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Working with Doris Humphrey

Pauline Koner

Doris Humphrey played no part in my training or my early career. I never had a modern-dance class in my life, and the term “choreography course” was unknown to me. My dance background was eclectic: ballet with Michel Fokine, Spanish with Angel Cansino, neo-Oriental with Michio Ito, and a season of joint recitals with Yeichi Nimura. All of these styles, as well as the influence of seeing Mary Wigman, Herald Kreutzberg, and Yvonne Georgi, had become synthesized into a personal approach that belonged to no school. I had fifteen years of working alone with no one to advise me. After performing in the United States and the Near East, and, in 1934, being the first American dancer officially invited to the Soviet Union since Isadora Duncan, I was happy to continue. But a traumatic experience in New York suddenly soured me. In 1939 I decided to leave the concert stage and explore other fields. It took seven years for me to realize that I found no other form of dance fulfilling. In 1946 I was at a dead end.

I felt shriveled after an escape into commercial dance, including a year of television. I felt the inner need to do what I really

“Working with Doris Humphrey” is a section of Pauline Koner’s autobiography, which is to be published by Dance Horizons.

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loved—serious dance, meaningful dance, to go back to solo dance. But the ideas didn't come. This was a time of doubting. Where do I go from here? Have I anything more to say? Am I finished? A low point! I was tired of looking for answers all alone. I craved asking questions. I ached for someone to tell me what to do.

The name Doris Humphrey came to my mind. Not belonging had always been a problem. There had never been anyone in the concert field I could relate to on a personal level. But on March 18, 1945, I had participated in a concert at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA and had invited Doris, who had recently become the director of the dance education department there. Shortly afterward I received a letter, dated March 21:

Dear Pauline,

Thank you very much for the invitation to your concert. It's a pleasure to see such sure technical facility, even virtuosity. The one I like best was to the *Unsung* [*In Memoriam*, to Shostakovitch]. Here I thought you were most eloquent and I liked the way you spoke and danced the spirituals [*Judgement Day*]. To venture a little criticism in the others, I thought that your versatility was sometimes your handicap, in that, since you can do everything, you do, and I would have liked a little less—more restraint. On the other hand, I have never seen faster or more cleancut pantomime and movement than in your last dance [*It Ain't Necessarily So*]. Did you do this one in a production? It looks as though it would be a "showstopper." Also, congratulations on smoothness in stage technique and general expert professionalism.

Sincerely,
Doris Humphrey

Now I remembered this letter. Here was a leader in the dance world who had taken the time to write a very perceptive criticism, encouraging and, I felt, very true. Yes! My versatility was my drawback, since it kept me from defining my personal area in dance. I called Doris and asked her if she would be interested in working with me.

"Anything you like," I said. "Either choreograph a dance or guide me in the choreographic process by working on a solo together."

"I'd love to," said Doris. "I have always admired you as a dancer."

We discussed a minimal financial arrangement, which was all I thought I could afford; but at least Doris would now have another body on which she could experiment. Suddenly there was hope. There would be someone to say "Yes" or "No," to tell me "It's good" or "It's bad," someone honestly interested in the result. This is what I needed. After fifteen years of working alone, purely from instinct, I would have a director, a great choreographer, as an outside eye.

I trembled as I anticipated our first session—I was more than a little scared. We worked at the Dance Players' Studio on Fifty-sixth Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues. Doris had to climb a steep flight of stairs. I had a chair ready for her when she walked in. With her glowing red hair caught in a snood hanging low over the back of her neck, the exquisite bone structure and taut skin defining every line, she was like a piece of modern sculpture. I'll never forget that first session. She sat down and opened her purse; she had come prepared with a narrow length of cloth and a piece of music.

"This is a score Lukas Foss has sent me for baritone and piano, 'Song of Anguish.' The text is from Isaiah. I thought it might make a particularly interesting solo," she said, "and I brought this piece of cloth. Try pinning it to your leotard and hold the ends in your hands."

I pinned the cloth to the front neckline of my leotard and grasped it with both hands at arm's length, the rest hanging loose from my clenched hands.

"Now play around with it," said Doris.

That was all I needed. I pulled it out with my arms reaching back. It framed my face. I wound my arms in it and suddenly whipped the ends. It became a lash. I let it hang loose, then lifted the ends to my eyes—tears. The tautness, the limpness, the whipping sound created a whole new kind of movement, new shapes, new dynamics. I was fascinated. The text was from the Old Testament, and though it would guide us, the first thing Doris impressed on me was "Never be literal."

I had used texts before, even speaking them aloud—Carl Sandburg, James Weldon Johnson—and now realized that I had used them more or less literally.

“A text,” she said, “can be used as a point of departure or metaphorically. If it is used literally, why bother? It speaks for itself.”

I was like a sponge. All the old excitement of creating was surging back. Each day our work together was a revelation. However, the music and the text did indicate different moods. The text was the voice of the prophet. I was the antagonist, The Iniquitous One. The three sections, without a break, were “Accusation,” “Lamentation,” and “Denunciation.”

This was an entirely new experience for me. I responded to each of Doris’s suggestions and could see that she too was excited. We had two sessions a week, and in between I would explore new movement from her verbal images. Creating movement always came easily to me, and one of her first criticisms was “Pauline, you’re too prolific. You create enough movement for one idea to suffice for three dances. You must learn to develop your material. Choose the most pertinent movement, stemming from your motivation, and then extend it phrasewise, themewise, and put it into form.”

Taking a single movement, she showed me how to extend, vary, invent, forming a long sequence that came from the seminal movement. In the “Lamentation” there was a line—“. . . and the earth reeled.” Marvelous! Here was a valid chance to turn, spin, be brilliant. Then Doris’s quiet voice said, “Let’s stop a moment. The earth is heavy, the earth is large, and it moves on its axis. Why don’t you take a shape that makes you feel the weight, the largeness?”

I raised my arms to make one simple, downward arc. Then she said, “Now, without moving from your spot, feel as though you are rolling on an axis.”

Without changing my arms, I rotated, swaying and tilting slowly. Suddenly I felt a strange sense of tremendous weight, of boundless space. At that moment, I had become the earth. The quiet voice said, “. . . *and the earth reeled.*”

This was my turning point. It burned into my consciousness. I discovered an essential truth, Doris's truth in choreography, the need to dig for the seed of an idea and then to realize it in movement, movement honed to the bone of purity. This is the basic difference between working from within and working from without. The strength of simplicity, the honesty of movement—these are the qualities that make Doris Humphrey's works stand apart from others', qualities that are often lost in this age of over-emphasis on technical facility. Technique, of course, is essential, but not as a display of acrobatics. Often the thought hits me that dancers are busy turning, spinning, and being generally brilliant. They rarely feel "the earth reel."

That rehearsal, that moment of insight, has served as a beacon for me. She had opened a whole vista, a new understanding. Now I would find myself, my own movement. Doris certainly did not deny technical brilliance. On the contrary, she demanded it when the motivation for it was valid. All the years I worked with her, she had a way of challenging us technically. She always knew how to get the best out of dancers.

"I'm not sure this is possible," she would say, "but I see something like this." The something like this could be almost impossible, devilish to achieve. I would never admit anything was impossible. The first time Doris said this to me was while we were working out a passage for the third section, "Denunciation," of this solo (which we finally called *Woe unto Them*), in which she wanted a violent movement.

"I see you starting very high and crossing the stage on a diagonal, descending gradually into a low crawl, then backing up the reverse way to the high position."

We were working in my friend Corinne Kovarsky's studio. Doris had climbed three flights of rickety steps to the small studio, but space was space, and in those days I had to take whatever was available. I began to play around with some possibilities and thought that maybe it *was* impossible. After experimenting for hours, I finally created an exciting passage, flailing ends of the scarf wound around my arms. I started from a *relevé* on one foot, and as I traveled forward, I descended until I was traveling in a knee crawl, finishing with a lash, beating against the verbal prophecy,

then traveling back from the crawl to my starting position. The dance demanded that it be done twice. This was possible. But during the time of discovering it and achieving it technically, I had to repeat it many times. Not until much later did I trace a torn Achilles tendon to this initial crawl. But it was *not* impossible!

My husband, the conductor Fritz Mahler, found an excellent baritone, Donald W. Johnston, who sang from backstage. I designed a costume of black with a panel of terra cotta edged in turquoise and black fringe, and used a scarf that was greenish-yellow. The costume, without being authentic, felt Biblical. I presented the work at my Central High School of Needle Trades Series Concert on November 30, 1946. The program credit read "Choreographic Direction by Doris Humphrey," which some critics interpreted as "Choreography by." The piece went well, but I sensed that, dramatically, something was missing. Since the protagonist was in the wings, I seemed to lose the feel of true conflict.

I discussed this with Doris. "What if I were to costume the singer and give him simple dramatic movements? With him on stage, my own dancing would seem more dramatically valid."

"I like that," she said. "Why not work on it?"

Fritz found another young baritone, Robert Walton, who was interested in the challenge, and since the vocal line was quite operatic, he felt that learning movement would be of great value to him. I restaged the work, changing the title to *Voice in the Wilderness*. While retaining all my own dance material, I choreographed very simple movements for The Prophet, mainly in one place. Now I had a focal point—a live, dynamic relationship to his singing. This change made a tremendous difference.

