



Loyce Houlton

Loyce Houlton was one of the first American women to gain national and international recognition as a choreographer, teacher and producer. With more than 90 original ballets to her credit, Loyce Houlton helped forever shape the cultural landscape of Minnesota and brought significant attention to the artistic richness of the state. A lasting legacy to the community is her production of *Nutcracker Fantasy*, an annual holiday tradition for families throughout the region.

Loyce Houlton, discovered dance while she was at Carleton College during World War II. At a time when ballet and modern remained decidedly segregated, she studied with both George Balanchine and Doris Humphrey. "Without any shame she put herself in any class available," said Lise Houlton. "Balanchine, Limon, and Ashton gave her work at a minimum price," said Houlton. "She really loved strong classical technique and wanted to incorporate that into the school. But still her pulse was formed from the modern dance esthetic."

In the early 1960's, under the leadership of Loyce Houlton as its innovative and inspiring Artistic Director, the Minnesota Dance Theatre began modestly as the Contemporary Dance Playhouse in Dinkytown with a young ensemble of dancers. Over the next quarter century, the fledgling group developed into a respected, mature touring company capable of performing a wide diversity of works in both the classical and contemporary idioms. Houlton and company performed major, groundbreaking new works of dance in venues throughout the United States and abroad, including the prestigious Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and Italy's Spoleto Festival.

On her accomplished company, Mrs. Houlton herself created over ninety original pieces of choreography, many of them in collaboration with composers who wrote original scores for the dances. Her signature piece, *Wingborne*, was created as a memorial tribute to one of her early patrons and is still in demand by American dance companies seeking to have it in their repertory. A collaborative, full evening work, entitled *Dream Trilogy*, with music composed for the piece by George Crumb, has been performed frequently to wide acclaim, and was presented in a spectacular revival at Theatre de la Jeune Lune in summer of 1994.

Mrs. Houlton brought teachers and choreographers from around the world to Minnesota to enhance the training of the company and to create or stage works for the performing repertory. Guest choreographers included David Lichine, Robert Joffrey, and choreographers from the Royal Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet.

A tiny and perpetually restless woman, Mrs. Houlton liked to say to students: "Explode! Be voracious in space." As a teacher, Mrs. Houlton developed an original dance training technique, the Houlton Contemporary Technique, a symbiosis of the formal classical ballet technique and the freer more "modern" styles of dance. Mrs. Houlton's work with children is also widely recognized, and she served as guest teacher in various student programs and summer institutes in Minnesota and other locations. In one such guest residency, as Artistic Advisor to Ballet Michigan, Mrs. Houlton created a series of educational dance video tapes for children.

Bruce Marks, Artistic Director for Boston Ballet, stated at the time of her death in 1995:

"She belongs to that group of tenacious American women artists that includes Martha Graham and [Agnes] DeMille."