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Daddy.

Yvonne Chouteau uses a single word to explain her own career as a prima ballerina and the University of Oklahoma's ranking among the oldest and the best in collegiate ballet programs.

"Daddy" was the late C. E. Chouteau, a descendant of Jean Pierre Chouteau, founder of the first white settlement in Oklahoma in 1796. Chouteau was a proud father who loved his family, the arts and Oklahoma, and served all three by suggesting the establishment of ballet instruction at OU.

Long before "The Turning Point" made ballet a household word and turned ballet dancers into pin-ups, Yvonne Chouteau and Miguel Terekhov faced their own "turning point." They gave up careers as prima ballerina and principal dancer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo to provide a more normal home life for their two small daughters in Miss Chouteau's hometown of Oklahoma City.

Because of the Terekhovs' career decision in 1961, gifted dance students needn't take on the rigors of big city life, as Miss Chouteau did when she went to New York City at age 12. Instead, young people from all over the world come to OU to major in dance, many having received their early training from teachers who themselves studied with the Terekhovs.

By **PAULA BAKER**

Oklahoma an unlikely setting for a premier collegiate ballet program? Two world famous dancers didn't think so in 1961, and their vision resulted in nothing but success.

Terekhov and Chouteau with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in mid-'50s.

The role Miss Chouteau's father played in bringing ballet to the OU campus came to light only recently when President Emeritus George L. Cross reminisced about the debut of the ballet program in January, 1961.

"It never would have entered my mind to start a ballet program at the University," Cross confessed. "If it had, I wouldn't have known how to locate great dancers who also could teach. In late November or early December of 1960 I received a letter from Miss Chouteau's father. He explained that his daughter and her husband had been roaming the world with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. However, they had two small children and wanted to settle someplace where they could have a real home. Mr. Chouteau asked if there was any possibility that they could do something in ballet at the University. The mo-

ment I read Mr. Chouteau's letter, I knew it was an opportunity to be seized."

"We were all very impressed with the Terekhovs," Cross recalled. "I had already heard about Miss Chouteau — one of Oklahoma's famed Indian ballerinas. However, others on the fine arts faculty knew about Miguel and his competence." In addition to performing, Terekhov had been responsible for an award-winning ballet television series.

"We had no money — we never did back then — but Boyd Gunning found resources in the OU Foundation, and we offered them both appointments as artists-in-residence, to begin in January of 1961," Cross said.

Room 209 in the Old Science Hall, home of the School of Drama at that time, was turned into a ballet studio with the addition of full-length mir-

rors and oak practice barres. The Terekhovs had expected to teach two classes in the spring semester of 1961, totaling 20 to 30 students. They were overwhelmed when 65 students, male and female, signed up for three classes of beginning ballet and one of intermediate ballet. (By the spring of 1981, more than 400 class spaces were filled, with 47 undergraduates and 4 graduate students declaring dance majors.)

On April 24, 1961, only four months after classes began, six intermediate students gave the first performance of what was to become the University of Oklahoma Ballet. "Dean Clark¹ asked us to 'put something together' for the final evening of the annual Focus on Fine Arts, and we didn't know how to say no," Terekhov remembered.

¹The late Fine Arts Dean F. Donald Clark.

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The intermediate students had only six rehearsals before they performed "The Waltz of the Flowers" from "The Nutcracker" with Miss Chouteau as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Terekhov as the Prince in the grand pas de deux. The students wore rented pastel tutus. By the following year Helen Forest Lauterer and her costume crew had begun the nucleus of OU's extensive ballet costume collection. Taking one of Miss Chouteau's tutus apart for a pattern, they sewed the costumes standing up to be able to handle the yards of material which had to go through the sewing machines. Today, Michael Buchwald and his assistants turn out costumes which visiting artists have pronounced superior to those worn by East Coast professional companies.