I performed the new version at Jacob's Pillow on July 30 and 31, 1948. Now the work had real impact. I also performed it on the same program as the premiere of Doris's *Corybantic*, on August 18, 1948, at the first Connecticut College American Dance Festival in New London. When I finished my revisions, which I did alone, I asked Doris if she approved. She said she did.

The critics also agreed. In the New York *Herald Tribune* for July 31, 1948, Walter Terry wrote:



Pauline Koner as The Iniquitous One and Robert Walton as The Prophet in *Voice in the Wilderness*, photographed at Jacob's Pillow by John Lindquist.

The new Humphrey work for Miss Koner, *Voice in the Wilderness*, is a remarkable creation. It is not only perfectly suited to Miss Koner's dramatic gifts and great technical range, but it is a theatre piece of major creative substance. It is integrated with excerpts from the cantata "Song of Anguish" by Lukas Foss, which in turn derives from Isaiah, stressing particularly "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil." I use the word integrate with purpose, for Miss Humphrey has done just that with the music, even to the point of making the baritone soloist, in this instance Robert Walton, a figure in the choreographic plan.

There is no slavishness to the music or text, however, for Miss Humphrey's customary and still awesome choreographic genius has seen to it that dance action, universal gesture and formal pattern sometimes reflect the score, at other times challenge it dramatically, and again comment upon it.

Perhaps this is not a clear description of what Miss Humphrey has done, so let it be said that she created a work in which the elements of sound, song, gesture, movement and architecture are present and of which she is the theatrical master.

I felt this to be the greatest compliment I could receive. Unknowingly, my own contribution had been equated with a Humphrey creation. I realized that although Doris was influential in changing my approach to dance, I was still my own creator. It was not my style of movement that had changed but my understanding. The new version had turned out to be the successful one. I had learned but had not become submerged. I was still "I," the "I" that had once refused to become Nimura's assistant. Working under another's direction had not submerged my own individuality.

In a way, this was a rebirth—a sense of consciously knowing for the first time how and what I was creating. Before, it had been purely instinct, trial and error. Doris helped me discover my true identity. This had not come about as an instant revelation. A year and a half had passed between the first and second versions of the solo, a time that molded an entirely new perspective in my dance awareness.

One day when Doris was working with me on the original solo, she suddenly said, "Pauline, I would like to discuss with you an idea I have in mind. This summer I choreographed a duet for José Limón and Beatrice Seckler at Bennington. It is called *The*

Story of Mankind. It's a satire based on a cartoon by Carl Rose I saw in *The New Yorker*. Bea has just left me. I have seen you do comedy, and I think you would be perfect for the part. Would you like to do it with José?"

This was so unexpected that I held my breath for a moment and wondered if I really had heard her ask if I would like to dance with José. Back in the late thirties, when I was aching to dance with another person, tired of performing solo, I had invited José to my Fifth Avenue studio and asked him if he would be interested in working with me. In his very polite fashion, he said, "You know, Pauline, I admire your work tremendously and would love to work with you, but I am committed to the Humphrey-Weidman company. I really don't think they would want me to take time away from their activities."

When I found my voice, I said, "Yes, Doris. Oh, yes. It sounds wonderful."

"Fine," she said. "I'll talk to José and we'll set up a rehearsal schedule."

The Story of Mankind is one of the funniest, most biting comments on the superficialities of civilization, with man striving to achieve and woman pushing him on to bigger and better things, only to discover in the end that it leads to self-destruction. True to Doris's basic philosophy of involvement with the human condition, she used comedy to make a bitter comment on where "civilization" has led us. This work would, I think, be even more pertinent today than it was in 1946. What a tragedy that, aside from a few photographs, there is absolutely no record of it. It is a lost treasure. Humorous works are the most difficult to create and are needed in any repertoire, and *Story* was hilarious.

It was divided into episodes, tracing man and woman from primitive cave to Greek palace to medieval castle to Victorian brownstone to modern penthouse. Suddenly there appears a newspaper headline, "Atom Split," and back they go to the cave.

There was an interesting (but very heavy) set piece designed by Michael Czaja center stage, which served as Greek couch, medieval dining table, Victorian parlor, and finally, upended, penthouse. The commissioned piano score by Lionel Nowak was humorous

and charming. When rehearsals began, the first thing Doris did was to explain her idea of the characters. This would give me the point of departure on how to play the role. In each period of civilization, the female character was the activist prodding the male—who really preferred being lazy—to better living conditions, finer manners, nicer homes, more comfort. In each sequence he was willing to settle for what he had.

Now that Doris was taking a second look at the work, she decided to make some changes. Not having seen the original, I never quite knew what the changes were. However, she gave me images. In the primitive scene she said, “You’re furious with him. He uses you as a pillow to sleep on. He sits and fiddles around with two sticks getting nowhere. You’re furious. You want to wring his neck and tear his eyes out.” Then she let me find movement that suited my sense of satire and timing, and often I fell into movement via improvisation that she preferred to the original. She was also sympathetic to bits of detail I would suggest, so that I found it a creative experience. I love doing satiric humor. It is a great relief to be able to shift from the very serious, and it is also a tremendous challenge.

Working with José was exciting. He was tireless and so was I. We found that we had exactly the same sense of timing and that physically our bodies blended perfectly. Dancing with another person after fifteen years of aloneness was an exhilarating experience.

Actually, José hated doing comedy. As Doris put it, “Comedy is something he endures. This particular piece has a bitter message, which sweetens it for him, but even so! He reminds me of Gustav Mahler, who is said never to have had a trivial moment.” But that was not so; José could tell lusty, bawdy stories, which he loved to do when he had relaxed moments or was at a party. I don’t think he realized how really comic he was in *Story*, as he devoured clusters of grapes while lying on his couch in the Greek scene, or gluttonously pawed his food at our medieval dining table. In the primitive scene, he carefully balanced two crossed poles on my head, placed my hands to hold them, laid a fur piece on the top, and, having created a shelter for himself, sat underneath it hugging my leg and fell asleep, at which point I went berserk.

Sometimes I found it difficult not to break up when I looked at him. But he never believed he was really funny.

As presented by the Limón Company—for which Doris served as artistic director—*The Story of Mankind* was always a huge success on our programs and got rave reviews. But even so, José never felt very comfortable in the work. I always enjoyed performing it, finding new details to introduce at each performance. My personal success in this work was for me the final healing after years of depression.

I think that for both Doris and myself, 1946 was a year of crucial, positive change. Doris had come alive again, functioning at top level in dance after facing the fact that physically she had to stop because of her arthritis. Now she had discovered that her own body was not essential in continuing her career. We were there, bodies for her to use in ways she might never have demanded of herself. The most important change for me was psychological. One of the greatest choreographers and innovators in the dance believed in me, encouraged me. Suddenly I had found a focal point—a way of integrating all my dance experience into a single line of development. I no longer had to ask “How?” or “What?” I had opened the door a crack when I had approached Doris. Now it swung wide open, revealing a whole new world of dance.

Working with Doris was an illuminating experience. There was a constant search for new movement. Though her technique was based on certain key principles, it was never codified. I cannot remember Doris ever repeating a movement in her various works. Each piece demanded its own vocabulary, dictated by the subject matter. Even a pure-dance work was always filled with new, challenging ideas. Sitting on her chair in the center of the studio with a small, purse-size ashtray beside her, a cigarette always between her fingers, she was able to be more objective about her creations. Dancing in one’s own works made that almost impossible.

It was wonderful to watch Doris’s penetrating blue eyes sparkle with enthusiasm when she saw something she had imagined in her mind suddenly come to life. If she hit a snag, we would take a break. She would retreat into herself, able to block out her surroundings, and eventually would come up with a solution.

Sometimes she tried several variations of an idea until she found exactly what she wanted. This was for me a kind of choreographic schooling. Often I watched her work on dances I was not in, simply to learn. I found this as fascinating as dancing in her pieces, for then I too could see objectively.

I also found a tremendous rapport in our feelings of rhythm, dynamics, and sensitivity to musical phrasing. Very often at a dress rehearsal if she felt a tempo was wrong, she would check with me, asking if it was too fast or too slow. I know from personal experience that a tempo may feel quite different when watching movement than in the actual doing.

Not only was Doris a great choreographer, but she was also a true director. The two are not necessarily synonymous. She had insight into the hidden potentials of each dancer she worked with and was able to develop and broaden the scope of each individual. She developed polished artists from relatively raw material. Her mania for perfection of detail kept all the Limón company at peak level. Phrasing, dynamics, simplicity, mannerisms—nothing escaped those ever-watchful eyes. At dress rehearsals, with everyone's nerves frazzled and bodies exhausted, with crisis after crisis in technical production, Doris sat in the theatre making corrections, solving problems. She would release the dancers but remain until she had what she wanted, often staying on until 4:00 a.m. to achieve a lighting effect. The cigarette butts would pile up. She never complained, never lost her temper or mentioned that she was constantly in pain from her crippling arthritis. She was a great director, a rare director. No sacrifice was too much for the birth of a new dance. As Doris Hering wrote in *Dance Magazine*, in October 1952:

Doris Humphrey knows how to make people dance. She enables them to find the hidden spring within themselves that produces those enticing alternations of action and repose that are true dance. She involves them in chain reactions of neuro-muscular impulse that go from one body to the next, that make one body move smoothly and sedately while the next one is set afire and swirls out into a Dionysian variation, only to be reabsorbed into the moving mass until the chain reaction takes place somewhere else.



