

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Presented Posthumously To:

“DEE” DANCE MAN

Dee R Winterton

Honoring Dee Winterton

who invited us all to “see -- and touch -- the stars.” Theron Luke

Often, in the Fall, sometime around October, when the mountains are ablaze with color and the aspens glow yellow, I notice in myself a slight sense of uneasiness. It’s an under-the-surface, unconscious sensation. Then I realize that it is Homecoming season at BYU, with its accompanying presentation of *Homecoming Spectacular*, the last production that dancer, choreographer, director Dee Winterton was involved with. You see, the day after *Spectacular* is the day my friend and mentor, at 48, along with his 12-year-old son, was killed in a tragic car accident as they were returning from presenting a fireside for his brother’s LDS congregation in Vernal. That was characteristic of Dee, jumping unselfishly from one event to another with almost no transition in between. *Spectacular* one day and a religious service the next. Whether he was creating entertainment that enlivened, challenging individuals to be more committed spiritually, charismatically commanding a class of squirrely kindergartners, or sharing his love for movement through his exuberant performances, he invited everyone, participant or observer, to be fully invested in, as Agnes de Mille says, “the dance.”

The day Dee died, my world, and the world of almost everyone I knew in dance and theatre, was drastically altered. We realized that the creative force we fashioned ourselves after, the generative force that had fueled us, would no longer be physically present in our lives. When someone passes away so suddenly, at the height of their career, you are left with a vivid sense of who they are and their effect on your life. Dee’s influence didn’t gently fade away as it would have had

he retired; it was only intensified by his passing. For those who knew him, his memory is as etched in our psyches, as are the memories of where we were when John F. Kennedy was assassinated and the images of the World Trade Center disintegrating before our eyes.

Dee was born and raised on a cattle ranch in Oakley, Utah, where he honed his performance skills as he “entertained” the stoic cattle with his dancing and theatrical antics while doing his morning chores. He understood early on what it meant to meet your audience where they are.



In his formative years Dee shared the stage with his dance partners in high school operettas and became popular “on the circuit” performing throughout the state with the Utah Power and Light shows. After high school, he entered the U of U and moved between majors in English, Speech and Journalism but was constantly recruited by dancers and faculty members in the Departments of Modern Dance and Ballet to dance in their productions. During those years, he met and married his Fred Astaire teaching partner, Maureen Shepherd.

After college, they returned to his home in Kamas to teach high school and to raise a family. But the muse of dance continued to call him.

While living in Kamas, Dee would travel to SLC and Provo, rehearsing with “Choreo-Dancers,” forerunner to Ririe/Woodbury Dance Company and choreographing musicals. As they say, “The rest is history.” There isn’t anyone one in the state that holds claim to being a founding member of both RW and RDT, was instrumental in shaping both the Dance and Music



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT cont...

Theatre curriculums at BYU, created, choreographed and directed the Sundance Summer Theatre for ten years, taught perhaps more residencies as a Master Teacher for the national Artist-in-Schools program than any artist in the program, and traveled the world as director of the acclaimed BYU Young Ambassadors until his death in 1984. On all fronts, Dee was one of the most versatile, respected and dynamic artists in the state.

In an era where specialization pigeonholes us, Dee moved easily between Modern Dance and Music Theatre. It was this cross-fertilization, and core belief that dance was for everyone not an elite population, that allowed him to create and successfully present dance that engaged audiences on many levels. He believed that Modern Dance principles were the foundation of good dance training and that good choreographers, no matter what their form, had to understand them. This was always apparent in his work in Music Theatre. His musicals and reviews were never formulaic or trite. Though he loved to entertain, he never underestimated the power of Modern Dance as an art form to transform and inspire. He was equally versed at creating art that was entertaining and entertainment that was art. I suppose in part that's because he knew he wanted his art to be accessible to ranchers, artists, children and adults.

Dee was a dancer, a creator, an innovator and a very public persona, but at his core, Dee was a teacher – a masterful and very humble teacher. Ultimately it wasn't "the dance" that was important to him – it was people. To be in his classes was to be inspired and transformed because you were challenged to be more than you thought you could be. You were asked to think more deeply than you thought you could think. You were stretched and coaxed to both do and think simultaneously, to create and to move beyond what was comfortable to what was magical.

Dee was an intuitive man. There are many uncanny stories from colleagues and friends that in hindsight indicate that Dee was getting ready to "move on." Perhaps one of the most interesting came in response to a Mutual Life Insurance Good Citizenship Award that

he received just four months prior to his death. At the ceremony he is quoted as saying, "People are the most important asset. It is the people themselves that can help others to achieve happiness and peace. Helping others is the most important thing. *Life is pretty short and you never know...*The only things we ever take with us are those things we've done for others." (Italics added) This was a driving principle for Dee. His was a life of service.

Perhaps this is why when he died, we all understood that anyone who came in contact with him considered themselves to be his "friend," and those who knew him best considered him their best friend. Whether individual perceptions were accurate or not isn't the point – what is important is that we felt that way because he was so fully present in every interaction he had.

Even now, more than twenty years after his death, I continue to be inspired by his example. In my mind's eye I see him teaching and I am moved to teach the person not the subject. I understand "how" to teach, not "what" to teach. I learned from Dee that dance has a "special role to play in the education of the 'whole man.'" That "to dance is to appreciate and celebrate one of the most basic and perhaps most personal gifts of God to man—the physical body."

Like Dee, I have come to believe that dance enhances in very direct and personal ways our individual and collective social, intellectual and spiritual natures.

The night before he died I sat with him at Homecoming Spectacular. He hugged me. He didn't have to tell me he cared for me, I knew he did. I was fortunate to have encountered him. He changed my life. He was, and still is, my mentor, my friend and my spiritual guide.

As educators, in a profession that is about connection and engagement, his legacy for each of us is to do as Dee did -- enable every person that we work with, young or old, novice or veteran, to "see – and touch – the stars."

Written by Pat Debenham, BYU

Please join us at our Spring Conference as we honor Dee with the UDEO Lifetime Achievement Award.

