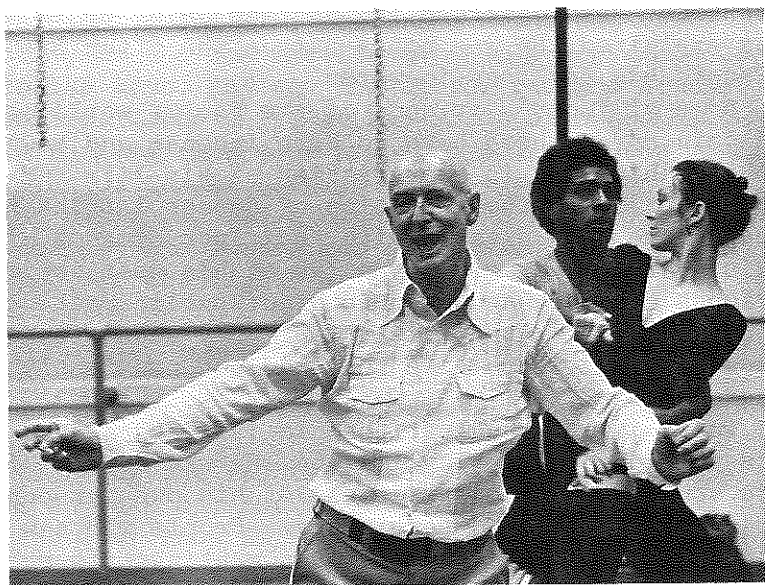


ZEN NOTES



TUDOR DIES by Mary Farkas

When Antony Tudor was so greatly honored at the Kennedy Center and the White House December 10th, 1986, the whole event was rebroadcast December 26th with Walter Cronkite as the narrator. A videotape was made of this and a fine print was sent to Tudor. We viewed this--he hadn't seen any of it before--at the Institute on the first day of his eightieth year, April 5th. As he stood, in the film, taking the ovation of the huge audience at the Kennedy Center, he bowed the Buddhist way, with hands joined, in the beautiful gesture that expresses heartfelt appreciation.

With tears in his eyes, with this gesture, he acknowledged this deep source of his inspiration. He wanted his gesture to be noted and brought it to the attention of some Institute members he thought might not have observed it. What he meant by it was not explained. He was not a person who often expressed his feelings in words.

Some of Tudor's friends of the ballet world came to join our members here to burn incense and bow in the Buddhist way in appreciation of his life and his contribution to the tradition of dance. I think he would have been pleased with their performance of this ancient custom. Only a few of his most intimate friends could be squeezed into our public meeting space where, for the first time, they encountered a side of his private life they had not previously shared.

Tudor joined the Institute in 1957 and served as its president beginning in 1964. He was a model for its students in the strictness of his own personal practice and quiet determination. People who saw him in his robe officiating at zazen meetings assumed he was a master. Even my husband, a stern judge of men's demeanor, who once saw him whisk by in the hallway at Waverly Place, took him for one. Sitting, walking, bowing, were impeccable. Those who had the privilege of following his walking remember it vividly. Ballet dancers do not necessarily walk well, but Tudor did. I don't mean he walked in some technically "Zen" style, but that he walked with dignity and presence.

I still remember exactly how he looked standing

one Wednesday evening when he entered our meeting room at Waverly Place late. At that time, in the fifties, we had the use of a basement room. I used to open the street door at eight o'clock and anyone could come in. If they came after meditation had started, they would have to wait for attention until the end of the period, about a half hour. Sometimes it would be really quiet. You could feel the intensity the moment you were inside the room. On such an occasion, Tudor had come briskly in and stopped suddenly after taking two steps into the room where the people were sitting in silence. From then until the break he didn't move a muscle.

At 113 East 30th Street in the 1970s, a letter from Arthur Black reveals another side.

I have many memories of Antony Tudor, but one in particular remains most vivid in my mind.

This incident occurred the first time I saw Tudor in action as the jikijitsu of a Wednesday night sitting at the Zen Institute. When I bowed myself into the zendo and saw him at the far end of the platform, I thought that his shiny bald head and thin serious face made him look like a gaunt western version of Sasaki Roshi.

On other Wednesday nights, with other jikijitsus in charge, the person who sat nearest the switch turned off the lights at the start of the first meditation period. On this one evening I sat next to the switch. When Tudor signalled the beginning of the first period, I put out the lights.

I'll never forget his immediate--and forceful--reaction.

"Turn on the lights," Tudor snapped. "We came here to wake up, not to sleep!"

I do not know if Tudor ever used bodily movement to answer koans. Even in fairly recent years, his demonstrations of classical ballet steps or original movements were his way of getting his dancers to intensify or develop standard movements into something more special. Audiences were astounded by the electric quality of movement made by his stars, Hugh Laing and Nora Kaye. He demanded of them that they transform themselves into the roles they were portraying. "The dramatic ballerina" he introduced into traditional ballet was marvelously realized by

this "one of a kind" dancer who, as Anna Kisselgoff put it (NYT 3/15/87) "took ballet into a new dimension of performance and meaning...The acting was not imposed upon the movement, it was the movement."