Doris Humphrey and José Limón in Mexico in 1952. Collection of Charles H. Woodford.

Besides the enormous demands of her regular schedule, Doris was vitally interested in everything going on in dance. She would climb up rickety stairs to some godforsaken loft to see an unknown young dancer who had asked her to look at a piece. Finding and encouraging new talent was almost a religion for Doris, and many imposed on her good will. But she felt it her duty to give them the benefit of the doubt and would always go to every performance of modern dance she was physically able to get to.

I never had a written contract with either Doris or José. A simple oral agreement existed throughout my fifteen years of association with the Limón company. Shortly after the company's debut, I suffered a severe accident, a torn Achilles tendon, undoubtedly due to that "impossible" crawl in *Voice in the Wilderness*. Meanwhile, Doris, who had been thinking of a new work and wanted one by an American composer, had asked my husband, Fritz, if he could suggest something. "Do you know Aaron

Copland's Piano Sonata?" he asked. She had never heard it. "It is a difficult work," said Fritz, "but one of his best, and absolutely beautiful."

Doris fell in love with it and began to set what was finally entitled *Day on Earth*, a work about simple people: a day, a lifetime, with Doris's inherent philosophy, "There will be a new time, a better time."

During my recuperation (I never doubted I would dance again, but others did), I was bewildered that she rarely called or showed any personal warmth or concern. Doris was always so involved in herself, her work, that almost nothing else existed, especially since I was a newcomer. Instead of dwelling on the hurt, however, I felt it necessary to keep in contact. Occasionally I called, and she was politely sympathetic. Knowing that I wanted to continue the relationship, I made excuses for her: she is too busy, she is ill, she is worried about personal problems. But still? When I was off crutches and able to hobble along on a cane, I called and asked if I could watch a rehearsal.

"Of course," Doris said. "Pauline, I'm so glad to hear from you. Please come. We're working at Charles's [Weidman] studio, our old Studio Theatre on West Sixteenth Street."

I sat there and watched this extraordinary woman create what I feel is one of the masterpieces of the modern repertoire. The cast was Letitia Ide (*The Mother*), Miriam Pandor (*A Young Love*) Melisa Nicolaides (*The Child*), and José Limón (*The Man*). I was mesmerized by the way Doris, indicating movement ideas with constant verbal imagery, was drawing from these three people (José was not present at this rehearsal) unusual movement and emotional qualities that left me in tears—tears at what I saw and tears of frustration, not knowing if I would ever dance again. I was astounded at how she could make ten-year-old Melissa—a thin, fortunately not overtrained, coltish child—create a sense of wonder, of childlike reality. Her method was based on a free improvisational quality, with Doris saying things like, "I want you to have stars in your eyes." Of course Letitia, one of the finest artists I have ever had contact with, was superb in her womanly qualities—the utter desolation of her back-and-forth walk, her arms moving

in a small, helpless, beating movement when the child leaves the stage, a symbol of disappearance from life; or simply looking into the wing, seeing distance, with a sense of loss that hit me in the pit of my stomach.

I came with my cane, watched, and I learned from this watching. It was a learning about choreography that had not existed in my early days. Then, to everyone's surprise, after eight months the cane was gone, and I was dancing again. Hurrah! I had made it. I was again a dancer. Though I was involved with the Limón company as a guest artist, I retained the independence of performing on my own whenever possible.

In the summer of 1948, what had started as the Bennington School of the Dance was moved to Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. There would be six weeks of classes in several techniques and a final week of festival performances. Doris taught composition, Louis Horst taught his pre-classic dance forms, Martha Graham and her company were residents offering classes in her technique, and the Limón company was also in residence, with José teaching technique and with Betty Jones assisting. I was there to rehearse and perform.

In March Doris had begun a work to the Bartók Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, a fascinating but devilishly difficult piece of music. She titled the work *Corybantic*. It dealt with the conflicts of our time, with aggression, with defense, with destruction, and with renewal. Though there was hope in her resolution, it would not come without difficulty. Her theme was basically the violence and hysteria of the world at the time.

Diary

March 9, 1948

Started Bartók. Doris has wonderful feeling for patterns using interesting foot movement. She finds unusual dance effects never seen before.

March 18, 1948

More Bartók today. All counts, occasionally no relation to music. Doris likes it that way. I find it extremely difficult. [I had never counted before in any dance; I worked by ear.] I think there

must be some unity or relationship to the music. As a result, one has to count and even the dancers are unaware of the music, much less the audience. It becomes just sound. Very frustrating for me, but good experience.

I have since learned that Doris was right, and I often use music the same way.

Though not entirely clear in its totality, I found the work one of her most fascinating, full of original movement and sections that were breathtaking with inspired beauty and utter simplicity. My own conclusion is that it was way ahead of its time and that her vision can only now be appreciated. The world today is what *Corybantic* was about.

She came to the studio with very definite ideas blocked out in her mind. What I found particularly interesting in her approach was that she planned the space design before planning specific movement. This is one of the factors that have made her choreography different. The design has a spacial awareness and architectural plan rather than just body shape. She would move us around in this design, sometimes just asking us to walk around the space. Then she got down to searching for the specific movement from her motivations, this movement fulfilling the spatial design.

The most important thing I learned from this work was how Doris approached music. She had an unerring instinct for tempo and for the subtlest dynamics. But the revelation was how she was able to phrase this very difficult Bartók piece. Doris had several basic theories concerning music. First and foremost, do not be slavish to the music, matching it beat for beat or phrase for phrase. She would consciously counterpoint slow music with fast movement (a device I later used in the "Youth" section of *The Farewell*), and vice versa. Sometimes she would parallel a phrase or an accent, sometimes deliberately delay it. Finally, if a section was uncountable, she would work without the music (knowing what the texture of the sound was) and set movement on what she called "dramatic phrasing" or "breath timing." Then she would say, "Let's play the music and see what happens." Invariably, the movement fitted perfectly to the music, and we found

key notes as sorts of signals to keep us together. All of this was new to me. I had simply allowed my musical instincts to guide me. This other approach was for me another step forward in conscious knowledge of choreography.

Most dancers start by dancing in companies, are exposed to group choreography, and often start choreographing for a small group in which they may have a short solo movement. Doris once said, "A solo dance is the most demanding to create. You only have two arms and two legs and it is difficult to maintain interest. It takes much more imaginative movement. With a group, even the simplest movement can be made interesting—more arms, legs, heads, bodies. Group design in space can create interest that no solo dance can."

Since I had never belonged to a group, I had to start by giving concerts alone, so solo dances came very easily to me. What I really was afraid of was choreographing a group work. Now, watching Doris, I felt I would like to make a stab at it.

I asked Doris if she would consent to be my artistic adviser and she graciously accepted. This gave me the courage I needed. I had found a beautiful recording of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's Concerto in D Major in our record collection at home. It had an exquisite slow movement with an English horn solo. When I look for music, it is always the slow movement that conditions my choice as far as baroque or classical music is concerned. I wanted to work on a chamber-music scale and decided to use three girls and two boys. I was lucky enough to get Nelle Fisher, who had been in Martha Graham's company; Lidija Franklin, who had danced a lead in one of Agnes de Mille's shows; Robert Herget, who later choreographed for Broadway; and Glen Tetley, who at that time had studied with Hanya Holm for a few years. I was the fifth. This was quite a cast for the experiment of one's first group dance, and I panicked when I had to face them that first day.

Diary

February 19, 1948

Today I worked with Doris on Bach. I was a little nervous as to whether she would think I was going in the right direction. Before I

even began she warned me about my musical knowledge, saying it could become a handicap by controlling the dance phrases.

She said she does not even mind working beyond the music phrase if the movement demands it. I personally feel working beyond a phrase must still have some unity of phrase with the music and should not be done in complete disregard or awareness. Furthermore, I told Doris that in romantic and particularly in modern music, the music can be used more or less as an atmosphere. In baroque music, however, especially if used for pure dance, the basic architecture must be respected. I feel this is most important in fugal forms. [Years later, Doris proved me wrong in the fugue of Mozart's Fantasy and Fugue, when in the duet for Ruth Currier and myself she completely disregarded the fugal form, and it turned out to be the high point of the work.] On the other hand, it would be ridiculous to stick to the line of each measure. This would be as bad as painting a picture with photographic detail.

March 10, 1948

Doris came. Mentioned one important fact. Always think one pattern ahead so that the present one is always determined by what follows. She thought the jeté lift was the freshest thing she'd seen recently. [Now I can't remember the lift.]

