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**Dancing with Mrs. Fay Simpson:
Memories and Stories**

**Cecille DePass & Denise Desnoes
Preface: Pat Cumper
Prologue: Sydney Burke**

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In Memory of:

Fay Simpson

Sydney Burke

Clare McFarlane

Pansy Silvera Hassan

Neville Black

Hope Bent

Anyone who receives a copy of the eBook, “Dancing with Mrs. Fay Simpson”, is asked to adopt the honour system. In the spirit in which Mrs. Simpson taught generations of students, please make a generous, voluntary, financial contribution to the following Jamaican schools: St. Andrew High &/or Preparatory Schools, Kingston, Jamaica; or any Jamaican school in which the arts are valued.

Dedication

From Cecille DePass:

To my mother, Phyllis Harriott nee Trotter; my Queen's School, high school teachers, especially to: Olga Banks, Mary Langford and Irma Gabay Foster; University mentor, Ruby King, UWI; University of Calgary mentors, Evelina Orteza y Miranda and Mathew Zachariah; my grand aunts: Dorothy Robertson and Gladys Harrison, and to everyone who inspired me 'to reach for the stars'.

From Denise Desnoes:

To all the readers of this book.

Life is like a dance.

So as in the words of the song: 'And when you get the chance to sit it out or dance...I hope you DANCE'! (*Source:* Mark D. Sanders & Tia Sillers. (2000). "I hope you Dance". Published by Rutledge Hill Press, Nashville, Tennessee).

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

After such a long time, since Fay Simpson's passing, this book is long overdue. Most of its production was completed in 2015, written, published and circulated for review and comments in 2016. However, due to unanticipated personal and family events, the book's final publication was delayed for several years. In 2021, Dr. Ali A. Abdi, UBC, and Co-Founder of CPI agreed generously to publish the book as one of the eBooks in CPI's emerging Legacy Series.

Important contributions have been made by many people in Jamaica, Canada, the USA, and England. Denise and Cecille know that without their help, the dream to create a book of memories and stories of dancing with Fay Simpson at her school on Hope Road, in Kingston, Jamaica, could never have been brought to fruition.

We know that, due to constraints of time, space and funds that we were unable to contact and include the stories of many former Simpson dance students. Any former Simpson dancers who wish to contribute their memories, stories and photographs of dancing with Mrs. Simpson, please contact Cecille DePass at depassc@ezpost.com. Cecille will make the necessary additions and revisions, in the next edition of the book. Several of the photographs included do not identify the names of the dancers and characters. If anyone can identify the individuals and wish their names to be published, please contact Cecille DePass and she will make the required revisions. If there are any errors and oversights, in terms of: information included/excluded, interpretation/misinterpretation of data collected via innumerable telephone calls and email letters, Cecille DePass, as the first author, accepts full responsibility.

Warmest thanks, acknowledgments and appreciation for their immeasurable contributions to the following individuals, whose support, encouragement, guidance and love have made the preparation of this book such a rewarding venture:

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Photographs willingly given for inclusion, by the following generous individuals, have taken the narratives and danced the book to life:

Sydney Burke

Denise Desnoes

Cecille DePass

Preface by Pat Cumper (Niece)

Fay Simpson was at her happiest when she was teaching dancing. That moment each afternoon when the chairs and tables at her kindergarten school were pushed back to clear a large space for dance classes was familiar to all of us. At that moment, Mrs. Simpson was transformed from being a school teacher to the ballet mistress who strengthened young bodies and trained young minds in her favourite discipline. Music from all the great ballets rang out at 11 Hope Road as her pupils strained mightily to learn the first to fifth positions, how to bourrée and plié, to perform an arabesque or pirouette, how to leap lightly in the pas de chat and complete a snappy *ronde de jambe en l'air*.

The whole family knew the story of young Fay who had wanted to be a ballerina but who had sadly been put on pointe too early, ruined her ankles, and so had had to settle for teaching dance. In fact, she started trying to teach her siblings to dance as a pre-teen. With no available pupils she enticed her brother into playing that role. Still a bit on the plump side and without the genes for the athletic skills dancers need, he was seriously inadequate in this role but she persisted, even attempting to teach leaps and jumps once positions were understood. It must have been a hilarious sight. So, what became evident as an adult was already there as a child.

None of the young folk in the family -- daughters or son, nieces, nephews or cousins -- were terribly talented dancers, yet we all attended many years of classes and had instilled in us a love for and enjoyment of dance in all its forms. It still delights us today. When the Dance Theatre of Harlem or the Russian folk dancers performed in Kingston, or any of the travelling ballet companies came through, we were always there.

And though we may not, any of us, have been prima ballerina material, we were always made part of Fay's bi-annual shows. There was no escaping it. If we weren't being sailors in *Pineapple Poll*, a broom in the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland* or a cygnet in *Swan Lake* on stage, we were marshalling the little ones, sorting costumes and applying make up to delighted little faces. None of us will forget her sharp disapproval of mistakes made during the dress rehearsals (she believed in the adage of 'bad dress, good performance' but thought it a good idea to put the fear of god into us just in case). And Fay Simpson shows always started on time. Full stop. At 7:59 pm doors closed and locked for an 8:00 pm start. No exceptions.

