



*Rosalind Pierson in 1979, dancing "The Desperate Heart" by Valerie Bettis (1943).  
Photo courtesy of Valarie Mockabee.*

## In Memoriam~*M. Rosalind Pierson*

JANUARY 10, 1941–OCTOBER 20, 2005

On October 20, 2005, the Department of Dance at The Ohio State University lost a revered member; simultaneously, the world of dance lost a passionate teacher, choreographer, performer, thinker, and advocate. M. Rosalind Pierson, born January 10, 1941, died suddenly at her home, following a heart attack. As it happens, she had spent the day in service to a grieving colleague and was warmly surrounded by OSU faculty, students, and friends only hours before her death.

“Roz,” as she was familiarly known, was a 1963 graduate of Bennington College. She had studied and performed with Virginia Tanner as a young dancer, and when her family moved to New York, she continued her development as a young artist at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA. She went on to study with José Limón, Vera Nemtchinova, Valerie Bettis, Helen Tamiris and Daniel Nagrin, among others. Rosalind spoke often about the indirect influence of Doris Humphrey on her aesthetic formation, as well as the significance of her work with Tamiris, Ruth Currier and Bonnie Bird. She performed with the Charles Weidman Company and the Garden State Ballet.

In the early 1970s, while teaching at Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges, she first discovered what was to become a vital part of her career, when she began directing the Five-College Moving Company and the Mount Holyoke Concert Dance Group. Later, after joining the faculty of The Ohio State University in 1975, she would find her greatest professional pleasure in directing the OSU University Dance Company from 1983–1999, touring her student performers in local schools as well as across the country, and as far as Middlesex and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

As a faculty member of thirty years, Rosalind remained the department’s daily link to the founders of the OSU department, her wisdom and experience serving as an invaluable asset to both colleagues and students. She taught ballet, modern dance, performance technique, improvisation and choreography. Rosalind also derived immense satisfaction from her post as the coordinator and dance instructor for the OSU Summer Institute for Gifted and Talented High School Students in the Arts, and from her advocacy work on the Honors and Scholars Committee of the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences.

Rosalind choreographed approximately fifty works, many for the University Dance Company, but others for BalletMet of Columbus, Ohio, and various OSU faculty events. Several of her works were preserved by means of Labanotation scores, including her most recent work, *Lachrymae*, set to Gabriel Fauré’s *Requiem*, which was performed at the Capitol Theatre in downtown Columbus in 2003 and again in 2005.

From 1995 to 1999, Rosalind was a member of the Board of Directors of CORD, and served as secretary from 1995 to 1997. In 1998, she co-chaired the CORD conference, *Dance: The Art of the Moment: Looking at Dance From Inside and Out* at OSU.

Rosalind was also a poet, publishing in a variety of venues, including *American Poetry Annual* and the *Arcadia Poetry Anthology*. Each year at Christmas, Rosalind's poetry would grace the mailboxes of the department. The following poem, "Housecleaning," was written by Rosalind in 2003, sent to her colleague and friend, Angelika Gerbes.

*House Cleaning*

Clutter too difficult to clear  
Swallows my days  
Pieces of precious instants lie in drawers ajumble  
Defeating order  
Because what might have been  
Cannot be folded  
Life caught between then and now pinches  
Future but annoyance  
Looming with mop and broom  
Treasures tossed are lost  
Send me a maid to help the sorting  
A caring one who senses the fineness of lace

August 11, 2003

Rosalind touched the lives of countless students during her years of teaching, and many have shared their stories with the department or called to contribute to the scholarship fund set up in her name. Speaking personally, I learned several profound life-lessons from Rosalind, with whom I studied ballet as a graduate student in the early 1980s. The subject was standing on one leg—a metaphor for getting through life if ever there was one! Rosalind taught me to think of energy radiating not only through my body but beyond, down through the standing leg, anchoring me well below the floor's surface. Similarly, she convinced me that the working leg cannot be ignored when it is obliged to perform some difficult action; rather, by directing careful attention to that limb, both the standing and working legs are able to move with improved stability and clarity. Through these embodied lessons, I came to understand that when difficulties arise, it is best not to ignore them, but to focus on them directly: that by attending to who and where I am, even during moments of confusion, I tap into the source of my own agency.

A warm and wistful celebration of Rosalind Pierson's life took place at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Columbus, Ohio on Saturday, October 29. Family, co-workers, friends and students from various eras of her professional life gathered to share stories and to remember a life lived passionately, through poetry, music, and dance. She is greatly missed.

—Candace Feck