March 19, 1948

She feels the opening section has no focus. I think she is right. Also, I do not come out enough in the opening theme. The idea of focus is very important. I think she means a center of projection [concentration], which is the link for the company. She also talks of ground base, which is to movement what organ-point is to music. These two hints are very important. Also, it is not good to have too many counter-movements, counter-lines.

Things seemed to go well. I had learned from Doris to plan my spatial design in advance and my material seemed to please the dancers. My confidence grew and soon I was totally immersed in the excitement of seeing this dance take shape. As I finished each movement, I would ask Doris to look at it. I could not believe my ears when, at the end of the piece, she said, "I think it is excellent." My first serious attempt at group choreography and it pleased her! I went home from that rehearsal with my head in the clouds. We finally performed it at a concert at the 92nd Street Y on Sunday, March 27, 1949; it was a milestone

for me. Knowing that I could always come to Doris for advice and criticism gave me an inner support I had never before felt.

During the fall of 1949, I felt the need to try a work diametrically opposed to my first, and chose a highly dramatic, psychological theme that had been brewing in my mind for a long while:

Fearing the violence of her emotions, a woman broke with her lover. He married her sister. A year has passed and the couple arrive for their first visit.

The work was titled *The Visit*. I asked Lucas Hoving and Betty Jones if they would be interested in being the lover and the sister. I also wanted a character depicting the inner self of the woman, myself. I asked Ruth Currier if she would do the role. In 1949–50 our engagements were sparse, so they agreed to work with me. I chose a piano sonata by Ernst Bloch, which was not the best possible music for my idea, but I felt I had to get going.

As I progressed, I found difficulty in finding movement for some of the passages. This was my first attempt at narrative subject matter. One of these moments was a sequence during the “Walk in the Garden.” My idea was a conversation between myself and Lucas, hiding old memories by being extremely formal. I was stuck. How could I suggest this conversation without mimetic movement? I asked Doris for help. She came to the studio, her little ashtray at her side, and watched. Then she said, “Pauline, what happens in a conversation?”

“Well, basically, one talks and the other listens,” I said.

“And then what happens?” she asked.

“The listener responds and the speaker listens,” I answered.

“One person is dominant,” Doris said, “the speaker. The listener is the receiver. Why don’t you progress on a diagonal? The speaker standing, the listener in a low crawl, and, in answering, the roles are reversed.”

We tried several versions, and then Lucas took walking steps, focusing on me as he bent his upper body toward me and used an arm gesture while I, holding his arm, did a low forward

crawl, focusing on him. Then I stood up, doing Lucas's movement, as he dipped to a crawl. Yes! There we definitely felt a give-and-take, a speaking and a listening, and this made for an extremely unusual movement passage. It was the first time I understood how Doris analyzed a realistic situation, digging for the inner reactions and then stylizing these into movement. This was dance, not mime. She had not mentioned her thoughts on gesture to me at that time. But my mind was suddenly awakened to the need for digging to find the meaning for a movement rather than inventing some externalized decoration. Again, this was a landmark for me, another "and the earth reeled" moment.

The Visit was performed several times, first presented by the Choreographers' Workshop at the 92nd Street Y on March 26, 1950. It was a highly theatrical piece with an excellent cast, beautiful costumes, and a fascinating set. Though I don't think I fully realized my intentions dramatically, it was a step forward for me. Moreover, Doris was pleased, and that was important.

Shortly after this work, in late 1950, an incident occurred between Doris and myself which to this day makes me very unhappy. Doris's *Invention* had been presented by the Limón company at the American Dance Festival in August 1949. A trio for José, Betty Jones, and Ruth Currier, with music composed by Norman Lloyd, it was a charming, pure-dance work, with remarkably innovative movement, and beautifully performed, but *The Moor's Pavane*, José's greatest work, overshadowed it. Doris didn't seem to mind and started to look for a completely contrasting idea. Feeling that another humorous piece would help the repertoire, she began to work on some ideas.

We never were quite clear on the total aspect. Perhaps she had not crystallized it herself. In any event, when she started, I remember her saying something about this being a backstage scene with the light battens hanging midway on stage and me sitting at a make-up table, getting ready. She had no music yet. She also tried bits and pieces of other ideas with Lucas, Betty, and Ruth. Somehow, none of us could find humor in any of the suggestions, and no matter how hard we tried, rehearsals bogged down to the point where we dreaded the next one.

We were afraid Doris might be making a terrible mistake and wanted to spare her the embarrassment. The four of us talked it over and decided we ought to discuss this with Doris, explaining that we could not seem to catch the humor she was aiming at. Since I was the senior member, I was chosen to do the talking. I tried to be as tactful as I could. But how can you tell a choreographer that you don't feel her idea is working? I could see the shock and hurt in Doris's eyes. She was extremely quiet, puffed hard at her cigarette, and a scrim dropped between us.

"If that's how you all feel, well . . ."

Though this had been a group decision, somehow Doris's hurt was directed at me. I was the one who had spoken privately to her, to save her from having to face the rest of the group. I often wonder whether we were right in confronting Doris at such an early stage. We should have let her develop her idea. Certainly, we respected her genius. Perhaps it was we who made a terrible mistake. I have always felt that, deep down, Doris never forgot that incident, and I have been haunted by a sense of guilt. Though she respected me as an artist and constantly helped when I needed her advice, she never was warm or really close in the thirteen years we worked together. But then, Doris was extremely reserved emotionally, to the point of remoteness, except at rehearsals, when her involvement would break through the reserve, and emotional passages in her works are deeply touching, though contained.

For me, the great revelation working with Doris was the broad spectrum of her work. She was totally involved with the human condition, and the humanity of her works always was evident. She demanded that we be people, not mechanical dance specimens. She always stressed that we must each retain our individuality, and somehow she was able to blend that individuality into a unified whole. As time went on, Doris would assign a particular part of a piece to me and say, "Why don't you go off in a corner and work on it?" She would tell me what she needed, give me the music, and I would go off to improvise, thinking, "I'll show her this material, and then she'll make something of it." What usually happened was that she would say, "Fine, that will do perfectly."

“But Doris,” I’d say, “I’ve just been diddling.”

“It’s fine,” would be her answer. Well, since *I* thought it could be better, I would go off again and this time take the diddling and set and polish the section until I felt right about it; then Doris would integrate it into the rest of the piece. I always seemed to be waiting, hoping Doris would take the time to really set something for me. The nearest I came was when she would make specific suggestions and then, while she watched, I would find some movement that pleased her. Little did I realize then that this was an invaluable challenge, for I had to live up to the entire concept of her piece, so that it retained the sense of the whole. I think that Doris recognized I had a specific way of phrasing, sharpness, and attack, as well as an ability to travel in space absolutely smoothly (from my days with Michio Ito). She liked this smooth way of covering distance without any shoulder wagging, and often asked me to use it in one form or another.

Equal to the form and space design of Doris’s works are the phrasing, the dynamics, and the breathing source of her movement. These, rather than the mechanics are essential to her style. The initial impetus of movement starts in a high center of the body, then radiates out. Her movement could be airy. It could be gutsy. Somehow, when I see these works now, they seem empty. The intrinsic quality is missing. The inner electric vitality is gone. There is only the shell.

We never knew what to expect. She searched every possibility for as wide a range of subject matter as possible. She was constantly seeking new directions, ideas, music, sets, lighting. Everything concerned her. In the spring of 1953, the Bethsabée de Rothschild Foundation decided to present a season of American dance at the Alvin Theatre that would include performances by the leading modern-dance companies and some soloists. The foundation commissioned Doris to create a new work for the season.

“I think this will surprise you,” said Doris, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye and a lift of the chin. “I’m going to do a Spanish piece.” “Surprise” was hardly the word—we were flabbergasted, and excited. This would be a whole new Doris. She explained that she didn’t mean authentic Spanish, but a work that

would convey the temperament and the flavor, with a deeply human comment about men and women.

The music, *Rítmo Jondo* (*Deep Rhythm*), by Carlos Surinach, was based on Spanish gypsy songs and dances. Doris outlined the work for us. The first section would be for José and three men—Ray Harrison, Charles Czarny, and Crandall Diehl, whom she took on specifically for this work. The second section would be for the women of the company, and the third would be a combined dance for the men and women.

The men's dance was brilliant, technically demanding, and virile, with wonderful strong, exciting movement. It was like nothing she had ever done before. The set, designed by Jean Rosenthal, was made of painted mesh and gave the effect of a clump of trees, stage right, through which the men entered.

In contrast, the women's dance was a gentle rite of femininity. Doris gave me four long branches and said, "You have sixteen bars of music after the entrance section of the three girls. I want you to enter from the trees, holding the branches with the quality of ritual, and come downstage left. Then you will offer a branch to each of the girls." The entire mood was slow and utterly simple—luminous.

At one point, the four of us—Betty, Ruth, Lavina Nielsen, and I—were in a line upstage. Doris set a slow promenade traveling downstage and superimposed a progression of arm movements that grew in design. "I want your arms to feel like branches of a tree," she said. I have never forgotten that. I have used the shapes of tree branches to create arm designs ever since. The source is infinite, and the unexpected shapes always lend variety, as opposed to the codified arm positions of ballet and other techniques. That one movement in *Rítmo Jondo* was another important landmark for me.