Remembering those early days, Miss Chouteau admitted that she had



Above: Miss Chouteau beats time for her students with a Mexican cane during rehearsal in the OU practice studio. At left: The teachers take a practice break. Opposite page: The Terekhovs appear in "Giselle" for the opening of the OU Fine Arts Center in 1966. Dance Magazine's Jack Anderson gave the performance a three-page spread. Ten years later Dance, would again boost OU ballet, commending Terekhov's full-length "Don Quixote" as a "first rate" production.

not known about her father's letter to President Cross at the time.

"My father was very faithful in his love of the arts and of Oklahoma," she continued. "He didn't want us to give up our careers in our prime, so he thought of the 'OU solution.' When I was born, he decided I was to be either a ballerina or an opera singer. I started dancing lessons at two and a half and fell in love with dance along the way."

She was so in love with dance that when Miguel Terekhov first joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo she went out with him on one double date, then assured him that she had no time in her life for romance.

"He was a big, handsome South American from Uruguay, but I just wanted to dance," she recalled. "However, a dance company generates very intense family relationships through traveling together and staying in the same hotels. Over the next two years, I learned that he was not only handsome, but very kind and sweet. One night when I had gone to Mass after a performance, he joined me. After that, we began double dating with other members of the company. In the fall of 1956 we were married in a sim-

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ple ceremony at the Church of St. Paul in New York City."

By the end of the next tour, Miss Chouteau was having to be sewn into her costumes, and the pas de deux was a pas de trois, as Terekhov partnered both his wife and soon-to-be-born daughter, Christina Marie.

"I danced through my seventh month, because I wanted the reviews from our New York season on my résumé," Miss Chouteau confided. "But following the final New York performance, the seamstress clipped the stitches, and I just exploded!"

Christina was born July 31, 1957, and mother and daughter stayed behind in New York City while father went on the next Ballet Russe tour.

"By the time he came back, I had fallen in love with my kid and knew that I didn't want to leave her behind with my parents in Oklahoma," Miss

Chouteau said. "Miguel didn't want to leave us behind again, so we stayed in New York and taught for a while, until Miguel's father became ill. We then went to Uruguay, and Miguel took over his father's cigarette business."

While they were in Uruguay, the Terekhovs worked out every day and did what they could to stay in shape — an added challenge for Miss Chouteau. Elizabeth Antoinette was born in Montevideo on July 13, 1959.

Political difficulties in South America caused the Terekhovs to return to the United States in the fall of 1960. After a brief stop to visit friends in New York City, they took the children to Oklahoma City for a visit with their maternal grandparents, which inspired Chouteau's visionary suggestion.

OU became the third state university in the country to offer ballet. (Indiana University first offered ballet in 1950 and conferred its first bachelor's degree in ballet in 1954. The University of Utah began ballet in 1951 when Willam Christensen, founder of the San Francisco Ballet, returned to his native state to teach.) OU's department of dance was established in the School of Drama in the spring of 1963 with Terekhov as director. That fall Helen Gregory's modern dance program was moved from physical education to the new dance department.

Because dance has taken such great leaps forward in the past years, few people realize what a unique opportunity the two ballet dancers gave to the University when they first came as artists-in-residence 20 years ago.

Columnist Earl Wilson commented in his column of February 23, 1961: "Where would you study ballet nowadays — Paris? Nope. Oklahoma! Oklahoma U. of Norman is said to be the 'only university in the country' with a major company ballerina on its permanent faculty."

When Nat Eek was hired to direct the School of Drama in the fall of 1961, he sat down with Terekhov and created the dance curriculum and the degree requirements. "We had no guides to go by whatsoever," Eek recalled. "The entire program would not have been possible if it weren't for the



Ko Yukihiro, right, dances with June Hines in the spring 1981 "Bal des Cadets."

rich personal experience and professional background that the Terekhovs brought to the program."

The bachelor of fine arts degree in dance was approved by the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education in the spring of 1968 and the master of fine arts degree in the spring of 1974. By May, 1981, 158 undergraduate degrees had been awarded and 13 graduate degrees.

OU dance graduates are teaching in Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Iowa, South Carolina, Michigan and New York, performing with the Ballet West and Joffrey, Pittsburgh, Hartford, Maryland, Houston, Boston and Eglevsky ballet companies and dancing on Broadway and in Hollywood.

