



Dancing in the streets of Avignon, France. (GTU Archives)

13. Teaching, Presenting at a Peace Center in Northern Ireland and a Sacred Dance Festival, Avignon, France

CDS: The thrust behind teaching, aside from its own good, is also propelled by my desire to introduce sacred dance into the liturgies of the Church, which includes [in addition to the Catholic church,] a wide variety of Christian denominations. Early on, the Catholic church and the Episcopal church, where we were in residence for so long, were the main outlets, but because I have taught so many years at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, with students from all the schools of the Graduate Theological Union, my outlook has [become] very ecumenical and interfaith.

The Center for the Arts, Religion, and Education (CARE), an affiliate of the GTU [Graduate Theological Union], was founded by Doug Adams, a professor at the GTU and PSR [Pacific School of Religion] and [a] visionary for the role of the arts in religious education. He was a promoter of dance as well as [of] the visual arts, and was the reason for me moving to California. CARE is currently under the direction of Elizabeth Peña, and continues [to be] a center in this country where people can come and integrate their religious education while deepening their appreciation of the role of the arts in theology and spirituality. I have been teaching at the GTU since Doug Adams invited me in the 1980s to offer summer workshops. So this New Yorker eventually became a resident in Berkeley with her husband, Arthur, who was from here in the first place. While I teach through CARE and PSR, I enjoy working with

students from the Jesuit school, the Franciscan school, the Baptist schools, the Presbyterian school, the Unitarian school, Jewish center, etc. With the new centers for Buddhist, Islamic, and Hindu studies, the dimensions are exciting. For me, none of this freedom to explore would have happened without Vatican II. I had the good fortune to enter the Church and be on the scene at the right time in history. As I mentioned before, I give real thanks to centers of religion, colleges, and convents across the country [that] were open to dance, believed in this ministry, and welcomed me. One such weekend, for example, was at Incarnate Word College in San Antonio, Texas, where I was invited to introduce to their students the integration of sacred dance and liturgy, courtesy of Sister Martha Ann Kirk! There have been so many different places. A formative and beloved place for me has been Saint Andrew's Abbey [in Valyermo] in Southern California. Saint Andrew's is a Benedictine monastery in the desert outside of Los Angeles, and for twenty-one years I offered [a] weeklong workshop in the summer. (That tradition is still continuing under John West.) My week was always hosted by one of the monks, usually Father Philip—and sometimes, in the beginning, Father Gregory would cohost. The whole day would be spent praying and dancing, primarily in a designated dance room, but also in the chapel and outdoors into the desert. Coming back from the desert, we would regather and work on dances to be offered as prayers for the closing vigil on Saturday night. It was very important to go into the desert because of its heightened mystical dimension, and I wanted us to find that core inside, where you also meet the living God of the desert.

I want to mention here other places where I have gone, not by myself but with the company, Omega, as part of our studio work at St. John the Divine. [These tours were] organized by Father Thomas Kane, our friend and champion. The first tour was to Northern Ireland, specifically to Corrymeela, a peace center in Ballycastle. It was a thrill to go there. Our preparation included choreographing a dance to “The Cat and the Moon,” a poem by Yeats. A Yates poem—what temerity! Many young people from the Northern Isles had gathered for this peace conference titled “The Upside Down Kingdom.” A high point for me included teaching through dance the Lord's Prayer, which we all did together.