During these years of association with Doris, I had come to know her husband, Charles Francis Woodford. Leo, as she called him, was of medium height, a stocky man with slightly greying hair, who came to rehearsals on rare occasions and sat in a corner, just watching. Before meeting him I had known that she was married to a ship's officer working for the United Fruit



Company. He was often at sea and had little chance to be with her in New York, except on his short periodic leaves. I think this suited Doris perfectly. It left her free to concentrate on her work without guilt while he was away. However, there were many times even when he was on leave that she was so involved in her work that nothing else seemed to matter. Strangely, I felt the parallel to my own situation. But Leo was away on lonely sea voyages, waiting for the precious moments he could share with his family, while Fritz was just as involved with his own work as I was in mine. As I got to know Leo better, I found him to be a beautiful person and grew very fond of him. He had a quiet inner masculine strength. I could see why Doris had fallen in love with him. His light eyes said many things—they could sparkle while he made some ironic statement, suddenly piercing to the heart of the truth about a dance or a philosophic thought.

At times, these eyes would be veiled with a sadness that touched me deeply. He loved Doris, but the pattern of their lives was not easy. Doris, with her reticence, her anxieties both physical and artistic, was a complex person to love. On his lonely trips at sea, he would take a tape recorder along with reels of music. He was an inveterate reader, very involved in those early days with yoga. He once lent me a book on yoga, which I am ashamed to say I never returned.

By the time I knew Leo, I think he had accepted certain facts about his marriage, though it did not make him happy. But Leo was not a complainer. Brought up from childhood to love the sea, he could no more leave it than Doris could leave dance. On his leaves, since Doris was usually rehearsing, he took over the household. I remember after they moved to the Ruxton Hotel on West Seventy-second Street and Columbus Avenue in 1955 walking in to see Leo with a dish towel around his waist, happily preparing a cheese soufflé (he was a vegetarian). He saw to it that whenever he was home, Doris ate nourishing food. When she was alone, she

Pauline Koner in her 1953 solo *Cassandra*. Photograph by Peter Basch.

usually ate whatever happened to be around or dined in the hotel restaurant. Food never had any importance for her.

Occasionally when he was in town and we had a nearby engagement, Leo would come along on the hired bus, so as not to lose a minute of his precious shore time with Doris. I loved sharing a seat with him, just to talk. He had much to say that was valuable, especially his personal criticisms. During the years with Doris, he had absorbed very definite opinions about dance. On one such bus trip I said, "Leo, I don't ever want an audience to say, 'She's slipping. Time is beginning to show.' When the time comes, I want you to promise that you will be honest and tell me if or when my dancing looks like it is not at its peak." He promised. Some years later (this was probably the spring of 1958), I began to dread the difficult leaps I had set in my solo "A Time to Laugh" from *There Is a Time*. I asked Leo, "Are the leaps beginning to look labored?"

"Yes," he said. "If you want me to be honest, they're not as light as they used to be." I promptly took them out and substituted another movement. I knew Leo appreciated my dancing and was concerned that I always be at my best.

I only saw Humphrey, Doris and Leo's son, on rare occasions. I remember one wonderful party Pauline Limón gave for the company at Doris's Sixteenth Street apartment, at which Humphrey seemed quiet and remote. Humphrey's room was a small back bedroom that was separated from the rest of the apartment by louver doors. He struck me as being a rather shy and reserved boy. I know Doris was concerned about him, but I, coming from a warm, Russian-Jewish family life, found theirs a rather cold mother-son relationship.

During the summer seasons at Connecticut College, Humphrey lived with José and Pauline. One summer, in 1952, he was assistant purser on a United Fruit Company ship. During his teens he was very interested in travel routing and plotted many of the Limón company concert tours, scheduling the connections and generally making life easier for us. In New London I was always on a "Hello, how are you?" basis with him. Finally, in 1956, he was accepted for officer training by the navy. Doris was not

happy, but it was his choice. I know Doris loved him, and she often mentioned her concern about his welfare. I felt, however, that she could never give him the time that any growing child needs, and Leo was away most of the time.

Humphrey enjoyed being with the Limóns. He spent his early adulthood at José's barn in New Jersey, and the Limóns were really surrogate parents. While in his youth he may have resented Doris's preoccupation with her dance at his expense, in later years he realized her greatness. He finally asserted his individuality, though, by insisting on being called by his first name, Charles Woodford. He now takes pride in his mother's achievements, doing everything possible to keep her name and her works alive. However, I do not think he had a happy childhood.

After the success of *Rítmo Jondo*, Doris, unwilling to rest (which she always felt was a waste of time), announced her plans for the New London American Dance Festival. Again, a surprise was in store for us. With her compelling concern about the human condition, she felt the need to make a strong statement. She found her source in Stephen Spender's poem "The Fates," from his collection *Ruins and Visions*. From this poem, Doris wove a dance drama that was entirely different from her previous work. I could trace an evolution from *Corybantic* to *Day on Earth* to this piece, *Ruins and Visions*.

While *Corybantic* had been couched in abstract terms and dealt with a global problem, and *Day on Earth* had depicted in a simple way a simple but fulfilled life, now Doris, using real characters, faced the problem of the not-so-simple life: the psychological problem of what is reality and what is illusion.

Her premise was the thesis of the Spender poem:

Oh, which are the actors which the audience
Both, both, vowing the real is unreal.

She divided it into two parts:

Part I. Scenes in a garden, a theatre, and a street.

Part II. The storm rises

The walls fall tearing down

The fragile life of the interior.

The music was an inspired choice, the first movement of Benjamin Britten's String Quartet No. 1 and the entire String Quartet No. 2. I was cast as The Mother, Lucas as The Son, Lavina as The Actress (doubling as The Bride), José as The Actor, Crandall Diehl as An Actor (doubling as A Young Man), Charles Czarny as The Newsboy, Betty and Ruth as Two Girls. The sets were by Paul Trautvetter.

One of the important aspects of working with Doris was the time she spent explaining the characters to us, helping us in this way to translate into movement who we were and how we felt. Her movement came from these sources. Lucas and I had the first scene, set to the very eerie, high string sound of the first movement of Britten's first string quartet.

"You will start this seated in a garden swing, facing each other. It will move back and forth, so remember that what you do will be in relation to the swaying. You, Pauline, are a possessive mother—probably from New England—whose aim is to shelter her son from all the anxieties and problems of life. You, Lucas, having been brought up this way, have no concept of what life is like outside this protected garden world that your mother has built. Occasionally, there is a moment of disquiet for you, but your mother is always there to answer your questions and to still your fears."

We placed two straight-backed chairs facing each other and sat down. "I want you to have a conversation. You both are very calm, secure. The son adores his mother. She worships him." We began tilting back and forth to simulate the swaying and built a sequence, with Lucas at one point lifting me high as though on a pedestal and seating me on the back of the chair.

"Now, Pauline, you get out of the swing, and I want you to do some movement traveling around the edges of the stage, and giving the sense of 'this is your world—enclosed—your garden, your life.'" I worked out this sequence. "Good," said Doris. "Now, Lucas, you have a solo section that has some agitation, a need to break away. Then, Pauline, calm him with a quieting gesture. Tell him there is no need to worry. You are there to protect him."

As rehearsals went on, we became more and more fascinated. We had to develop dance movement from the gesture and,



Pauline Koner and Lucas Hoving in the swing scene from *Ruins and Visions*. Photograph by Peter Basch.

above all, to believe who we were. One day Lucas and I were discussing exactly this. How could I, five foot one, Semitic, dark haired, dark eyed, believe that this blond, six foot two Dutchman was my son? "I have it," said Lucas. My father migrated to the West Indies and married there." Somehow that seemed necessary for us. Yes, I certainly could be his mother. But to make it even

more plausible, Pauline Lawrence, José's wife, who was doing the costumes, said to me, "You know, I think we'll work a small strand of blond hair into your hairdo, to link the two of you." So, for once in my life, I had some blond hair—which I wove into my own!

In the second scene, which took place in a theatre, Lucas and I sat on the apron, stage right, in a theatre box, with our backs to the audience while we watched the on-stage drama. José, The Actor, finds his mistress with a lover. Furious, he knifes the man, and after a macabre duet with The Mistress, he chokes her. This was done as high melodrama, and the choking scene was handled in a most inventive way. José lifted the front of Lavina's skirt, wrapped it over her head, and held her suspended by neck and chest in the air, revealing her spasmodic leg movements in their death throes. It had a strange, Goya-like effect. But this drama never touched us. We were insulated, knowing that this was unreal. After politely applauding, we left the theatre and slowly, calmly promenaded home, I holding my skirts so as not to be contaminated by the frenetic newsboy and the two sleazy girls cavorting in the street.

This was one of those times when Doris's casting brought out totally unseen potential in Betty and Ruth. Betty was a wild, raucous gamine; Ruth, a slinky, blowsy, sexy vamp. It was hard to believe these were the lyrical, exquisite dancers we knew. I always felt their scene with The Newsboy to be a highlight. Life in the gutter was a reality that Lucas and I were never aware of as we calmly exited.

