

A VERY PERSONAL NOTE ON THE DEATH OF ALFRED DESIO

from Louise Reichlin, Director

Although Alfred and I were married for 39 years, the experience of being with him when he was diagnosed with bladder cancer, and then on the 9 month journey of his efforts to return to his life as a tap dancer, proved to be an unknown journey for both of us. I loved Alfred for his great talent, and also because he was a wonderfully loving husband who was thoughtful and supportive of my own work. I was supportive of his, and as artists and teachers we both had very full individual creative lives. Although it may sound strange, some of the months after his first operations before the cancer spread to the meninges area of his brain contained some of our most quality time where we could just focus on the present and on being together. He was a voracious reader, and throughout his illness he continued to read a tremendous amount- about herbs, electronics, food cures, jazz and biographies of Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein, both of whom he had worked with years earlier in the original *West Side Story*.

The reality of his no longer being here is overwhelming at times, and our house is filled with all the material objects- from his records and cameras and photographs to his flutes, electronic instruments and teas and honeys to his clock collections and his cars. So far I haven't wanted to express my loss in dance, but I have learned to edit to DVD's and make slide shows with my iPhoto because I needed to show his work through these mediums. We showed some of these at the wonderful 'Celebration' of his life at Zipper Hall in early March, that the Colburn School kindly donated for this event. Alfred had taught there for 30 years. Many of his students, their family members and company members danced, played instruments, and spoke in tribute about Alfred's influence on their lives, which kept his spirit very much alive. In May Alfred was awarded a Horton award for excellence in teaching at the Alex Theater, and this too was an event very much in the present.

In looking through video footage of our joint concerts to use in the DVD presentation, I came across a short excerpt from an early 80's work of mine called *Woman Sleeping*. There was an emotional wailing and mourning section about death to music by Toshiro Mayuzumi that perfectly expressed then what I am feeling now. As a choreographer I am so aware of my non-linear thought and creative patterns – and I am becoming now more aware of the non-linear nature of my life and Alfred's. In the 70's when I was first teaching Movement For Actors And Musicians at USC, a Japanese gentleman and a companion (neither of which spoke too much English as I recall) came to watch a class. Afterward, the man offered me a choice of two records he had with him. They were both the music of Mayuzumi

(and I think that he was that composer) and I took them home to listen to. Alfred was there, as he was playing an African drum for my classes at the time. It was before he was teaching. The music had a sound I had never heard – Japanese instruments mixed with European, and a raw emotional drive. I used one section in part of my first work for the company in *The Tennis Dances* (1979) that we nicknamed 'the violent duet' and another section in *Woman Sleeping* (1981-82). I know that when I created the movement, I had never experienced the feelings I have now, but that I understood from the music and was able to convey it in the piece. I think I expressed many of the feelings and created a critically well-reviewed work with elements that I didn't experience and relate to until 25 years later.

I remember saying at Alfred's 'Celebration' in March that I used very few personal photos in the slide show I had created. Although we had a whole scrapbook of early photos of us in New York and visiting my family on their boat, I had no idea where the book was as we never looked back at photos (or videos) unless one of us was trying to recreate a dance work or needed a work photo for publicity. We both lived very much in the present and looked forward – not back. And when I look at the mosaic of our lives together and our company, I think it is also here in the present and always. It is in that way that I can proceed to create new work and live. 🌱



photo: Louise Reichlin & Dancers perform 'Woman Sleeping' in 1982, photo by Kenneth Johansson

Photo: "Celebration for Alfred Desio in March, Zipper Hall, ended with a Tap Jam by a group of his former students

