

Geraldine Stephenson's career spans the worlds of dance, theatre, television and film. Although IMDb lists 77 credits as choreographer or movement director in films and television between 1956 and 2000, her CV lists a staggering 164! Her output ranged from *The Two Ronnies* (1979) to Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975) via landmark television series like *War and Peace* and *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*.

Her stage career began in 1951 when she was Movement Director for E. Martin Browne's revival of the York Mystery Plays. In the fifties she was a pioneer of independent dance, creating and touring her own dance-theatre pieces. Her enterprise extended to hiring and filling the Park Lane Theatre on 11th October 1954. Over the next forty years she would work on more than one hundred productions, working regularly with the National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, Regents Park Open Air Theatre, Chichester Festival Theatre and a host of other producing theatres through England.

Stephenson was born in Hull on December 4th 1925, and educated at Newlands School for Girls. She then studied Physiotherapy at Bedford College of Physical Education when one of her teachers, Joan Goodrich, had connections with Rudolf Laban, a charismatic pioneer of dance and movement. She went to the inaugural gathering of the Laban Guild in Sheffield in January 1946 and determined to join Laban's Art of Movement Studio on Oxford Road in Manchester when it started its first three-year course in September that year. Unable to pay for a second year's tuition fees Geraldine offered her services as a pianist and physical trainer, and thus managed to continue her studies. By 1948 she was accompanying Laban to Bradford where he taught a weekly class at Esmée Church's Northern Theatre School. Her students included writer Donald Howarth and director David Giles (with whom she worked on four BBC productions: *Vanity Fair* (1967), *Diary of an Encounter* (1968), *Sense and Sensibility* (1971) and *Mansfield Park* (1982)). She also taught actors Tom Bell and Edward Petherbridge with whom she established a long working relationship. She also formed a long working relationship with Maureen Lipman notably on her loving portrait of Joyce Grenfell, *Re-Joyce* for both stage and television.

When the Art of Movement Studio moved from Manchester to Addlestone in Surrey Geraldine began to miss, as she put it, the bright lights and the big city. She gradually reduced her teaching at the Studio, as her career on stage and television began to gather momentum. For most of her early Dance Recitals she worked with the pianist and performer John Dalby. These recitals consisted of danced and mimed character pieces. A 1956 programme called *Centuries in Dance* consisted of dances from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century. She was to become an expert in period dance and movement, an expertise on which many television and stage directors would draw. During these early years she also developed Laban's idea of movement choirs, creating huge pageants in venues ranging from Llandaff Cathedral to the Royal Albert Hall where she worked with 1,000 girl guides.

Her output for stage and screen was staggering. On most years over her forty year career she would work on four or five television or film productions, and as many stage productions. She formed close working relations with a number of television directors including Jane Howell (*The Dybbuk*, (1980, BFI), *The Winter's Tale* (1982, BBC) and in 1983 the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*), and John Glenister (*The Franklin's Tale* (1969, BBC), *Catherine of Aragon* (1970, BBC's *Six Wives of Henry VIII*), *Casanova* (1971, BBC), *Emma* (1972, BBC) and *Marie Curie* (1977, BBC)). She choreographed dance and movement for some of the BBC's legendary costume dramas including *Nicholas Nickleby* (1968) and *Daniel Deronda* (1970) directed by Joan Craft, and classic series like *The Pallisers* (1974), *The*

House of Elliot (1991 – 1993), *Poldark* (1995), and *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1996 – 1997).

Her stage productions began with the York Mystery Plays which were revived for the Festival of Britain in 1951 and involved most of the major producing houses in England. Apart from the National and the RSC, she worked at theatres throughout the UK, including Bath, Clwyd, Cambridge, Guildford, Nottingham and Sheffield, in theatres across London including the Aldwych, Fortune, Lillian Baylis, Lyric Hammersmith, Riverside Studios, Royal Court, Vaudeville, the Young Vic and Maximus Discotheque.

Her final professional production was in 2004, the 28th Johann Strauss Gala which was produced by Raymond Gubay between Christmas and New Year at the Royal Festival Hall, London and the Fairfield Halls, Croydon – every performance sold out in advance!

What marks out Geraldine's output is its range: from youth productions to historical pageant to serious drama, to comic routines for the *Two Ronnies*. She was a woman for all seasons and tastes. After her professional career had pretty much come to an end she dedicated seven years (2000 – 2007) to teaching me the elements of Laban movement. She was a generous, devoted and inspiring teacher who changed my life.

Dick McCaw