

# Charisse recalls dancing days

By Sherry Kahan  
staff writer

She started out as Tula Elise Finklea, but people began changing her name. Her brother called her Sid. She was given two different Russian names when at 15 she began to dance with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Then she married her dancing coach, Nico Charisse, giving her a new last name.

In her first film she was called Lily Norwood. Finally film producer Arthur Freed found a name that fit and lasted. He changed Sid to Cyd.

It was Cyd Charisse, therefore, who recently gave a Livonia Town Hall audience a look into the thrilling days of yesteryear in Hollywood. It was a time of the film giants: Gable, Garland, Mickey Rooney, Robert Taylor, Greer Garson, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly.

And there was young Tula Elise of Amarillo, Texas leaping and twirling among them. Her Texas accent was erased along the way, and her speech today is actress-style.

Lecturing is a new field for the dancing star of "Brigadoon," "Singing in the Rain" and "Silk Stockings." This was her fifth experience as a speaker on the lecture circuit.

HER LIFE IN the bigtime started when she received a call and later a seven-year contract from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It

might have worked out badly because these contracts allowed MGM to drop a performer after six months, but did not give the same privilege to the performer.

But it worked for her. She danced in "Ziegfeld Follies," not with star Fred Astaire, but "around him." Next she danced in "Harvey Girls" starring Judy Garland and Ray Bolger.

MGM made an effort "to build stars with drawing power and lasting power," said Charisse. "I had to take dictation, singing and dramatic lessons."

The producers in those days "never asked us to take off our clothes and use four-letter words." However, once a censor declared that a leotard she wore in a dancing sequence was cut too high. So an artist had to alter every frame of the film in which she appeared with the leotard to make it less revealing.

This topic caused the speaker to segue into a brief discussion of violence and nudity on TV.

She drew applause when she said, "I hope the pendulum swings back, so we can have some control over what comes into our homes."

CHARISSE'S FIRST dancing partner in films was Ricardo Montalban, an actor with whom she is soon to be reunited in an episode in TV's "Fantasy Island."

She then moved on to Gene Kelly in "Singing in the Rain," which she described

as the second most viewed movie in the world. She regards Kelly as a genius, both as a singer, dancer and director. It was a great disappointment to her that she had to turn down a role in "American in Paris" with him.

That was because by then she had met and married singer Tony Martin and she was pregnant with Tony Jr. "I lost a picture but gained a son," she said.

One day, into her dressing room walked "the one and only Fred Astaire. He wore a silk scarf at his throat and a jaunty hat. I'd buy a ticket just to see him walk around a room."

It seemed that Astaire was scouting to see if she wore too tall to dance with him. She wasn't and they did.

"I was spoiled for life dancing with Astaire," she recalled. "He's a wonderful gentleman, shy and humble and a perfectionist. There were so many elements he brought into a step. It looked like we were floating around, but we were working hard."

SHE PARTICULARLY enjoyed the picture, "Silk Stockings," which they made together not only because she worked with Astaire but because "it was the best dramatic role I ever had."

It was a musical version of the Garbo film, "Niobe," and Charisse conversed with a Russian accent.

While she performed with the likes of Dan Dailey, Stewart Granger, Kirk Douglas, Robert Taylor and Rita Hudson, she views Astaire as her favorite film "human being and all around person."

THE FIRST TIME she went out with Tony Martin, he spent a lot of time dancing with Rita Hayworth. But later, despite competition from Howard Hughes, who taught her to fly and offered her an airplane, Martin won out. They have been married more than 30 years.

Martin says its only 15 years because show business separates them so much. However, togetherness has been fostered by their performing on many of the same programs.

She regards him as "my favorite entertainer," and said their marriage is based on love, trust and understanding. The understanding is important because they both have had to be at the beck and call of the entertainment business.

"Does Tony look as good as you do?" asked a member of the audience at the celebrity luncheon in the Mayflower Meeting House in Plymouth. Charisse, who is a grandmother, smiled. "Better," she responded firmly.

"ONCE A DANCER, always a dancer," reported Charisse, who noted that she goes to ballet class every morning when she is at home. "I feel better when I do it," she explained.

Her message to her listeners concerned the benefits of exercise. "I feel as a dancer that exercise is the most beautiful thing in the world," she said. "I'm not talking jogging or aerobics. I'm talking walking. Walking is the best thing you can do. You lose weight. Cardiologists say it lowers blood pressure."

"Walk about three times a week. Go at a brisk pace, swinging your arms. You'll create a health habit for yourself. You'll begin to want to walk. And you don't need all that equipment. Just get a good pair of walking shoes."

She also advocated a sensible diet, watching fats and sugars.



Cyd Charisse, who still takes ballet lessons to keep her weight at 118 pounds, can call up many memories of dancing with Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly.

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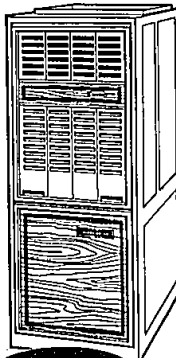
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A preview of the Holiday elegance of two important collections, Halston III and Lee Wright. This will be a full-scale fashion presentation.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4

1:00 p.m.

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### CHINESE SHAR-PEI DOG SHOW

Come and see these rare and unusual dogs as they are shown and judged for the first time in this area.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12

2 p.m.-6 p.m.

AUDITORIUM, located in the Emporium

### LIFESTYLE SEMINAR

This month's free seminar features Holiday Decor. Get some ideas on decorating your home with those special touches that add to the warmth and festivity of the season. A complimentary Continental Breakfast will be served. Reservations are required.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15

10 a.m. - 11 a.m.

AUDITORIUM, located in the Emporium

### FASHION & BEAUTY WORKSHOP GRADUATION

You are invited to join us for the graduation Fashion Show presented by the members of the seven-week course on Fashion & Beauty sponsored by the Merchants Association and coordinated by John Robert Powers School of Personal Development and Modeling.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15

7:00 p.m.

EAST COURT



### SANTA'S TOY SHOP OPENS

The jolly old elf is back, ready to visit with all his little friends. Follow an enchanting path to find Santa and his elves busy at work preparing for Christmas Eve. Instant photos are available, and they are the lowest prices around.

NOVEMBER 18-DECEMBER 24

NOV. 18 - Noon-8:30 p.m.

MONDAY-THURSDAY - 10 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY - 10 a.m.-9 p.m.

SUNDAYS - Noon-5 p.m.

CENTRAL COURT

### THANKSGIVING DAY

All of us at Westland wish you and yours a very Happy Thanksgiving

CENTER CLOSED - NOVEMBER 24

### LIVING WITH FASHION

This month our Second Wednesday Fashion Show has been rescheduled for a later date to give you an opportunity to see what Westland has to offer in fashions and gifts for the Holiday season.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30

11 a.m. & 7 p.m.

EAST COURT

### SNEAK PREVIEW OF DECEMBER EVENTS:

Christmas Music, Dec. 1-16

Fashion Show Auditions for Children, Dec. 3

Spirits Basketball Team, Dec. 3

Holiday Cabaret by Spotlight Players, Dec. 9 & 10

Holiday Fashion Show, Dec. 14

Westland Center home of 94 stores, including Hudson's and JC Penney and the newly renovated Emporium. Shopping Hours are 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday thru Saturday, Noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. Located at 35000 W. Warren at Wayne Rd. Events are sponsored by the Westland Center Merchants Association unless otherwise noted.

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