

Modern Theatre

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Celebrating the Life of Deborah Pafitis (née Capon)

Myra Tiffin reports on an evening of reflection and remembrance

Friday 17th January saw the Modern and Tap Faculty examiners arriving for their annual weekend meetings at ISTD2 Dance Studios. However, there was to be a more poignant gathering on the Saturday evening.

Some 12 months ago Tereza Theodoulou and Katie Morea had sown a seed at the Modern Committee meeting about having a gathering in a restaurant for all Modern and Tap examiners. Debbie Capon and I had decided to let this seed grow and we started to put plans into place for the evening to germinate. Debbie in her usual, very sensible way had thought it would be more practical to hold the event at ISTD2 itself.

With the tragic loss of Debbie in August of last year I decided, with the backing of the Modern and Tap Committees, to go ahead and hold the evening in memory of her. It seemed a fitting tribute to continue with the plan we had started together, for an evening with which she would be in total approval.

The buffet was ordered and a trio of musicians booked. There was one slight hitch; we didn't have enough wine glasses at the venue. This was a concern until Tereza said that in Greece wine was drunk from a tumbler! Mike came up with the said glass tumblers, plus a few plastic ones. Obviously



Left: Foreground (L to R) Keeley Sanderson, Kathy Wiggins and Tereza Theodoulou.

Debbie must have been watching over us and the final detail was put into place.

Two of Debbie's life-long friends and teachers at the Dance College, Kathy and Keeley, came along to the evening and set out a wonderful array of memorabilia, scanning the years of development and successes and we all enjoyed browsing through these scrapbooks.

Jackie Hayward opened the speeches for Debbie and told us of a DVD that had been found of Debbie's college students. She had brought the DVD along to the evening and she had it playing in the basement studio for us all to pop down and view. We could watch, laugh and cry together, or just quietly reflect. Jackie spoke wonderfully of the legacy Debbie had left the Tap Faculty and how, in the much

Keeley and Kathy were pupils of Deborah Capon since childhood gaining Licentiate and Fellowship Tap respectively. Both Keeley and Kathy will be striving to continue Debbie's life-long work at the newly named junior school, 'Dance Whitstable' and the ADC for teacher training, 'Dance College Whitstable'. Elizabeth Harrison, Head of Classical Ballet (not pictured) and Tereza Theodoulou, Modern Theatre, had no hesitation when making their decision to continue teaching at the college and along with Kathy and Keeley will endeavour to carry on Debbie's legacy, where each student can be quietly confident and gracious in the knowledge that they can reach their potential as teachers and performers.

It is no coincidence that 'Dance College Whitstable' has the initials of Deborah Capon. The staff and pupils are proud to bear the name 'D C Whitstable' as they embark on a new phase of Debbie's vision. You can almost picture her, nodding her head in approval, saying, "Mm, I think it's going to be very good."

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"Deborah had an excellent staff of teachers and all the dancers were a great credit to their training"

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too short time that Debbie had been its Chair, she had taken tremendous care and created a sense of bonding in the team.

Christina Ballard's speech was both sensitive and heartfelt and is laid out below for you all to read. Tereza Theodoulou finished off the tributes, paying her own respects to Debbie. She referred to her loss of "the big sister", as she looked upon Debbie and of the huge loss and sadness of Debbie's husband Ted. Tereza ended her tribute by telling us about the new Dance Centre Whitstable, shortened to the DC Whitstable. The centre will live on in her spirit, with her staff, who I know will continue to strive to maintain the wonderful standards Debbie always achieved.

The evening was a time for the Modern and Tap examiners to gather socially, we hope sincerely with Debbie's approval. We would like to send a very big thank you to Mike at ISTD2 for all his help and support with the evening.

There will be a memorial event, to be held for the wider circle of family, friends, colleagues and students, when everyone will have the opportunity to remember Debbie together. Dates and plans will be published once everything has been confirmed.