OU's capacity to turn out the kind of polished performer thought to be exclusive to New York studios has been noted by state dance expert Lili C. Livingston. Dance editor of the *Tulsa Tribune*, she was selected to cover the Oklahoma dance scene by *Dance* magazine this spring when editors decided that the growth of the art in the state merited a quarterly column.

"Chouteau and Terekhov have refused to subscribe to the theory that if their students could make it as performers they wouldn't be in college," she wrote. "This attitude is one of the reasons several graduates of the OU dance department have gone on to successful performing careers in ballet companies around the country. The undergraduate program is significantly influenced by the emphasis put on performing experience. For the student seeking a career as a dance educator the benefit is excellent. Oklahoma is fortunate to have the quality, integrity and experience of Chouteau and Terekhov molding those who will shape the future of dance in the state."

The performing experience Mrs. Livingston describes comes from both on-campus and off-campus appearances. The touring company, OU Ballet Theater, has presented programs in 14 communities across the state, from Woodward to Broken Bow. Modern dance productions and the touring Modern Dance Theater give another kind of experience. Both techniques are considered necessary in the training of the dancers of

today, and Terekhov considers himself fortunate to work with Ko Yukihiro, head of the modern dance division in the department of dance.

Mrs. Livingston agrees:

"The structure of the dance department . . . is exceptionally well balanced in that the modern dance is as strong as the ballet. Both balanced on traditional technique and discipline first, frills later."

The Dance Catalog: A Complete Guide to Today's World of Dance includes OU in a group of four universities noted for their strength in teaching ballet technique.

Terekhov would love to do more touring throughout the state, offering mixed programs of ballet and modern dance to give the students the kind of experience they would get in a repertory company. Similar experience will be offered next spring when ballet and modern programs will be alternated in a two-week festival April 14 through 25. Terekhov also has a long-range vision of a semi-professional company in which the students could literally dance their way through college, earning stipends and getting experience while they continued degree work.

Stipends and scholarships are a never-ending need in such a labor-intensive area as dance. Students spend so much of their time in class or rehearsal that part-time jobs are virtually impossible. All the female ballet dancers have a special expense — pointe shoes, which cost approximately \$25 a pair. A student may dance her way through \$200 to \$350 worth in a semester, depending on whether she is just taking classes or performing as well.

The department of dance has a recruiting "plus" in that its superb faculty is matched by its facilities.

"The facilities here are a tremendous attraction for the students," Terekhov said. "They have locker rooms and showers in addition to three studios and an excellent stage facility. The Rupel J. Jones Theater is a very good theater. It is small enough for several performances instead of only two or three. It is also available for extensive rehearsal time, unlike the early days in Holmberg Hall Auditorium when the stage was available for only two or three

The world premiere of Terekhov's "Bodas da Sangre" (Blood Wedding), which drew national acclaim, featured guest stars Luis Fuente and Zelma Bustillo, both formerly with the Joffrey Ballet.

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Terekhov had a say in designing the ballet studios when the Fine Arts Center, which houses the School of Drama, was being planned.

"That's why the building is three stories high on the north and two stories high on the south side," he said. "When I saw the plans, I said that dancers have to have high ceilings, so it was back to the drawing boards."

Two years ago the dean of dance critics, Walter Terry, came to OU for the world premiere of Terekhov's "Bodas da Sangre" (Blood Wedding), based on the play by Federico Garcia Lorca. Terry praised Terekhov's choreography and the students' dancing in an article which appeared in *Saturday Review Magazine*, citing "Bodas" as a "ballet that would add distinction to the repertory of any professional troupe." "Bodas da Sangre" featured a specially commissioned score by Carlos Surinach and guest stars Luis Fuente and Zelma Bustillo, both formerly of the Joffrey Ballet.

The Terekhovs were their own guest stars through the early years of OU ballet. They also accepted occasional guest roles with ballet companies across the country as their schedules permitted. However, as the press of duties cut into the time available for their barre exercises, they have all but renounced stage appearances.