José's solo, a lament, was ambiguous—part of the play, or The Actor's real life? At this point he took on a universal duality, merging the two. Again the scene changed. War stepped in to snatch the son from his mother and his young bride.

"You are shattered," Doris instructed me. "You scream as you see him taken from you. You are bereft." When The Son is returned, dead, the drama of life has become a reality for which the sheltered are unprepared. "Suddenly you realize that death in life and death in the theatre are one." The Actor, José, appears to comfort the two grieving women. We had a wonderful duet in

which he helped me to understand and to accept life on its own terms. There I was in a stage drama, and yet it was an absolute reality. I loved doing this dance.

At this point The Actor, perhaps representing all art, became the catalyst, and Doris ended the work by having us all drop our dramatic characters, merging in a procession of collective humanity. We walked en masse, very slowly, downstage, our arms rising with a sense of serenity and hope as the lights faded.

Who at some moment of crisis has not said, "This can't be happening to me; it's not real"? In the drama of life, the real is the reality beyond all realities. At that moment we do not know if we are actors in some illusory drama on stage or if we are living the moment. The dividing line disappears, for we are the actors in the drama while, simultaneously, as audience, we ask, "Can this be happening?"

Pauline Limón did wonderful costumes. I was in a long, cream-colored, princess-style dress with a high lace collar and long sleeves edged with a lace ruffle. At the base of the dress were two bands of green. For the theatre scene, I donned a long green boa made of ruffled net. The dress helped me feel the formal elegance of the character. I considered my part quite unimportant, with almost no real dancing except the duet with José. It was José who had the central role. However, mine was a wonderful acting part, and I enjoyed this more than just a dancing role. I had to create a three-dimensional character and show how the drama of life changed me from an arrogant, withdrawn, domineering woman into a warm, compassionate one who discovers the anguish of true reality and must live with it. I was astonished when the reviews always singled out my performance. I felt I had done very little. The major newspapers and periodicals gave the work rave notices.

The technical rehearsals, on the stage of Palmer Auditorium at Connecticut College, were a nightmare. The swing had to be hung from overhead batons so that it would be suspended about ten inches above the floor. It was a very heavy prop made of solid wood. First, battens could not be found that would not interfere with the velour borders. When this problem was solved and we started to swing, Lucas and I found that the prop moved

with great difficulty, for not only did it sway, but the battens from which it hung swayed as well. We had to keep it moving within a minimum of space and yet still give the impression of swinging. I was always apprehensive about stepping off it and on again or worried that we would get stuck. After days of problems, we finally got it to work. We kept our fingers crossed. However, because of the swing the piece could not become a tour work, and therefore was not seen enough—a great pity.

During this period, I couldn't help noticing that Doris's limp was getting much worse, and though she never complained, the pain she endured was plainly visible. So we were all very excited when she told us why she would be away from rehearsals for a while. "I have decided to have this new hip operation," she announced. "It's the one Arthur Godfrey had, and the doctors feel I have a good chance for recovery." A highly advanced form of this operation is quite common today, but at that time, 1953, it was still experimental. We kept our fingers crossed and fervently hoped that it would be successful. As soon as she was able, she appeared on crutches for rehearsals and seemed much encouraged. When she graduated to a cane, we felt she was well on her way. But evidently there was a setback, and she was beginning to have trouble with the other hip.

With her typical reserve, Doris didn't say much about it and hid her disappointment as well as she could. It was a bitter time for her, since she could look forward only to more pain and locomotor difficulty. But, as always, her escape was in dance, and she began to plan a new work for the summer festival. Always alert for fresh ideas, she had come upon the true story of Felix, a Spanish gypsy who had been invited by Diaghilev to coach Massine and the Ballets Russes for his ballet *Le Tricorne*. They proved artistically incompatible, however, and the resulting clash seemed to unbalance Felix's mind. He was thereafter known as "the Mad."

My role in *Felipe el Loco* (as the work was called) was The Imaginary Dancer. Since I had had Spanish-dance training, Doris asked me to use my castanets. I played a rhythm sequence in silence behind the black curtain at the back of the stage and then

entered from the center. She asked me to set a dance in which I used castanets and heel work. Then José joined me in a duet, and finally I disappeared, leaving him to his madness. Since José had never been a Spanish dancer, Doris choreographed modern movement with a Spanish flavor. I, on the other hand, danced in authentic Spanish style, so there was a discrepancy. I think her idea in asking me to do the authentic dance was to make his dream of his native roots believable and to show the contrast. This would have worked if José's movement had been more authentically Spanish.

On the night of the premiere, August 22, 1954, Doris sat in her usual place in the hallway backstage at Palmer Auditorium. She looked anxious. We all felt very uncertain about the work. But as always before a performance, Doris encouraged us, told us we were wonderful, and sat there like the oracle at Delphi. We depended on her moral support at all performances. Because we were so anxious, there seemed to be a special electricity in the theatre that night, and at the end there was a standing ovation. This is one of the unpredictable elements of audience response—one never knows. Actually, the work was not very successful, because of the stylistic discrepancies. Even though Doris later improved José's role, the piece never got that kind of reaction again—inexplicable! Doris was disappointed, but she once said to me, "Pauline, one must constantly choreograph, so that the percentage of success will overcome that of failure. One cannot create a masterpiece every time."

One of Doris's problems was taking her cat, Monahan, to New London. Monahan was an enormous gray cat with a very domineering personality. He was an important member of Doris's family and often took precedence over important matters. One summer during the early fifties, I offered to drive Doris with Monahan up to New London. But Monahan hated cars. He whined and carried on during the entire trip. Doris was so uncomfortable that after that she hired a limousine each summer to transport herself and Monahan. Remote as she was with people, she was absolutely devoted to the cat. Monahan was such a

character that someone once wanted to write a book about him, but it never happened.

After much urging, Doris was finally convinced to move to an elevator building, and as much as she hated living uptown, she finally moved into the Ruxton, an apartment hotel on Seventy-second and Columbus Avenue. This was closer and more convenient for her Juilliard activities, and of course I was thrilled, because I lived three blocks west of Doris on Seventy-second. This meant I could stop by, see her, and help her if needed. One day Doris called and asked, "Pauline, could you come over this afternoon?" I knocked at her door and heard a muffled, "Come in, it's unlocked."

I stopped short in the doorway. I could not believe what I saw. There was Doris on her hands and knees on the floor, her crutches (which she still used indoors) lying beside her. My first thought was that she must have fallen. "Oh, no," she said. "Monahan is sick. He's hiding under the bookcase, and I can't get him out."

I got Monahan out, helped Doris up, and said, "Doris, what if I had not come? How could you have gotten up?"

"Oh," she answered, "I really hadn't thought about that. You see, I just had to get him out." Doris, who so many people felt was cold and reserved, never thought of her own danger when it came to Monahan, who seemed to rule the household.

From the time Doris became my adviser, I had become more confident in creating small-group works, but only because I knew she was there if I needed her. By now, I was working totally on my own, as was José, and we would show her our works for criticism and advice. *Concertino* was a satisfying piece to work on. I loved the Pergolesi music, and the movement and style came easily. I had no intention of creating a major work. This I was doing to satisfy my inner need for movement, for lyricism, and for the satisfaction of moving to beautiful sound. There was a slight motivation: the necessity for maintaining a social façade while at the same time satisfying the inner need to know oneself.

The premiere of *Concertino* was on a full Limón program at the American Dance Festival, on August 20, 1955, and I was

delighted that on an evening of major works John Martin gave it an excellent review. But what bowled me over was his summation of the festival the following Sunday, August 22:

In the recent series, there were four new works of major proportions and three smaller ones, and about half of them emerged from the testing with honors, which is not a bad average. The best of the major pieces was Pauline Koner's *Concertino in A Major*, to the music of Pergolesi. It is a simple composition for three dancers, without program, and yet, not a mere "visualization" of the score. A court lady of a period corresponding generally to that of the music dances gaily, attended by two waiting-women, with an interlude in the privacy of her own boudoir for some sad and tender meditations. The choreography has both the bounce and the flavor of the old court dances, without bothering with authentic forms, and its invention is charming and musical. So indeed is Miss Koner's performance

All I can say is that I was torn between elation and embarrassment. How could my work be chosen above that of my mentor, Doris Humphrey? José had done two works, *Scherzo* and *Symphony for Strings*, and Doris had done *Airs and Graces*. New London was, with teaching, choreographing, and rehearsing, very time consuming. I knew *Symphony* since I was in it, but I had not been able to see the others. So Martin's choice came as a complete surprise. Actually, I felt a little uncomfortable, but how could I not be proud of my success?

The next winter I was approached by Maxwell McCullough of UNESCO to help organize and participate in a presentation to culminate a month-long conference on Asian-American cultural relations. Asian cultural leaders, including university professors, former cabinet officers, and a member of the Cambodian Royal Council, met with Americans in six cities to discuss and define common cultural interests and to identify misunderstandings. The conference was to end with everyone meeting in Washington, D.C., and what was needed was some sort of concert presentation highlighting common cultural interests that would be revealing and entertaining as well.