Myra Tiffin

A Tribute to Deborah Capon by Christina Ballard

When we think of Deborah, we immediately visualise in our mind's eye, glamour, style and a sense of calm dignity. She was also an intuitive and kindly person who, when she asked you how you were, looked you directly

in the eye and waited for the reply. Such a simple thing to do but sadly in this age of 'speed', a rare occurrence.

I knew Deborah for about 30 years – not as a close friend but as a dance colleague – meeting twice a year at Examiners' Weekend Meetings and also at the Chichester Summer School and other dance events. I always looked forward to seeing her and so many times I admired her outfit and jokingly asked her to think of me when she had got fed up with it and was going to throw it out! Little did we know that she had been trained at the Lucie Clayton Modeling School and had enjoyed a successful career as a model before training as a dance teacher. We learnt this little tidbit of information at Debbie's funeral and I'm sure we all collectively thought, "Oh so that's why she always looked so lovely!"

About five years ago, Deborah asked me if I would adjudicate her school's Choreography Competition held in Whitstable. I happily accepted, knowing the standard of her work and that I would enjoy the experience. It was held in Whitstable's delightful theatre, but I have to admit to wondering if the atmosphere would be similar to so many dancing school shows, where you have audience participation, ie children waving at parents from the stage, parents "yoo hoo-ing" back to children and generally lots of X Factor shouting. I should have realised that as well as her children and students, Deborah had also trained the parents!

It felt like you were at the Royal Opera House. Well-mannered people calmly and quietly enjoying the performances of the children and students. I was not calm however, as I quickly realised that because the standard of work was so high, I was going to have a mountain of a job to decide whom the winners would be. Thankfully I had a fellow adjudicator with me and we agreed on all the results, but my goodness what a hard time we had! The work was brilliant, from

Below: Christina Ballard, who spoke so eloquently about Debbie's life as a model, dancer and examiner and how each role was fulfilled with style and elegance



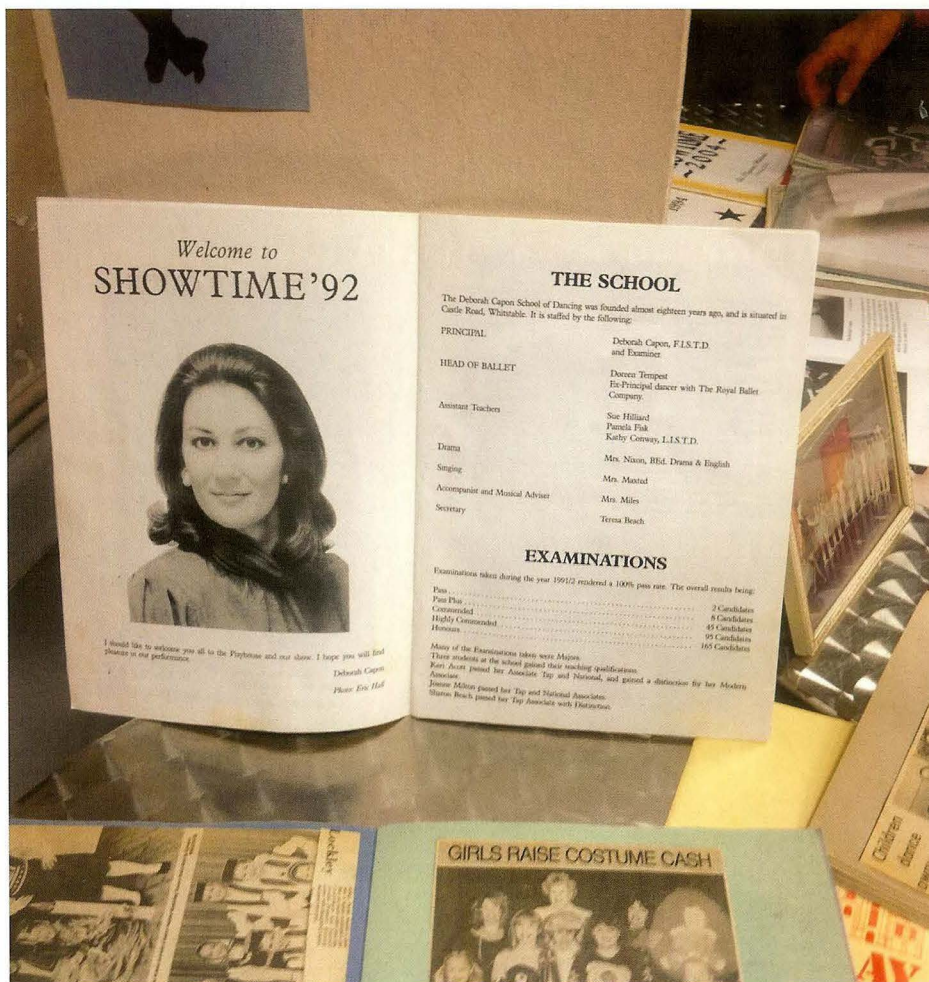
the youngest children to the students and all the dances had been very well rehearsed, with music and costumes carefully chosen. I knew Deborah had an excellent staff of teachers and all the dancers were a great credit to their training.