Terekhov gave up dancing on stage several years ago. "Suddenly I found myself wondering 'how am I going to land?' and I thought 'Oh, hell, I don't need this any more.' And I haven't done a barre in years," he said.

Recently he proved that his "retreat" to choreograph, teach and administer his department had robbed the theater of a gifted dramatic actor. He returned to the stage for the 20th anniversary performance of the OU ballet this spring in the role of Niccolò Paganini, presenting a wrenching performance of the tortured violinist. Then, after a 20-minute intermission to change his costume and make-up — the Paganini make-up alone takes two hours to apply — he

I had been very deeply affected by ballerinas who kept dancing too long . . . now, I'd rather see the kids dance. It's their turn."



Mary Margaret Holt and Donn Edwards in the 1980 OU production of "The Firebird."

trouped in the best "show must go on" tradition to portray a cooly aging headmistress in "Bal des Cadets" as a last-minute replacement after a student sprained his ankle.

"He's such a great dramatic actor," Miss Chouteau commented, "that when he performed 'Paganini' for the first time at OU 10 years ago, I couldn't watch him. It took so much out of me emotionally that I couldn't perform myself afterwards."

Miss Chouteau has not danced on stage since "Hommage to Pavlova" at OU in the summer of 1976. However, she continues to perform liturgical dances for special occasions. She might be coaxed on stage again, although she admits that she would hate the discipline involved in returning to 4-hour daily practice sessions and performance diets.

Now that she does not have to appear on stage, the ballerina emaciation has been softened to a firm slim-

ness. She still is disciplined to exercise because she believes that a teacher must be able to demonstrate steps herself. Miss Chouteau's fresh, smooth skin, shiny golden-brown hair and an over-all glow heightened by practice clothes in the pale pink she favors, would make her admitted birth year of 1929 seem a lie, if it were not in so many record books. Youngest dancer to be accepted by the Ballet Russe (age 14), youngest person to be inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame (age 18), she was a youthful 45 when she received OU's 1974 Distinguished Service Citation.

"At age 40 I began developing new interests because I had been very deeply affected by ballerinas who kept on dancing too long," she explained. "I danced in public from age 2½ to 47 and feel very deeply fulfilled. The artistry Alexandra Danilova gave me as her protégée in the Ballet Russe was a special gift, and it's time to pass it on. Truly now, I'd rather see the kids dance. It's their turn."

"I'll admit that I was a little sad not to be performing with a company when I was in my late 20s, which is considered a ballerina's prime," she said. "However, when we came here I started a whole new career and was still able to continue performing. Miguel created so many exquisite parts for me — a full-length Juliet, Giselle, Undine — that I have no regrets at all."

Miss Chouteau has a half-time appointment as artist-in-residence at OU and has her own Chouteau Academy of Ballet in Oklahoma City.

"I take them from age 5 or 6, then suggest that they come to OU to finish up," she said. "As a mother, I would be very concerned about my daughters studying in New York City alone. I didn't like the cut-throat atmosphere and bitchiness, and the drug scene has gotten a great deal worse since I studied there. I'm so glad that we can provide an opportunity to receive good training, give performances and learn from the guest artists who come here."

Among the noted artists who have appeared on campus in the past few years, in addition to the Fuentes husband-and-wife team, were Pat-

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sidered a criterion, I suspect that several of us could not qualify for membership on the university's governing board.

2. Professor Z is charged also with using profanity in his backyard. Who, among us, has not used profanity in his backyard on one occasion or another?

3. Professor Z is further charged with using alcoholic beverages in his home and on his premises. I suspect that a majority of this board is not qualified to pass adverse judgment on such a charge.

4. And finally, Professor Z is charged with having sexual intercourse with his wife in his home. If this is improper behavior for any man, what is proper? I move that the charges against Professor Z be dismissed.

Regent Erl Deacon seconded the motion with the comment, "I'm skeptical of the fourth charge anyway. I don't see how he could get any traction on a dining-room table." Following a burst of laughter the board passed the motion unanimously.