My suggestion was a presentation to be called "Drama of Dance as a Universal Language." It was stressed that at least two

Asian countries should be represented, as well as America. The program would be presented by the American Council of Learned Societies as part of the conference at Lisner Auditorium at George Washington University.

I had a choice of Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Laos, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. I knew I could find East Indian dancers, but finding a second group from one of the participating nations was a saga! After running around to various embassies, I discovered that there were two young Javanese men, Wasisto Soerjadiningrat and Ksentjoro Koentjaraningrat, studying at Columbia University who were excellent dancers. I finally had a meeting with them. They showed me *Fighting Dance* and *Mask of Love Dance*. From what they said in their rather broken English, I hoped that they had agreed to participate by coming to Washington.

For the Indian dancers, someone suggested that I contact Bhaskar, who had recently come to the States, and he in turn suggested Bhanumathi, a friend of his, to dance with him. Having found the cast, I now had to structure the evening. I asked Doris if she would speak in the first half on gesture. Each nationality would then demonstrate particular gestures in their own dance style, and the similarities would be recognizable no matter how different the style. Weeping must relate to the eyes and all tears fall, no matter what the movement is.

Doris was excited about it. We rehearsed once in New York. Pauline Limón got Doris a lovely, flattering, gossamer dress and jacket to wear. (Pauline always saw to Doris's clothes, as though she were costuming a dance work, since shopping for clothes was too difficult for Doris.) My part of the program consisted of my *Concertino*, with Lucy Venable and Elizabeth Harris, and *Cassandra*. I was a little nervous for fear that the Indonesian boys might not arrive in time, since their school schedule was tight. When they showed up on the stage of Lisner Auditorium on May 15, 1956, I almost cried with relief. Pulling this event together had been more of a challenge than I had anticipated, and I was terrified.

I never thought it would happen until we were all onstage. The audience was filled with conferees and embassy dignitaries,

many of whom had not seen American modern dance. The first half, "Gesture," had Doris seated on a chair, looking absolutely stunning with her red hair highlighted by a spotlight. We stood in three groups, and as she spoke we demonstrated the same gesture, one after the other, in our own style. The second half was devoted to the actual performance, each unit performing two works. The audience was enthusiastic, and I was told later that at an evaluation of the conference, our performance was considered the highlight and that we had achieved in that one evening what many felt had been missing from the rest of the conference. It was an evening of complete rapport.

Since both Doris and José had done works for the Juilliard Dance Theatre's 1956 spring season, they decided to take a breather from choreography, and Doris concentrated on her classes. This was for me an unexpected bubble of free time, which I felt I must use. How could one waste this precious jewel, time? There never seems to be enough of it to follow through on the ideas germinating in that cubbyhole of the mind which are stored away for future reference.

For a long time I had been thinking about Helen Keller, who, deaf, mute, and blind, had nevertheless made an enormous impact on the world. Her only medium of communication was movement—the manual alphabet. I had the cast necessary for it and now had the time. So I dug in and learned the manual alphabet. This all happened in 1956, before the Broadway production of *The Miracle Worker*. I read everything available and even saw a documentary film of her recent activities. I chose the pertinent moments of her life as a sequence and the two important women who helped her to become and to be: the first, Annie Sullivan, whom she called Teacher, and the second, Polly Thomson, who continued when Annie became ill. When I told Doris about my idea and the way I planned to realize it, she was most encouraging. "It's a wonderful idea for a dance work," she said, "but you will have to handle it very carefully."

Leon Kirchner's String Quartet No. 1 seemed the perfect musical background for the four sections. As I finished each

section, I showed it to Doris. She particularly liked the opening (“World of Nothingness”) and the closing (“Remembered Image”) and made suggestions about the other sections. *The Shining Dark* had its premiere at the American Dance Festival on the all-Limón program, August 16, 1956. It went well, but somehow I felt that something was not quite right. After the performance Doris said, “You know, Pauline, now that I have seen it from the house, I think the “Panic of Loss” section is too sentimental. It gets bogged down. Why don’t you try another approach?”

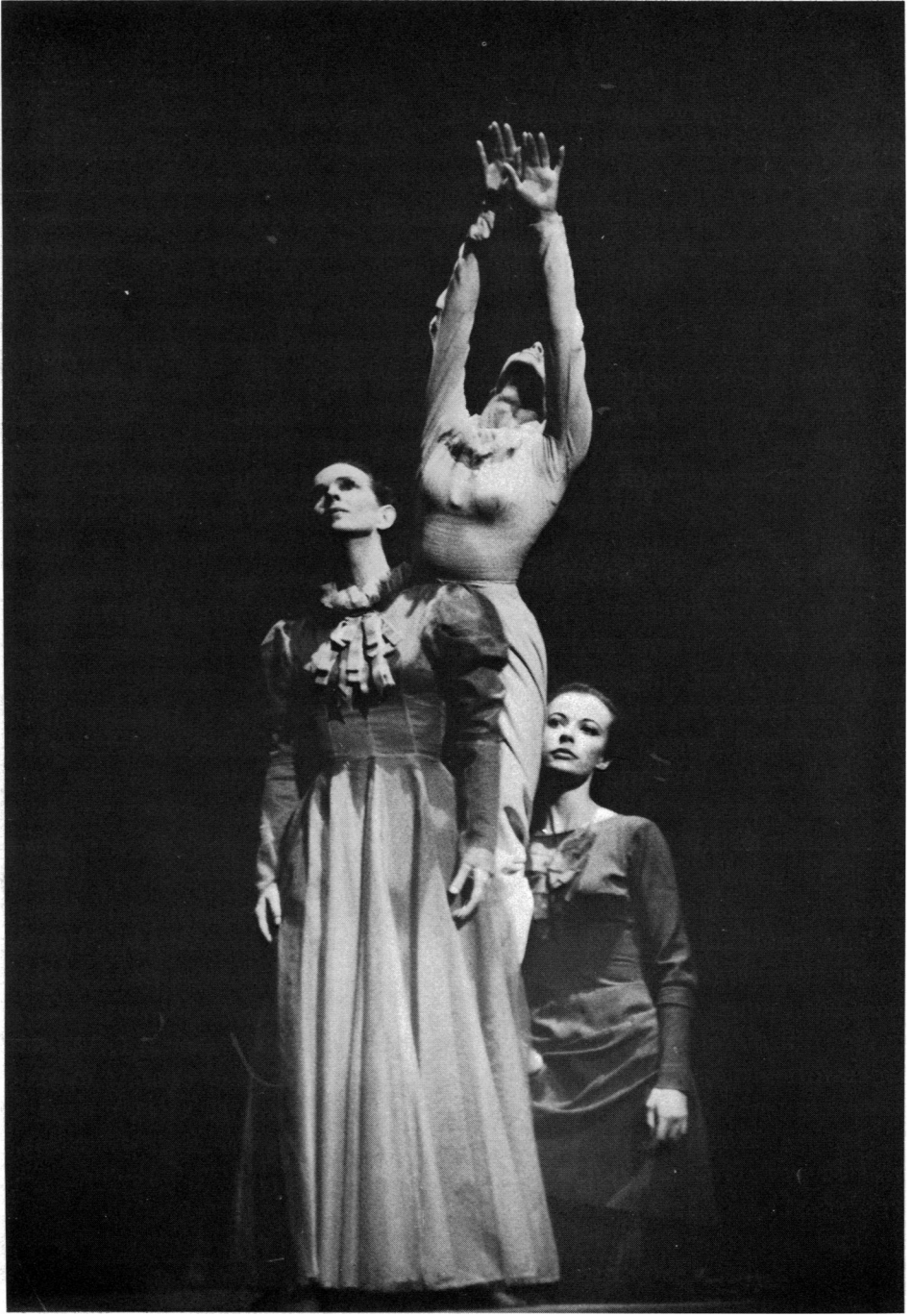
I felt she was absolutely right. It needed an intensity and starkness that was lacking. Helen’s own words to the effect that she felt as though she were back where she began were my clue. Encased in transparent gray gauze that hung to my feet, I did a strange solo which had a sense of isolation, blindness, inarticulateness, and desperation. I think it was one of the most difficult things I ever attempted. I finished seated on the floor. At this moment the remembered image of the teacher appeared and lifted the fabric off my head; then the new figure of the helper entered, and the final scene blended from a duet to a trio. When Doris saw this version she said, “Pauline, you’ve done it. That solo gives the work the focus it needed as well as the dynamic range it lacked.” I performed this version at Jacob’s Pillow and this time it really jelled. I felt it the moment we finished the first performance.

I was grateful to Doris for having pointed out the weakness. It was this kind of honest advice that constantly gave me the courage to dare. I depended totally on her advice and criticism. I knew she was there to help at those terrible moments when one feels, “I’m stuck. I have no more ideas. Blank.” Doris would say a word, suggest a move, look for a motivation, and presto!—a newness, a freshness would come alive. She would smile and say, “You see, you must never give up. There is always a way,” which I think was her philosophy. “Just don’t ever give in or give up.”

