



Orotario Dance by Charles Weidman at Old St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, CA. reconstructed by Joann Koch and Eloel Quitzan. (GTU Archives)

17. Advent, Palm Sunday, Old St. Mary's Cathedral

CDS: Carla De Sola

SMA: Sister Martha Ann Kirk

CDS: Old St. Mary's is a very beautiful Catholic cathedral in San Francisco, and Omega West Dance Company was invited to be in residence there shortly after I moved to Berkeley in 1991. We were there for about five years under Peter Zagrafos, who was the director of liturgy. I was impressed and grateful that we were included in the liturgical planning. They had a fine organist who also was a composer. He came to rehearsals, improvised, and created a beautiful, vital score tailor-made for the dance, which we were asked to repeat year after year during Advent. This dance was to the gospel of John the Baptist as a herald in the desert, calling all to be baptized—[and] also calling everyone a brood of vipers!

It is a rich proclamation, filled with wonderful imagery for dance. I began, after blowing a shofar, with having one of the dancers leaping onto the dancer who played John the Baptizer, whispering into his ear, as a muse, or as the Holy Spirit directing him. It worked really well as a dance. I was proud of it and relieved that nobody minded it---it wasn't too far-out after all.

Another favorite dance was the entrance procession for Palm Sunday. The whole congregation was also involved, waving their palms in a joyous pattern as the dancers, with huge palm branches, filled in the verses to "All Glory, Laud, and Honor." As the dancers circled the altar,

it was like the verse in one of the psalms of dancers coming with branches, even to the horns of the altar, and later in the liturgy of the Word, of people laying down their branches for Jesus as he came in procession to the temple.

CDS: I want to talk about John the Baptist and the sense of being included in the liturgical planning.

SMA: I think that is important. Yes, go ahead.

CDS: Now there is a whole reading on Palm Sunday called the Passion and it fit in with that. How do we do it?

SMA: First of all, for the outside, then . . .

CDS: They all had palms inside already, so the “Palms Dance” was at the beginning of the liturgy, and the dance “O Sacred Head” was after communion instead of a reading. I think it was after communion. I think I should mention both. We started down the aisle using “O Sacred Head” with all the music and the verses. We were a part of a group of people. We reflected on “O Sacred Head.” We had Veronica. [A legend said a woman called Veronica wiped Jesus’ face and the image stayed on her cloth.] We had images.

SMA: When were you at St. Mary’s? Could you say a year?

CDS: I think it was the 1990s. In the early 90s.

CDS: In 1991. To recap, being in residency at Old St. Mary’s Cathedral in the early 90s was a significant time for me because the dances developed out of careful liturgical planning with the staff rather than being added at the last moment with insufficient rehearsal time. We found also that, pragmatically, when a dance is created to one of the readings, people are not worried about the extra time it will take. Dancers [and] choreographers need time to think through the function of the dance within the liturgy and, within this stricture, create a work with depth. After communion, or perhaps it was Good Friday, we danced to the beautiful hymn “O Sacred Head, Surrounded,” drawing on images of stations of the cross, ending with Jesus being crucified. He was lifted up and the rest of the dancers carried him horizontally going down the aisle. We also performed “O Sacred Head” at Grace Cathedral.

“A Voice Cries in the Wilderness”

This gospel proclamation for the season of Advent focuses on Saint John the Baptist. This dance was shared at Old St. Mary’s Cathedral in San Francisco, California in the early 1990’s. Choreography by Carla DeSola and danced by Carla De Sola, Nona McCaleb and David McCauley of the Omega West Dance Company.

The Jewish shofar calls people to listen. A muse jumps on John’s back, reminding him to be faithful to his prophetic call. It is not easy to be a “voice crying in the wilderness.”

URL: https://youtu.be/X12I3-e_Iak

“O Sacred Head” and the Veneration of the Cross

As part of the Good Friday Liturgical Service in the mid-1990s, Omega West Dancers reflected on the ancient hymn, “O Sacred Head,” attributed to the twelfth century writer Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, with allusions to Isaiah 53:5. The universality of suffering is shown, while at the same time, the tenderness of compassion and consolation can be seen in Veronica wiping the face of Jesus.

In dancing “O Sacred Head,” recalling the suffering of Jesus, the dancers hold up—and later carry, in procession—the heads of suffering people of Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The photos are by a young US photojournalist, Mev Puleo (1963-1996), who used her skills to make people aware of the struggles in Haiti, El Salvador, Brazil, and among the homeless in the United States. She was the author of *The Struggle Is One: Voices and Visions of Liberation*, and loaned her photos to be used in this service.

In Catholic Good Friday services, it is traditional for the people to come forward and venerate the cross, remembering the love of Jesus on the cross.

Choreographed by Carla De Sola and danced by Carla De Sola, David McCauley, Kevin Fung, Nona McCaleb, Cynthia Newland, and Janet Weeks.

URL: <https://youtu.be/Iz2v6OLE3IQ>

Learn more of Carla De Sola, the Omega Dance Companies on the West and East Coasts, and of sacred dance at <http://spiritmovesomega.weebly.com> The Carla De Sola Collection is in the Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, CA. <http://gtu.edu>



*The photos by Mev Puleo who created the book *The Struggle is One, Voices and Visions of Liberations* were used in this dance at Pacific School of Religion Chapel. They were also used for the dance *Sacred Head Surrounded*. (GTU Archives)*

“Come to the Feast,” a table-setting dance, Easter Vigil, 2013

Choreography by Carla De Sola and David McCauley. Dancers: David Henry, Jennifer Kimball, Claudia Florian-McCaffrey and David McCauley, with Chris and Randy Dixon.

Though no words are used, many of us heard singing in our hearts:

“I danced on a Friday when the world turned black

It's hard to dance with the devil on your back

They buried my body; they thought I was gone

But I am the dance, and the dance goes on

Dance, then, wherever you may be

I am the lord of the dance said he

And I lead you all wherever you may be

And I lead you all in the dance said he.”

See other parts of the Easter Vigil, 2013, on the Carla De Sola YouTube channel:

“Women at the Tomb,” a dance, and “Lord of the Dance,” Closing of the Easter Vigil, 2013.

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URL: <https://youtu.be/d7dKsm-M7ps>

“Women at the Tomb,” a dance at the Easter Vigil, 2013

Choreography by Carla De Sola. Dancers: David Henry (angel), Karen Jensen, Jennifer Kimball and Claudia Florian-McCaffrey.

The story of the three women visiting the tomb after Christ's resurrection, as told in Mark's gospel, is interpreted in dance. The angel's story astonishes the grieving women. See other parts of the Easter Vigil, 2013: “Come to the Feast,” a table-setting dance and “Lord of the Dance” Closing of the Easter Vigil.

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URL: <https://youtu.be/fUkNLozedM4>