The musicians among us provided live music. Others assisted backstage, made costumes or painted sets. As a reward for all this, once the show was up and running, we were allowed to sit up with the gods at the Ward theatre or watch from the wings at the Little Theatre or Creative Arts Centre. From those vantage points, we saw all the months of hard work, the sleepless nights, the planning and gentle coercion of friends and family which Fay had put into creating these popular shows come to delightful fruition on the stage. And of course, there was the mandatory single red rose she handed out to everyone after the curtain had fallen for the last time on each show.

Fay invested in those who shared her passion and talent for dance: students like Norma Shim Quee, Cecille DePass, Denise Hall, Monica Ingleton come to mind. They became part of our extended family, infected as they were by Fay's enthusiasm and ambition. Her passion for teaching must have been sparked by her parents who remained teachers all their lives. So it was

natural all their children became teachers too – teachers with an understanding of the power of education, the value of discipline and knowing that commitment bears the fruit of success.

Although she choreographed show routines for her leading dancers to the music of the famous ballets like *Swan Lake* and *La Fille Mal Gardée*, she also did more original challenging work. Like all good teachers, she used the experience of both her successes and failures to become steadily more creatively mature, not only in the complexity of the adaptations and to produce original works but in the music for these. From live music, to taped, to challenging (for the tape creator) juxtapositions from a collection of scores, she never stopped experimenting with the music. An abstract piece called *The Two Monicas*, for example, and her original staging of *The White Witch of Rose Hall* stand out in the memory.

Hundreds of students passed through Fay Simpson's Ballet School. Some went on to dance with NDTC, Neville Black and many other companies. All of them learned at the very least something about ballet, performance, discipline and teamwork. Dance became part of many of their lives. None of them are likely to forget the upright stance, sharp eye and no nonsense voice of Fay Simpson, choreographer, ballet teacher -- aimed to inspire each and every student.

Written in England, Winter/Spring 2016

Peter Thomas, retired senior engineer in the USA, and Fay Simpson's nephew, invited Pat Cumper, MBE, playwright, producer and author in England, Fay's niece and a former Simpson dance student, to write the Preface.

Prologue by Sydney Burke

(Fay Simpson former dance student and lifelong friend)

Fay Simpson — God put her on this earth as an example of his goodness for all of us to follow.

Fay was the youngest daughter of Bertha and Will Carpenter, who resided at Half-Way-Tree, Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies.

Fay had two sisters — Joyce, a trained nurse, and Gloria, Jamaica's first woman barrister. She also had a brother, Reginald, a medical doctor who was formerly Head of Surgery of the University Hospital of the West Indies, in Jamaica, for many years.

Fay studied dancing in Jamaica with Miss Johnston. Miss Johnston was one of the only teachers of dance, at that time, in the island.

As a very young and sheltered teenager, Fay was sent to school in Toronto, Canada, to study kindergarten teaching. However, she also studied ballet and music while she was a student in Canada. Ballet was, undoubtedly, her first passion. Music and choreography were everything to her.

While studying in Canada, Fay Carpenter met a dashing young skiing instructor named Gordon Simpson. When he skied down the slopes, Fay probably thought that he was an angel from heaven, sent to sweep her off her feet. He did.

They subsequently married and returned to Jamaica with their young daughter, Lynda.

Gordon became famous for his productions of the annual Christmas parade featuring Santa Claus and his Elves. This was a large parade with numerous floats, such as: 'Old Mother Hubbard, Three Blind Mice and Cinderella'. It also included many other floats sponsored by local business people. Times Store, on King Street, was the major sponsor.

Fay opened a kindergarten school for young children, as well as, a dance studio for all ages.

Many of her friends and their children became her first students. They participated in her first ballet show — which was called "Anancy". The ballet told the story of the mythical trickster, Anancy, who is quite famous in Jamaican folklore. He went around pulling tricks on people, and usually outwitted them.

Subsequently, for very many years, on a bi-annual basis, Fay produced all the well-known ballets such as, 'Giselle, La Fille Mal Gardée, Coppélia', etc.

Fay Simpson was well known as one of her country's outstanding choreographers. She was subsequently, awarded the Musgrave Medal of Honour for her 50 years of contributions to the fields of Education and Dance by the Jamaican government.

In time, Fay Simpson also specialized in helping students with learning disabilities. Many of the students whom she taught had severe disabilities. A few, as a result of Fay's patience, understanding and encouragement, went on to become self-sufficient adults. One of whom, later, taught in her kindergarten school.

In my entire lifetime, I cannot think of anyone who was more even tempered, thoughtful, and kind than my dear friend, Fay.

She was such a good listener when people talked to her about their problems, and we certainly did.

She was instrumental in developing my keen interest in arts. On one of her last visits to Canada, we went to Niagara-on-the-Lake which is famous for its varied theatre productions. On the day before we left, we went to three shows, all in one day, so that we wouldn't miss any of them. What a thrill that was!

Needless to say, if I tried, today, to do some of the dance steps I once did, seemingly without effort, my legs would probably never return to their normal positions.

I will always remember Fay Simpson for she brought such joy into my life by awakening my interest in arts.

I know she is probably teaching the angels a new way to fly in heaven, where she certainly belongs.

With fondest memories.

Written in Thornhill, Ontario, December 2015

(Unfortunately, Sydney Burke passed away suddenly, in Summer 2019)

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