

IN MEMORIAM

Dixie L. Durr:

July 11, 1940–September 2, 2007



Dixie L. Durr

Dixie Durr died September 2, 2007, at her home in Lansing, Michigan. Durr served for several terms as a member of the Board of the Congress on Research in Dance, most recently as chair of CORD's Awards Committee. We will miss Dixie's optimism, kindness, and infectious love for dance and for the individuals and organizations of her extended dance community.

Durr began her career at Michigan State University (MSU) in the Department of Kinesiology (formerly the Department of Physical Education). In the early 1980s she was transferred to the Department of Theatre, where she was artistic director of the MSU Repertory Dance Company. She chaired the

Department of Theater from 1994 to 2001, before retiring in 2005. She held a PhD from Ohio State University, received an MA in theatre from Michigan State University and an MA in the anthropology of human movement from New York University, and earned a BA in dance from Butler University. She was a Certified Teacher of Labanotation and earned an Advanced Certification in Labanotation from the Dance Notation Bureau.

Durr's writings include her 1992 doctoral dissertation, "A Descriptive Analysis of Five Self-Study Documents of Education Programs in Dance Accredited by the National Association of Schools of Dance," and articles, reviews, and reports for *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*; *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*; *Journal of Aesthetic Education*; *Dance Research Journal*; and *Educational Gerontology*. As a choreographer, Durr created her own work for the concert stage as well as for musical theater. She received special recognition for her choreography for *Carousel*, *West Side Story*, *Cabaret*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Brigadoon*, *The Music Man*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *My Fair Lady*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and *The Mikado*. She also reconstructed dance from Labanotated scores, including Charles Weidman's *Flickers* and *Brahms Waltzes*, Elizabeth Keen's *Mini-Quilt*, Judy Allen's *In The Swing*, and Doris Humphrey's *Partita* and *Soaring*.

In addition to her CORD service, Durr was a member of the Professional Advisory

Committee to the Dance Notation Bureau, a member of the Board of Directors of the American Dance Guild, and president of the Michigan Dance Association from 1987 to 1989. The National Dance Association recognized her with a Presidential Citation in 1994. In 2004 she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Michigan Dance Council. At MSU she was a member of the Faculty Professional Womens Association, serving as president. Durr was the recipient of the Paul Varg Alumni Award for Faculty presented by the MSU College of Arts and Letters Alumni Association and recognized by the College of Education in 2006 with a Crystal Apple Award.

In a statement written for Durr's memorial, MSU Director of Dance Sherrie Barr noted:

As I review Dixie's career, I cannot help but smile. She was a pioneer for dance in higher education. Through her history at MSU, I see snatches of dance history within higher education. She was initially a member of the Department of Kinesiology; there the curriculum included studio dance classes, rhythmical analysis, and dance pedagogy. As the dance program emerged as an independent field of study, Dixie's belief that dancers needed to own their heritage and to

understand the choreographic craft was apparent. She wanted students to return to their home studios within Michigan and teach "good" dance. The truest and finest of Dixie's legacies is her students.

At the close of her tribute to Durr, Barr remembers that,

As I assumed my duties at MSU, Dixie continually reminded me to keep breathing through all the complexities that this position would present to me. The statement became our private joke. We knew, as all dancers do, that breath is ongoing. Dixie's passing is a tragedy for so many. Yet, I know she would want us to go forward, for us to keep breathing.

With that in mind, Michigan State University has established the Dixie Durr Dance Scholarship fund.

Ann Dils

Many thanks to Sherrie Barr for allowing me to reprint a portion of her eulogy and for supplying information about Durr's life from an article prepared for the *Lansing State Journal*. Additional information on Durr's life was established through an autobiography that appears on the MSU Web site.