

# Dance and its people light up teacher's life

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

After 30 years of teaching dance, Shirley Busher still has a lot of love for its people and its beauty.

Barely topping five feet, she makes her presence felt in the Farmington dance studio she operates with her sister, Nancy Sawitsky, by her insistence on treating pupils gently.

"You get the best out of a dancer by gentle persuasion. That's how George Balanchine choreographs. That's how I teach," said Ms. Busher, who was a student at the School of American Ballet, of which Balanchine is the director.

After seeing the film "Turning Point," she would like to change only two things in the movie about her art. Both concern the gentle treatment of dancers.

Ballet teachers should correct quietly instead of yell at their pupils, according to Ms. Busher. "The 'very arrogant choreographer' in the movie who insists on molding the dancer to the music is unreasonable, she says.

"GEORGE Balanchine is nothing like that," she said.

Another objection to the movie is its insistence on depicting the battered feet of a young dancer.

"Battered feet aren't necessary. It's a matter of knowing how much padding to put on the toes. Once the skin becomes tougher, then you need less lambs wool in your toe shoes," she says.

Her commitment to treating dancers gently extends to helping the ones who hold the promise of blossoming into professionals.

Each time one of her promising students leaves before they can realize their ability, it carries an almost personal sense of defeat for Ms. Busher. "If you can see my heart you could see the cracks," she says when speaking of the disappointment.

"Several girls will come up and have potential to be dancers. Then I get to be about 15 or 16 and they quit. After you put so much into it, they quit," she said.

The students who survive and try for the American Ballet Theatre School in New York or audition for Broadway parts are the ones who have drive and ambition.

"A lot of girls might have better bodies but they didn't go in for it, making the sacrifices for it.

"BUT dancers don't feel like they are sacrificing. They are enriching their lives," she said.

One of her successes is Kathy Melochie, who is dancing on Broadway in "Grease." In six years she has progressed from the School of American Ballet to the Joffrey Ballet to a spot in the National Ballet of Canada. Now, she's been switching from the classical discipline of the ballet to the free-for-all style of 1950s rock and roll on Broadway.

On her scheduled week in New York to sit in on classes to keep up with ballet, Ms. Busher is making time to see



SHIRLEY BUSHER

her old pupil dance on stage. It will be a personal satisfaction to see a pupil who stuck with the art. "I find satisfaction from being a dancing teacher and seeing my pupils learn and progress," she said.

Ironically, if she could live her life over again, she would try harder to land a spot for herself on the stage. She gave up trying and returned from New York because she was convinced her height was a barrier between herself and the stage.

"I would stay in New York and keep trying," she says now. "There have been dancers under five foot three who have made it."

INSTEAD of mourning her decision, she relishes her association with dancing.

"Anyone who's associated with the dance has their life enriched. It gives

self-confidence and music education. Not everyone can be a professional dancer. But with dancing they can appreciate the arts," she said.

With her small feet tucked into a pair of open-toed shoes and her dancer's legs crossed at the knee, she leans back to remember how she became involved in the art that allows its practitioner to appreciate other creative forms.

"I had a little girlfriend who was studying ballet. Whenever I went to her house her mother would tell me that 'Doris has to practice. Do you want to come in and watch.' So I would watch this girl dance. And one day I came home and told my mother that's what I wanted to do.

"I took my first lessons when I was 10 and I've never stopped," she said with a fond smile.

By the time she was 18, she was subscribing to Dance magazine and considering study in New York.

"I just happened to pick the School of American Ballet out of Dance magazine," she said.

"I think it was the best school I could have gone to. They're very selective now. I don't think they'd accept me now. I'm too short."

DANCERS are usually between five foot three and five foot eight so they can be arranged on stage to appear to be the same height.

Her tenure at the School of American Ballet allowed her to meet its faculty including her favorite teacher, Mariet Stuart of England, and Alexandra Danilova, 72, who is teaching another generation of dancers.

Danilova appeared in "Turning

Point" as the former ballerina who taught classes from her apartment and took a promising young dancer under her wing.

"That's exactly how she is in real life. Watching one of her classes is like watching one of her performances. She still has the grace of line with her body although the power isn't there.

"She still wears a leotard and tights but she adds a flowing chiffon skirt and a scarf around her neck. She's very colorful," Ms. Busher said.

Danilova moves in a world where most persons are colorful or have at least a bit of uniqueness about them, according to Ms. Busher.

Each has a status to uphold. In one of her first professional performances, Kathy Melochie appeared in the line of Nureyev's "Sleeping Beauty."

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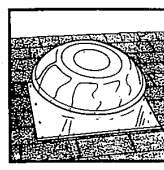
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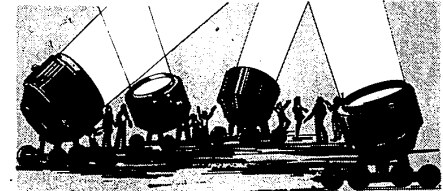


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