In 1957, with a European tour sponsored by the President’s Special International Program for Cultural Presentations following the Connecticut College festival, we were all revved up. New London summers were invariably hot and humid, and festival time always seemed a cue for the hottest days of the summer. There

were classes to teach and rehearsals, endless rehearsals. Doris knew we needed a bright opening work, since our programs tended to be on the heavy side. She started work on *Dance Overture*, to music by Paul Creston. It was a bright, sunny piece full of interesting spatial design and fast movement, with individuals darting out of the group for solos and duets. I was paired with Lucas Hoving. Though it was one of Doris's lesser works, it fulfilled its purpose and put the audience in a receptive mood. When it was premiered at the festival, the audience cheered in sheer delight to see the Limón company bright and gay, dancing lightly and brilliantly, though we were dead tired. There was barely time to get home and pack before we left the following week for London on the *Queen Mary*.

Those few days aboard ship were an oasis in the next four months. I don't think Doris realized the problems she had set for herself. Six of her works were scheduled for this tour: *Dance Overture*, *Variations and Conclusion from New Dance*, *Rítmo Jondo*, *Night Spell*, *Ruins and Visions*, *Day on Earth*, and *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias*. The last three started out with basic handicaps. Because of child labor laws, we could not take a child on tour. This meant that in each city where *Day on Earth* was scheduled, Doris had to immediately hold auditions—find a child and teach and rehearse her. This plus the normal performance and rehearsal load was nerve-racking, both for Doris and for José. Then, since Letitia and I spoke American English, it was thought that this would hamper *Lament* in London, so they decided to have Lorca's text read by an English actress in the pit. Nothing could have been more artificial. I felt ridiculous miming without feeling the guts of the text as I moved. It was a disaster. Finally, *Ruins and Visions* always presented the problem of hanging the swing. Doris's three major works suffered the worst performances—the press was icy. Andrew Porter of the *Financial Times* was the only critic who understood our basic premises and who appreciated Doris's work in depth. In a final review he specifically concentrated on *Ruins and Visions* but then went on to praise *Day on Earth* as well. This was an excellent, thoughtful review, but hardly enough to soften the blow of the slough-off Doris received from the other



London critics. This was a terrible blow to Doris. It was decided to drop *Lament* (I was grateful for that), but José insisted that *Day on Earth* continue. It lasted through the Paris engagement, and then, in Berlin, that too had to be dropped. This at least guaranteed Doris's and José's physical survival.

Doris was terribly shocked to discover that the press preferred José's works to hers. The London press was bad; the Paris, worse. Fortunately, Leo had joined us the week after we left, and after our Berlin Festival performances they decided to take a trip to Paris and southern Spain while we went off to Poland. This took her mind off the terrible disappointment and frustration of the tour at least for a short while. She joined us when we returned to Bonn from Poland and Leo had returned to the States. She was now alone.

The first time I saw her, standing at the station with her fur coat and make-up bag in one hand, her cane in the other, just standing, waiting, I winced. The young members of our company were too excited about Europe to think of anyone but themselves. José and Pauline were immediately surrounded by welcoming committees and disappeared. I, the outsider, also stood there, and I made up my mind that from that moment on I would always be with Doris on arrivals and departures. I carried her things as well as my own and got the porters and taxis; we were inevitably the last to get to the hotel.

Hotel arrangements always seemed badly handled. Instead of having specific rooms reserved for us, it was on a first come, first served arrangement, except for José. No one ever thought of reserving a special room for Doris, so we usually ended up with the poorest accommodations. She never said a word, though nobody seemed to greet her as the very great artist that she was. I was embarrassed for her. I felt her humiliation and watched her slow fading as this went on.

The ending from *The Shining Dark* with Lucy Venable (standing) as One Who Comes to Teach, Pauline Koner as One in Silence and Darkness, and Diane Quitzow as One Who Comes to Help. Photograph by Peter Basch.

Doris rarely asked me to take her to the station—I always suggested it first. She would not have asked for help unless it had been unavoidable. I was shocked at José's thoughtlessness. This was the woman who had given him life as a choreographer and was the nucleus of his career. No one cared to interview her, she stood there on the sidelines isolated, unrecognized. I think this experience did what no physical handicap or artistic problems had ever done: it broke her spirit. She was devastated. We were not close, but the sadness that enveloped her like a shroud was very hard for me to watch. The light had gone out, and there was bitterness in her words.

After the tour, I dashed to Hartford to be with Fritz. I had been away too long. The first thing I did when I got back to New York was visit Doris. "You know," she said, "José is working on a new piece, *Missa Brevis*, inspired by his Polish visit. He rarely talks to me about it, and when I saw a rehearsal he didn't even ask my opinion. I think it is too long, but he hasn't asked, and so I will not say so." When I could not hide my surprise, she said, "José is a lone eagle flying in the sky. No one can touch him."

Her face was drawn, her lips pressed tightly together, the ever-present smoke from her cigarette clouded her eyes. I never saw Doris cry. These were tears, invisible tears. This rejection after the European experience seemed to shatter her completely. "I don't want to do a new work this summer," she said. "I've decided to concentrate on my book, and I've decided on the title *The Art of Making Dances*. It says exactly what the book is. How do you like it?" I felt it was just right and told her how essential it was for her to write it.

"I need it, others need it. There is so little valid information on choreography, Doris. It is the most important thing you can do." I meant it sincerely, and I have used the book as a text for years—a precious legacy.

She spent all her spare time during the New London summer session working on the book. Leo was there the latter part of August, and I think she needed him desperately. Though she never mentioned how she felt, she didn't look well. Only once did she say to me, "I think I must be gaining weight. All my clothes are

too tight in the waistline.” One of her assistants had to let out the seams for her. Otherwise, she did not say a word.

She came home and Leo had to leave. When I could not reach Doris on the phone one day, I called José. “Doris is in the hospital,” he said. “She has to be operated on; they’re not sure what’s wrong.” When I called again, I was told that she had some complications. What was not said, but I suspected that she was seriously ill with cancer. She was told only that she needed to rest. The Limóns moved from the Wellington Hotel, where they lived during the week (weekends were spent at his barn in New Jersey), and took an apartment in the Ruxton. With the agonizing truth facing them, they devoted themselves to caring for Doris. Leo came back, and Doris simply took this as one of her transitory illnesses. I dropped in quite often, and Doris, actress that she was, seemed cheerful. We talked shop. One of her main concerns was that the new trends in modern dance were destroying its humanity. It was becoming arid. One day she said vehemently, “Pauline, we must not let them take over. You must fight, keep the spark of the human being in everything you do. Don’t give in. I haven’t.”

Another day I walked in and Leo was sitting with a tape recorder surrounded by reels of tape. “Leo, what in the world have you got there?”

“Well,” he said, “I taped Doris’s classes this summer. I felt it was important.” I often wonder what happened to those tapes. Another time Leo said to me, “You know, Pauline, Doris is a great artist, and I feel it is my mission in life to care for her.” No matter how difficult his private life may have been, this was his salvation. When Leo had to return to work, a nurse was hired. I came as often as possible to visit, bring goodies, and talk dance. She would be propped up in bed, wearing the lavender peignoir I had given her, her hair carefully groomed, eager to talk about her activities. The book was delivered to the publisher. She was working on a new piece for the Juilliard Company, *Brandenburg Concerto No. 4*, assisted by Ruth Currier, a member of the Limón company. “Ruth comes here and I block out the material. Then she teaches it to the company. It works very well.” One day she said, “I’m so delighted, I have almost finished the Bach piece. I plan to see a run-through shortly, early in January.”

Then there were complications: gangrene developed in her leg and amputation was considered. When José told me this I shuddered. "Why put her through further agony?" I asked myself. I had received a Christmas card from her and looked forward to giving her a special gift, perhaps some new lingerie. The day before Christmas, she was taken to the hospital. José's voice was grim. Pauline had chewed her fingernails to the quick. I waited for news. On December 29, José called. "Pauline, Doris has died."

Even though I knew it was inevitable, the reality was a shock. I broke down. I felt as though I had fallen into an abyss. The sense of emptiness frightened me. I couldn't call and say, "Doris, I need your advice." Leo could not be reached in time. He arrived the next day. I waited to hear further news. Would there be a service? Could we make our farewells? Nothing. Total silence. It was as though she had evaporated. After a few days, I called Leo. He was desolate. "Leo, would you like to come over and talk, or just be quiet? Please come." He did. I gave him a large glass of Scotch to dull the misery in his eyes. I took one myself. We sat together quietly and listened to the adagio of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in C Major.

I felt numb, lost. She had given me new life. Now what? Who could I find to be my outside eye? I tried to go on and found it frightening. Could I go on without Doris's reassuring voice. "Yes, it's good," or her critical eye, "Cut that part out—you don't need it"? But as I struggled in the studio, I realized that I was not alone. She seemed to inhabit me. She was my dybbuk. Everything she had said to me echoed in my mind. I suddenly heard phrases that had evidently been lying in my subconscious, things she said to others while I watched rehearsal. No, Doris was not gone; she would always guide me. This became my premise for *The Farewell*, my tribute to Doris:

Our shimmering memories we take with us.
The luminous self we leave to others.