

Obituary - Trish Arnold, ground-breaking dance teacher



Dance teacher

Born: June 19, 1918;

Died: February 2, 2017

TRISH Arnold, a native of Peebles who has died aged 98, was a ballet dancer who pioneered Pure Movement, a revolutionary alternative form of dance-teaching, specifically to help actors move naturally on both stage and screen to fit their role.

Her method, coupling physical movement with voice and breathing training, is now widely practised in acting schools, theatre groups and dance classes around the UK and beyond. Her Pure Movement technique has had a major influence on countless actors, stage productions and movies.

Using her grounding in ballet, she based her method on what she called natural gravity swings, teaching actors how to move with ease and physical alignment, using their bodies to add more dynamic expression to their roles and scripts in order to add credence to the mental or physical state of the character. "The placing of the body in space," it was called. Among her pupils were

Kristin Linklater of Orkney, Jane Gibson and Sue Lefton, all now

globally known for their input into theatre, opera and movies.

Patricia Joyce Thorburn was born in Peebles on June 19, 1918, one of five children of Ronald Thorburn, who worked in the Borders' wool industry, and his wife Elinor. Having been educated at home and rather than follow her father into the major local wool industry of the time, she became fascinated by dance, and in particular ballet.

After the Second World War broke out, she served with the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), an organisation set up to use talented entertainers - rather than call them up to the military proper - to perform for our troops in the field. Among those who toured with her, often not far from the front lines in Europe, were the comedian Arthur Askey, Scotland's own Harry Lauder, Gracie Fields, George Formby, Vera Lynn and Spike Milligan.

After the war, having married John Arnold in 1945 (they later divorced), Mrs Arnold graduated as a

dancer with the Royal Ballet Company at the newly-reopened (post-war) Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. As the Royal Ballet Company expanded, she helped students at its new Lower School at the now-famous White Lodge in the heart of Richmond Park, west London, where teenage or near-teenage students board to combine ballet with their general education, distracted only by the park's famous red deer (the school was most recently made famous through the 2000 movie *Billy Elliot*).

Mrs Arnold went on to study with the German choreographer Sigurd Leeder at his School of Dance in Dartington Hall, Devon, where Leeder focussed on the dynamics of movement and the coordination of spatiality in and around the body. (After the outbreak of the Second World War, Leeder, who had fled the rise of Nazism, was briefly interned in England as an "enemy alien.")

Mrs Arnold also studied in Paris at the Jacques Lecoq International School of Theatre, where British actor and comedian Sacha Baron Cohen and Australian actress Isla Fisher, a child of Scottish parents who spent her early years in Bathgate, became later pupils.

Mrs Arnold went on to teach movement at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) from 1955, serving as head of department from 1963-72. One of her former pupils was Kristin Linklater, an internationally-known vocal coach whose clients have included the actors Patrick Stewart, Bill Murray, Donald Sutherland and Sigourney Weaver and who now runs the Kristin Linklater Voice Centre in Quoyloo, Orkney, the island where she was born.

The first person Mrs Arnold trained to be a teacher of Pure Movement was Jane Gibson, a movement director whose film credits include *Sense and Sensibility*, *Brideshead Revisited* and *Mansfield Park*. Ms Gibson is now associate director and movement director of the international theatre company *Cheek by Jowl*. Another Arnold pupil and protégée is Sue Lefton, one of the UK's best and most prolific theatre, opera and film choreographers and movement directors, whose film credits include coaching Cate Blanchett in *Elizabeth* (1998) and Johnny Depp in *The Libertine* (2004).

Ms Arnold also served as movement coach at the Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario, Canada, on-and-off from the 1960s into the '80s. Dividing her time between the UK and North America, she was movement teacher for the New York University theatre arts programme in the 1960s, a visiting professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and a summer teacher with Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts. Back in the UK, she taught at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

In her latter years, Ms Arnold put out a series of DVDs - *Tea with Trish* - produced and directed by one of her former pupils, the American dance coach and (literally) clown Merry Conway - which are now considered essential viewing by young, or even established dance teachers and movement directors for stage or film worldwide.

According to her former pupil Kristin Linklater of Orkney: "Trish was my movement teacher when I was a student at LAMDA in the 1950s ... she and I began to collaborate when I returned to LAMDA as a teacher. As my teaching developed her work became seamlessly integrated with the voice exercises known as *Freeing the Natural Voice*.

"Her detailed explorations of the spine, the exercises she has devised that stimulate the vivid experience of impulse, of release and the energy derived from gravity and momentum, are of immeasurable value to the actor."

Andrew J Robinson, another former pupil who worked with Ms Arnold in New York said: "She was so open and willing and curious ... I think it was the humility of the woman that blew me away. Here was this person - the first person who got me into my body - expanding her deep and extensive working information with a former student who was trying to find himself in the downtown New York theatre scene of the 60s.

"Trish was the first teacher I had that taught me how to inhabit my body. She introduced me to my spine. I began a relationship with my body that thankfully continues today and that has deeply informed my work with students."

Patricia Arnold, who spent her latter years at her home in north-west London, is survived by her

daughter Sonia, seven grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

PHIL DAVISON