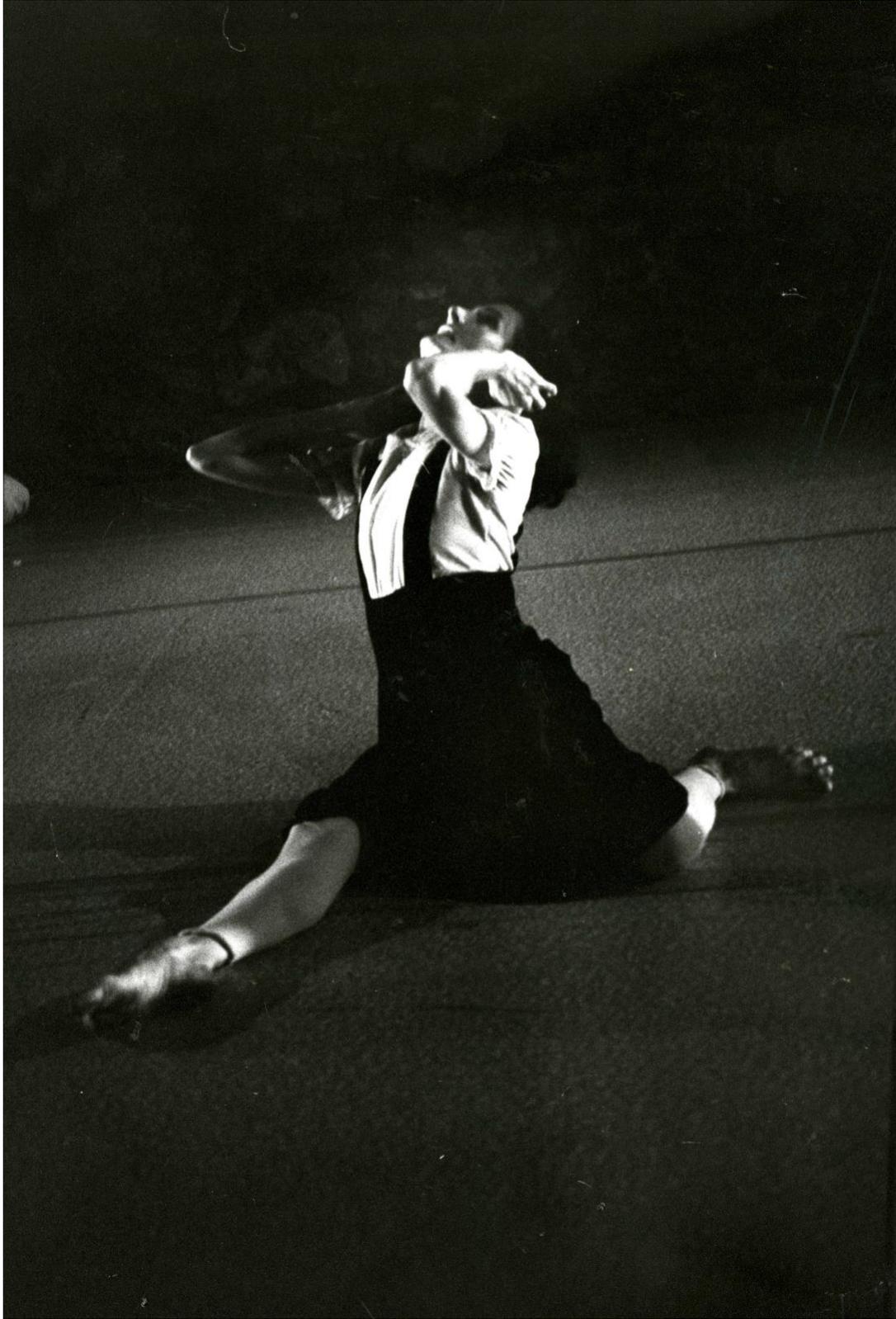
A major tour was going to France, again organized by Father Kane as well as our beautiful dancer Marie de la Palme, who was from Paris. The high point of our trip was dancing in Avignon, in southern France, at a sacred dance theater.

Our concert was directed by Allan Tung and was called Vidi Aquam. An amazing event happened near the end of our stay. It was arranged for us to go from church to church in Avignon [an ancient medieval town with narrow winding streets]. And at each [Catholic] church, we would offer in dance a part of the Mass. In between churches, we danced down the streets waving flags.



The "Vidi Aquam" concert danced in Avignon, France, in 1986. (GTU Archives)

“Stations of the churches” [that is, going from church to church]: Thus, we began in the first church with a danced Gloria, then arriving at the second church, [we] perhaps danced the Credo. I don’t really recall. Probably a gospel story, an Agnus Dei? Finally, the narrow streets opened up into a huge open space, the Pont d’Avignon. Forming an enormous circle with the many people who had joined in our procession and others who had gathered at this pilgrimage site, I led [for one of the first times] a circle dance to the Taizé chant “Laudate Dominum.” [It was helpful] that, aside from Marie, other people in our company also spoke French. I was very proud of them. (I spoke a little.) Let me take a break for a moment. Ah, Sacred Dance Guild, I will have to say a word about the Sacred Dance Guild.



In the political challenges of Ireland De Sola shared the Anne Frank dance reflecting a terrible time in history. (GTU Archives)

