



Celebrating 50 years of Dance



OMAHA WORLD HERALD



*The lights go down. The orchestra begins to play.
Dancers appear and there's magic on the stage.*



The Omaha Academy of Ballet, a dream by its founders for a school and a civic ballet company for Omaha, was realized by the gift of two remarkable people: Valerie Roche ARAD director of the school and the late Lee Lubbers S.J., of Creighton University. Lubbers served as Board President and production manager, while Roche choreographed, rehearsed and directed the students during their performances. The dream to have a ballet company for the city of Omaha had begun. Lubbers also hired Roche later that year to teach dance at the university. This decision helped establish the creation of a Fine and Performing Arts Department at Creighton.

The Academy has thrived for 50 years, thanks to hundreds of volunteers, donors, instructors, parents and above all the students. Over the decades, the Academy has trained many dancers who have gone on to become members of professional dance companies such as: the American Ballet Theatre, Los Angeles Ballet, Houston Ballet, National Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, San Francisco Ballet, Minnesota Dance Theatre, Denver Ballet, Momix and the Omaha Ballet. Our dancers have also reached beyond the United States to join: The Royal Winnipeg in Canada and the Frankfurt Ballet in Germany.

Birth of a Dream.



The Omaha Regional Ballet Academy, now today's Omaha Academy of Ballet, was founded in 1962 to provide talented Omaha dancers with disciplined studio training based on the tradition of the Royal Academy of Dance. It has offered Omaha access to a repertoire of classical and modern works while fostering the careers of dance professionals and enriching the lives of numerous students.

The Academy presented its first full scale production in 1965, "Suite in G." That December it presented its first annual "Nutcracker," establishing an Omaha holiday tradition. Later in 1965 "Suite in G" received a standing ovation at the first Midwest Regional Ballet Festival (a division of National Association for Regional Ballet) in Kansas City and established the Academy as an honor company as well as a founding member.

In 1971 with a grant and volunteers from The Junior League of Omaha, a Ballet Lecture Demonstration headed by Mary Smith introduced ballet to local schools reaching 20,000 students by 1972.

From the beginning the Academy has collaborated with other Omaha arts organizations including Opera Omaha, the Omaha Community Playhouse, Joslyn Art Museum, the Omaha Symphony, Omaha Art Festivals and the Jewish Community Center. Performances have been toured to Lincoln, Grand Island and other locations in Nebraska as well as touring to Kansas City, Minneapolis, Des Moines and Ames, Iowa to perform with the Regional Ballet Festivals.

One of its first instructors was Valerie Roche, ARAD (Associate Royal Academy of Dance) who served as director from 1964

until her retirement in 2002. Originally part of the Omaha Ballet Society, the Academy became a distinct organization with its own board in 1970. From 1969 to 1978, the Academy conducted classes in a studio at 39th and Cuming Streets. In 1978 the Academy moved to Creighton's Fine Arts Building and then in 2003 to its current headquarters at 4950 Dodge St.

The Ballet Academy's traditional strong ties with Creighton have benefited both institutions for many years.

Throughout its history the Academy has been recognized for the high quality of its program. John Marshall, a major examiner for the Royal Academy observed on a visit to Omaha that; "Omaha ballet students were some of the best candidates I've seen in America."



Valerie Roche

Valerie Roche, a native of Birmingham, England, is a life member of the Royal Academy of Dance, who is now retired in New Zealand. She is an ARAD registered teacher, a mark of great distinction. Roche also is a trained pharmacist.

Roche and ballet in Omaha became virtually synonymous as she was a founding faculty member of the Omaha Academy of Ballet and established the Omaha Ballet Company in 1964. She became Creighton's first fulltime dance lecturer in 1974 and received a Faculty Fellowship from Creighton in 1980 to spend the summer in Denmark

studying the work of August Bournonville. At Creighton she adopted the syllabi of the Imperial Society for Teachers of Dance to broaden the curriculum and in 1999, she was awarded that Society's Associate Diploma.

In addition to ballet, she has taught tap, national character dance, musical theater and contemporary dance styles and she choreographed for many operas and musicals as well as dance productions.

Roche is beloved by her colleagues and former students. When she retired in 2002, The Academy held its 40th Anniversary Gala performance of "Sleeping Beauty" as her farewell, attracting many of her former students. Some of them performed while others were in the audience. Roche still returns to Omaha in connection with Academy events.

The Nutcracker.



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Modern and Ballet.





Celebrating Dance.





Summer Dance Camp.

In addition to its regular classes and a long history of fine performances, the Academy began conducting a one-week summer dance camp in 1964, a tradition it continues, at the state 4H Camp in Halsey National Forest. Camp instructors have included noted dancers or instructors from professional companies or educational institutions.





Decades of Dance.

Dance is very much a visual art.

Since the 1960's, the OAB has been meticulously documented by two exceptional photographers; Fr. Don Doll, S.J. (magisproductions.org) and Jim Williams (jlwphoto.net). Together, there are over 20,000 beautiful photographs and OAB moments in time that have been preserved. Your support of a project to publish our photographs and history would ensure that everyone has the opportunity to experience our historical journey. The book would include the Academy, the Omaha Ballet, Creighton University's "A Company of Dancers" and the Omaha Dance Project.

Today there are approximately 300 registered students, children and adults at OAB. In order to continue to operate at the non-profit level and still provide the highest level of excellence in classes, performances and camp experiences, it is becoming increasingly more imperative to seek support from our community.

We hope that you will take advantage of the opportunity to support the Omaha Academy of Ballet by donating to our coffee table history book or any of the following projects:

- Scholarships
- Omaha Dance Project
- Summer Camp – Guest Teachers
- Capital Improvements

Thank you.

On behalf of the Academy, we wish to thank all of our teachers, board members, sponsors, volunteers and alumni for their unending support. A special thank you to our students for giving us the opportunity to enhance their cultural and artistic abilities.



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Omaha Academy of Ballet
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