The next day I had a visit with Professor Z and told him essentially what had happened after he and his attorney had left the regents' meeting. But I did tell him also that, while no pressure was implied, I thought he was a bit ahead of his time as a member of the faculty of the University of Oklahoma and that, considering the mores of Oklahomans probably both he and the university would be better off if he could find employment elsewhere.

At a meeting of the board on December 12, 1945, Regent Emery reported that he had received a copy of a letter of resignation from Professor Z that he had sent to William Cole, his attorney. After discussion Regent Emery moved that "the president of the University of Oklahoma be authorized to accept with reluctance the resignation of Professor Z . . . if and when the resignation is presented to the president."⁴

Professor Z's resignation came to the president's office a few days later. He had accepted a much more lucrative position in Washington, D.C., doubtless a more congenial setting.

⁴Ibid., meeting of December 12, 1945, p. 1935.

ricia McBride and Jean-Pierre Bonnefous who danced a benefit performance of "The Nutcracker" in 1976. Donn Edwards, who began his studies at OU and is now a principal dancer with the Boston Ballet, created the role of Prince Ivan in Terekhov's world premiere two-act ballet of "The Firebird" in 1980.

The Terekhov daughters themselves, who once were thought to be carrying on the "family business," have turned in their toe shoes. Occasionally seen in OU and Oklahoma City Civic Ballet productions, they reached the crucial stage in their early teens when they had to decide to point toward careers and give up everything else, or to live a more normal life.

**"It almost broke my heart
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"It was hard when the girls got older and decided to give up ballet," Miss Chouteau recalled. "They were beautiful dancers and had distinctly different gifts. It almost broke my heart when Lisa decided she would rather be a cheerleader, but I gave her the choice. I have seen what happens when mothers push daughters who don't want careers."

Terekhov also betrays a parental attitude as he talks about the joy and pain of watching his students grow for four years and then leave.

"Every year there is something about each group of students which sparks the desire to teach," he says. "Every year it is a different challenge to choreograph for them. We lose some students, and the new ones influence the old ones, so the mixture is always changing."

Seated behind his desk in the Fine Arts Center, peering through reading glasses at a clutter of schedules, grade sheets and an appointment calendar, he looks the stereotypical faculty member until he rises to his 6-foot-2-inch height. Trimmed by tennis now, he still is a commanding physical presence.

Gone are the days when he knew so

little about university life that he was granted tenure without realizing its significance. His teaching has earned the Standard Oil (Indiana) Foundation superior teaching award in 1967 the OU regents award in 1968, and listings in the Outstanding Educators of America since 1971.

Twenty years in Oklahoma have not erased Terekhov's Spanish accent, just as 20 years away did not destroy Miss Chouteau's soft "Okie" inflections. He jokingly apologizes for his often illegible handwriting with the comment that "even my writing has an accent!"

"I was invited to teach a few classes here, and before I knew it, 20 years had gone by," Terekhov said. "Yvonne and I did things because we had to do them. We never could have gotten this far without George Cross.

"Subtle and not-so-subtle offers from major departments across the country keep coming in, but I never have had time to think about them. I still am in the process of building. This has been a quest. Ballet is my heritage. (Terekhov's aunt and father were both ballet dancers in Odessa, Russia, before Miguel, Sr., set off to see the world and wound up as a cigarette wholesaler in Montevideo.) My tradition reaches back to Saint Petersburg."

"One of my students is teaching in the New York City High School of Performing Arts (scene of the movie 'Fame')," Terekhov continued. "Bobby Heath, who is also in the hit 'Sugar Babies,' has asked me to teach master classes whenever I visit New York City. And he's told me not to worry — the students are being trained in my tradition and to my standards. When he choreographs for students at their end-of-the-year performances, he draws on the repertoire he learned at OU."

So, the aspiring dancers from "Fame's" high school are touched with Oklahoma's dance fame. And some may be coming on to Oklahoma to continue their dance studies, as students have come from across the country and as far away as Australia and South Africa.

And Terekhov continues his quest.

"I never planned to be doing what I am doing," he said, "but perhaps it is why I was born."