When I went on to the stage to announce the results, I wanted to share with the parents and pupils some of my thoughts about Deborah and her teaching excellence. I mentioned that Deborah had managed to impress her style, glamour and sense of calm dignity onto her pupils so that you could always pick them out from the line-up of competitors at a competition. They had an aura, just like Deborah, of being quietly confident, not brash and steely competitive, and I'm sure would have said "Good luck" and "Well done" to their fellow performers.

I wanted the parents to know that Deborah was very special and that they were so lucky to have her in their town, someone of her stature and skill to teach their children. They had learnt so much more than how to dance but also how to behave in this world.

As an examiner, the candidates knew Deborah for her warm and sympathetic approach. As a lecturer at the Tap Dance Summer School, she made a big impression on all the teachers she coached and I received many lovely email messages from the teachers who attended courses that I organised for the ISTD Essex Region. They all said how she had given them expert tuition and confidence for their teaching examinations and how kindly and humorously she had trained them.

About a year before Deborah died, she had been selected to be the Chair of the Tap Dance Faculty – a position she undertook with great skill and diplomacy, and it is with huge pleasure that the Committee have announced that the good work is being continued under the expert leadership of Jackie Hayward and Nick French as the new



Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

The spirit of good will, love and wonderful atmosphere in the church inspired those of us who were able to attend the funeral. It was for everyone, a shockingly sad event and the Minister himself was visibly moved. There were some lighter notes when members of the family spoke about her mischievous sense of humour and funny incidents, which had occurred in the past. One of her famous students, Alan Burkett, spoke eloquently about the training he had received and the care and trouble that Deborah had taken over every solo he performed in any competition he entered, undertaking hours of practice to perfect every detail prior to the event. Deborah's students regularly won awards at

Above: An array of wonderful memorabilia from Debbie's beautifully kept scrapbooks

the Modern, Tap and National Dance competitions where her stunning choreography and costumes were always in evidence.

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“To be always mindful of the feelings of others and above all, to keep her spirit alive in joyous memory”

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When it came to the Minister’s address, he told us that although he had written his notes, he had decided to put them aside and speak from the heart because he had been much moved by the words of everyone during the service. He heard about the exemplary way in which Deborah conducted

her life, her gift for teaching and the gracious and kindly way in which she dealt with people. He said that he had realised that even if none of us were actually religious we had our own religion – that of devoting our lives to the teaching of dance, of giving our energy and commitment to our art, and giving our time to develop the skills and confidence of every pupil.

It was an incredibly moving occasion but there was also an indefinable quality of reverence and joy for the life and achievements of Deborah, and we all felt that we had been privileged and blessed to have known her.

I feel that Deborah has left us a legacy – to strive for excellence in all we do, not just in our teaching but also in our everyday lives. To be always mindful of the feelings of others and above all, to keep her spirit alive in joyous memory.

Christina Ballard

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