

PENNSYLVANIA'S ARTISTIC HO

Creative Women of the Commonwealth

By Dr. Philip M. Orlando

From both a metaphoric and geographic vantage, Harrisburg sits in a unique and enviable position to commemorate the enormous creative and artistic contributions made by the women of Pennsylvania. As the capital of the Commonwealth, we can make a claim of connection to each of these amazing women. At the same time, poised on Susquehanna River in the “heart of Pennsylvania,” we sit in the center of the state, looking as far west as Pittsburgh and as far east as Philadelphia to mark the contributions of women musicians, actresses, choreographers, and authors from across Pennsylvania.

From a historic perspective Pennsylvania can lay claim to such artistic notables as celebrated author Louisa May Alcott, who, although raised in Concord, Massachusetts, was born in Pennsylvania's Germantown. The town of Kingston produced the vocalist, comedian, television, and film actress Edie Adams; while painter Susan Hannah MacDowell, hailed from Philadelphia.

Pittsburgh born dancer/choreographer Martha Graham changed the face of dance around the world and gave credibility to the modern dance movement. With her unique vision and approach she took modern dance to a new level with the use of line,

space, kinesthetics, visual tone, the dancer's body, time, style, and aesthetics. She taught notable luminaries such as Alvin Ailey and Twyla Tharp, and she collaborated with iconic composer Aaron Copeland. Not only did this artistic legend develop innovative and unique choreography, she was also the first choreographer to cast Asian and African-American dancers. For her efforts Graham came to be known as “the mother of modern dance.”

In Philadelphia, choral conductor and university educator Dr. Elaine Brown broke new ground in the world of choral music performance with her artistry, stature, and presence. In 1948 Dr. Brown founded Singing City, an integrated choir that was born from the Fellowship Movement with the belief that all outward differences among humans can be overcome by ordinary people coming together to participate in a shared activity. As a result of her efforts, the choral art form was raised to new heights.

Judith Jamison, a talented young African-American dancer who graduated from Germantown High School, went on to a meteoric dance and choreographic career. After studying at the Philadelphia Dance Academy, her talent and unique skills were recognized by choreographer Alvin Ailey and the American Ballet Theatre.

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Her iconic modern dance performances in such works as *The Prodigal Prince* and *Cry* were seen throughout the world and forever cast her in the annals of modern dance history. Judith went on to become the artistic director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, as well as the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors in 1999 and the National Medal of Arts in 2001. Choreographer, educator, and humanitarian, Judith Jamison remains a formidable centerpiece of the dance world today.

The contribution of women in the arts is global and certainly not limited to those born in Pennsylvania. From literature and the visual and performing arts, to television and film, women worldwide and throughout history have played essential roles in the realm of art. French author Anais Nin, for example, has provided some of literature's richest and most passionate expressions, while the vast body of work and impact made by American icon Maya Angelou is cited as an inspiration by artists of every genre. Her poetry—including "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and "On the Pulse of the Morning," read by Dr. Angelou at the 1993 Inauguration of President William Jefferson Clinton—is counted among the most remarkable of the late twentieth century.

In addition to Martha Graham and Judith Jamison, the world of dance was also profoundly changed through the contributions of award-winning dancer/choreographer Twyla Tharp. The concentric rings of her influence have been felt throughout the dance community and have spilled over into theaters, film, and television. As for classical ballet, it is difficult to imagine the last century without the impact of Dame Margot Fonteyn. The arena of stage, film, and tele-

vision simply would not be the same without the influential work of Meryl Streep, Uta Hagen, Jessica Tandy, and Oprah Winfrey.

Within the musical landscape, conductor Margaret Hillis shines as the founder of the Chicago Symphony Chorus and the first woman to conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Maria Callas remains one of the most profoundly beautiful and dramatic voices of the twentieth century. Orchestral composers such as Shirley Walker, Rachel Portman, and Noriko Matusueda have composed scores for such diverse genres as major symphony orchestras, award winning films, and television and video game soundtracks. The consummate mastery and artistry of the great jazz vocalists Sara Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, and Billie Holiday continue to shine brilliant light upon the world of performing arts.

Happily, there is no conclusion to this account. Future generations of female artists continue to grow and flourish. Whether mature baby boomers, dynamic Generation X, our youngest Generation Y, or Echo Boomers, the creative artistry of women in the performing, visual, and literary arts continues to evolve.

In South Central Pennsylvania alone we can observe the growing careers of Susan Beckley, conductor of the Harrisburg Singers and choreographer Danielle Alexis Smith with the Pennsylvania Regional Ballet, as well as numerous other creative women artists.

As we come to the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, we know that the dynamic synergy and essential energy of women in the arts is leading the way in creative and innovative expression. There is no telling to what heights female artists will soar. Brava, encore! ❖

Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

By Mikell Worley

The role of the Pennsylvania Council of the Arts (PCA) has expanded significantly since its inception in 1966, when Governor William Scranton signed legislation charging the state agency with "the encouragement and the development of various arts in Pennsylvania." In 1980, the Governor's Awards for the Arts were introduced to honor artists representing all aspects of the arts, including crafts, dance, literature, media arts, music, painting, photography, sculpture, as well as "service to the arts," or those who contribute their creative talents to their communities.

The Council's current mission is to foster the excellence, diversity, and vitality of the arts and to broaden the availability and appreciation of these arts throughout the state. Council members accomplish these goals by providing grants for the arts; initiating partnerships and initiatives; providing technical assistance to partners and applicants; and serving as a resource provider.

The PCA has expanded to become a major force in economic development, the preservation of diverse cultures, and improving the lives of our youth through Artists in Education. Because of PCA's efforts, the arts continue to thrive in all of the Commonwealth's 67 counties through 17 partner organizations.

Philip Orlando, DMA, is the director of academic affairs at the University of Phoenix Harrisburg Campus. He has performed on Broadway and traveled the nation as a singer, dancer, actor, composer, and conductor.