

Sir Robert Cohan C.B.E – Tribute for LUTSF Spring News – April 2021

Master Teacher, Choreographer, Philosopher, Psychologist, Dancer Extraordinaire and dear friend.

My life was forever changed early in 1970 shortly after moving to London from Edinburgh. While taking daily open classes at The Dance Centre in Floral Street, a chance meeting with a student who was studying at E15 Acting School led me to The Place Theatre for a performance of Cohan's iconic work *Cell*. This extraordinary and electrifying experience, awakened a sensation which excited and inspired me to audition for training at London School of Contemporary Dance, as it was then known. A passionate young dancer, I was eager to discover and explore new ways of expressing my creative energy through dance and art. The highlight of my week as a first year student at the school was a scheduled opportunity to observe Bob teaching Company class. Stunningly beautiful, with a soft mesmerizing voice, he filled the studio with his presence, radiating powerful calm energy which impregnated the space, commanding the attention and commitment of his wonderful company of chosen, dedicated dancers. Experiencing such a revelation at the beginning of my professional career as an International dance artist inspired and informed my creative work with LCDT's pioneering Educational Outreach Team. The essence of Bob's teaching was instrumental in shaping my vision, over three decades, in my role as artistic leader of a gifted team of creative dance artists and musicians working with young dancers at The Place, many of whom went on to professional dance training and successful careers.

Bob continues to inspire me profoundly as I reflect with gratitude, almost half a century later, on the many memorable moments I have been privileged to spend in his illuminating company. For more than 46 years, quietly and consciously, he dropped many pearls of wisdom into my lap when he knew I was ready to receive them.

When discussing 'What Matters' in conversation with his good friend Sir Ken Robinson on the occasion of the Cohan Inaugural Lecture at The Place on 11th June 2015 Bob stated that, as he taught from a very strong technical point of view in the physical body, what mattered to him was fine tuning the body. When he sees somebody on stage he expects to see something extraordinary, something special, something that touches him. That requires fine tuning. "If the bones are in the right place, the body will develop perfectly; the muscles will form in the right way...." "I know I am right, but we can't assume every time we go to a dance class that our skeleton will be in the right place – most of the time our bones are not in the right place and a lot of teachers don't know how to fix the bones".

Bob's wisdom reinforces the crucial importance of alignment of the bones in the teaching of dance technique. I know he is right. My bones were not in the right place when I arrived at LCDS, but serendipity led me to The Place where my rigorous training in the technique of Martha Graham, developed and inspired by Bob's artistic direction and supported by Pilates work with Alan Herdman and Tai Chi with Gerda Geddes, enabled me to follow my dream and pursue a fulfilling professional career in dance.

My ongoing thirst for knowledge, a deeper understanding of Eastern philosophy, the function of martial application within the internal arts, and its relevance to the teaching of dance technique and performance, continues to inform and inspire my daily tai chi/qigong practice. I trust this powerful energy work to ensure my bones remain strong and in the right place for the remainder of my life.

I miss your company, your generous loving spirit and your droll sense of humour.

As I continue on my tai chi journey, full of gratitude, you remain in my heart with love.

Thank you Bob for believing in me.

Iris

