In Gratitude—my personal review of this work

By Catherine Turocy

Carol Teten has added her unique voice to historical performance reconstruction and production. While most performers and choreographers were busy digging into the depths of their period specialty she had a dream to dance through time. In one evening entertainment she presented dances of courtship beginning in the Renaissance and ending in the 1990’s. But it was not a dry demonstration of galliards, gavottes, gallops and go-go boots. It was the excitement of the first dance, a flirtation, a stolen kiss. It was musical theater married with earnest dance manuals guarding the vulnerable young lady or gentleman against a faux pas. With her team of 8 dancers inhabiting characters and costumes of different epochs it seemed to be a breathless race with time. The entertainment was light hearted but by the end, the audience had been exposed to glimpses of music and dance history with carefully researched choreography and performed by professional actor/dancers. This introduction whetted the appetites of the newly initiated audience for more concerts of historically informed performances beyond her company.

What was even more remarkable lay in the afterlife of this entertainment. After retiring from her company as artistic director/choreographer, Carol created a collection of “how to” videos for each period of dance, all based on her research for her show, Dance Through Time. These educational videos were acquired by libraries of universities as well as dance enthusiasts and are still being used today. It is not unusual for me to be teaching or lecturing at a university to discover that one of her videos from Dancetime Publications was used in a dance history class, a theater class or by a student organization holding an event. Short clips of these videos can be seen on YouTube. Again, Carol is planting the seeds of curiosity in the popular culture of social media for anyone to find.

In addition to her own work, Carol collected rare videos of dance which were not available to the general public (some were stored in forgotten closets of friends of former dancers). She edited and created narratives for these videos as well as curated collections ranging from early 20th century modern dance to social dances of diversity. Her collection of videos gives us a cultural and political context for dance as it evolved in the 20th century. But what is perhaps most amazing of all, is that this monumental task was achieved not by a university, not by a government agency, not by fundraising campaigns and foundation grants, but by one clever woman who had a vision and the courage and strength to stand by her conviction that dance history is of great value and that this history belongs to all of us.