

## IN MEMORIAM

### Louise Kloepfer (January 10, 1910-December 15, 1996)

Louise O. Kloepfer, professor emerita and former chairperson of dance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was born in Washington D.C., and died at the age of eighty-six in Madison, Wisconsin. She was the cherished daughter of Henry August and Louise Nigel Kloepfer, the beloved sister of Karl and Millie, and the revered aunt of Scott Davis.

Louise, as a young child, moved to Washington with her parents. She attended high school in Tacoma, Washington, studied dance, and performed in recitals together with her sister Millie. As a teenager Louise danced "Bamboula" in a contest at the Pantages Theater in Tacoma. The dance was selected to be part of a vaudeville show. She also performed an Arabic dance at a movie theater, after the newsreel and before the movie "The Thieves of Bagdad." Louise studied ballet with Mary Ann Wells in Seattle as a teenager and received much praise and encouragement for her dance talent from her teacher, the local press, family and friends.

Upon graduation from high school in 1929, Louise traveled to Berlin, Germany where she entered the Mary Wigman School of the Dance. Louise also enrolled in the University of Berlin, studying German, contemporary German art, and literature. During her second year in Germany, she studied in Dresden with Mary Wigman, Hanya Holm, and staff. Her classes included dance theory, percussion, dance technique, and group dance. In 1931, Louise received a diploma from the Wigman School. She was the first American pupil to complete the course.

Louise returned to the United States in 1931 and opened her own dance school in Tacoma, Washington. Within a year, she closed her school in order to accept an invitation to teach at the Mary Wigman School in New York, directed by Hanya Holm. Louise worked in New York with Holm, her mentor, teacher and colleague, from 1931 until 1942, studying, teaching, and performing on a daily basis. She taught at the Holm studio, Columbia Teacher's College and New York University. She also participated in three transcontinental tours with Hanya Holm and Company, and was best known for her roles in *Trend*, *Metropolitan Daily*, and *Golden Fleece*. Louise was known as an outstanding teacher of the Holm technique. Many of her students went on to become prominent dancers, teachers and movement therapists. Louise taught at several summer programs around the country, including Bennington, Vermont where she appeared in 1937 in Hanya Holm's groundbreaking *Trend*. During that same year, she performed with the Holm Company in Madison, Wisconsin, where she received rave reviews from local critics. Louise remembered participating in a lecture-demonstration in the fundamentals room of Lathrop Hall. Little did she know that she would in the future study and teach in the building loved by dancers and physical educators who trained there since its opening in 1910. During this period, she was also an invited teacher at the Gloucester Theatre School in Massachusetts, the Perry Mansfield Camp in Colorado, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

For the summer of 1938, Louise received a fellowship from Bennington College, where she created *Earth Saga*, a group dance, and two solos, *Romantic Theme* and *Statement of Dissent*. The latter work appeared on the video *Hanya: Portrait of a Pioneer* (Chico: California State University, 1985). During the summers of 1939 and 1940, Louise taught at

Mills College as a member of the Hanya Holm faculty. Louise was recognized for her brilliant dancing and particularly for her unusual ability to execute startling, breathtaking leaps, which she achieved in part by studying the jumping techniques of basketball players. John Martin, dance critic for the *New York Times*, praised her work, and Cecil Smith wrote in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that Louise's leaps compared with those of Leonide Massine and Paul Petroff.

In the fall of 1942, Louise Kloepper was the first dance professional admitted as a dance student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. One semester after her arrival, she taught classes in dance technique, to the amazement of her fellow students. She later taught dance composition and other courses. On occasion she was registered in the same classes that she taught. Louise also served as director of Orchesis, the student dance club founded by Margaret H'Doubler in 1918, which performed throughout Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Midwest. At the university, Louise worked closely with Margaret H'Doubler on all aspects of the curriculum from the time she was a student until H'Doubler retired in the spring of 1954. After four years of study, Louise completed the bachelor of science degree as a dance major. During that period, she embraced the philosophy and teaching methodology of Margaret H'Doubler and remained faithful to her ideas throughout her lifetime. Louise became an assistant professor in the Department of Physical Education for Women in 1946. She was promoted to associate professor in 1952 and to professor in 1969. From 1954 until 1963, she and Mary Fee, professor emerita and former chair of the Dance Graduate Faculty, served together as co-chairs of the Dance Division at Madison. From 1963 until her retirement in 1975, Louise continued to teach and to serve as chair of the Dance Division. During this period, she served on numerous committees, taught courses in education and dance composition at the beginning and graduate levels, supervised student teachers, and was artistic advisor to various performing groups that were established during the late 1960s. She was steadfast during the turbulent times of the late 1960s and early 1970s and championed dance students in their causes and political concerns. She also served as dance chairman of the Wisconsin Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation from 1956-57. A humanist who followed the ideas of John Dewey and Margaret H'Doubler, Louise put her faith in each student's ability and talent to grow into a teacher, artist, therapist by his or her own effort and motivation. In teaching technique, she viewed the body as an objective part of the self, as an instrument designed to perform tasks, and as an object of aesthetic expression. She hoped to help the beginning student to distinguish between the subjective and the objective self by directing each student to solve movement problems. For example, in teaching beginning composition, she guided the student to work with the movement material rather than to be concerned with the personal feeling or idea behind the dance. She believed in teaching the student to manipulate material in a disciplined way in concert with the principles of composition. She allowed for movement exploration but believed that a dance composition must be set and repeatable.

Following her retirement, Louise Kloepper lived in Madison where, from time to time, she entertained faculty, former students and guest artists. She lived quietly in an atmosphere of beauty, in a unique house designed by a pupil of Frank Lloyd Wright. An advocate of human and animal rights, she gave generously to numerous organizations and social groups. Louise continued to receive honors and awards for her work in dance, including a three-day gala celebrating her work, held in March of 1975 at the University of Wisconsin's Lathrop Theatre, and the first Wisconsin Dance Council Award, granted in 1984. She continued to support dance organizations nationwide, with a particularly enthusiastic interest in the UW Dance Program. Friends, colleagues and students who attended the seventieth anniversary of the UW School of Education Dance Program paid special tribute to Louise Kloepper for her

gifts as a performer, teacher and administrator.

On the occasion of her eighty-seventh birthday, in January 1997, a chamber concert of music and dance was held in honor of Louise Kloepper's memory, with tributes by friends, colleagues and students. Gifts to the Louise Kloepper Fund may be sent to John Uselman, UW Foundation, 1848 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53708.

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