Especially in "The Leaves Are Fading," Tudor had erased all signs of "personal" technique so that the viewer sees only the movement, the pure, seemingly spontaneous action. This is the transcendence of form Tudor himself described as "empty"--to use a Zen expression--empty of ego, he seems to mean. He was pleased with this achievement.

After rehearsing this ballet and his first masterpiece "Pillar of Fire," with Hugh Laing, who created the major male role in that work, on Easter Sunday, Tudor was very tired. Hugh Laing, who for several years has supervised his eating of the "macrobiotic" meals they shared, was spending the night at the Institute. He was waked by Tudor's call for help to get him up from where he had fallen. After being helped into bed, Tudor lay there quietly. Hugh asked him if he was all right. "Yes," he replied, "I'm all right. You can go back to sleep." Hugh went back to his own place and was sitting on the edge of his bed when he heard, a few minutes later, a "Ka-a-a-a." This is the usual spelling for a sound Zen masters make to demonstrate Zen. It means they dissolve into the sound. It is not a human word, but, like the baby's first cry, the true word of nature itself. Perhaps you could say "life force." Some Christians would say, "He gave up the ghost." In that moment of the death rattle, the heart stops beating. The person is gone.

Cover photograph by Jack Mitchell, 1975. Zen Notes gratefully acknowledges his permission to reprint it.

NOTES ON TUDOR

Dancing is a vocation. A fulfilled dancer is extremely rare. When they do appear, their achievement has nothing to do with success or failure in the material sense, but with the degree of rigor, continuity and honesty with which they pursue their quest. Theirs is an accumulated trust --both in themselves and in dance--acquired after years of searching and labor. Such dancers seek, they pursue, fail, doubt. They sometimes are fulfilled. (But they are not full of themselves.) And, sometimes, there is an audience to applaud their efforts. Their achievement dies with them, but what remains is a presence. What makes them nearly colossal is the intimation in their work of an existence where breath and gesture radiate a heightened vibrancy and awareness. In this respect Antony Tudor is a dancer.

Even if the steps remain only in Laban notation, Tudor's work will stay forever precisely because when a dancer explores the steps and discovers the steps for himself or herself there is an irrefutable truth in the body which, almost in spite of oneself, places the dancer into the appropriate feelings. What is important is that the ballet is an experience for the dancer. Not only have I experienced this, I have witnessed it among my Juilliard peers as well as among dancers of the Paris Opera. I am at a loss to describe this confirmation of physical truth. I could describe it as *le vol de phenix* or as a form of transcendence in the German words *aufgehoben, mit flugen die ich mich errungen* (with wings I have built for myself).

What will last in Tudor's work is simply the inspiration he will give to others. Certainly this is evident in the amount of time he has put into the students at Juilliard as compared with the amount of choreographing he actually has done in his lifetime. Tudor's legacy is a presence whose inspiration has nothing to do with aspirations toward immortality but the simple courage to be a human being. His inspired dedication is not a single-minded pursuit but a concentration whose awareness is always present, not omniscient.

His vision is not a sharing of glory on Mount Olympus but an earthy and resilient ability, when one hits rock bottom, still to risk, albeit while tumbling, the courage to remain porous through life's bittersweet experience.

--Clara Maxwell

So many details of his life are still veiled in mystery that it will be fascinating to find out what he is hiding under some of those veils. Musing, he reflected, "I am going to write a book, I know it. I don't quite know what or when, but I know that I will have to do it." What is no mystery though, is that he has taken a path from Freud to Zen and it has not been an overnight journey. Even in the 1950's when he was Director of the Met Ballet, he was beginning to be "into" Eastern thinking and even brought in the dancer/teacher Chou Li to teach Chinese ritual dancing to the company as an exercise in control. It was exceedingly interesting for the dancers and they gained a great deal from the experience, once they became accustomed to moving in controlled plie for over an hour! Today, Tudor actually lives the way of Zen rather than dabbling in its ramifications. Questioned as to whether or not Zen had made him any less caustic and perhaps more gentle he replied, "Of course not, I just handle it all so much better."

--Suzanne Ames

When asked by Richard Philip for "Dance Magazine" (June 1987), which of your own ballets would you choose for revival? Tudor replied: Shadowplay. Probably. Why? Because it is mysterious. The first time it was performed, everyone came out of the theater wondering what it was about. It's good to keep them guessing. It's a very difficult ballet to put on, though, because of all those monkeys flying around through the trees . . .

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING, Chapter X, 32
May 17, 1939

The master said: "After my passing into Nirvana, you must conduct yourselves well. You must not lament or weep as would men in the world; you must not wear mourning and receive condolences. If you do not follow my word you are not my disciples and your behavior is at variance with right Dharma. You must strive only to know your own original mind and to see your own original nature. Your mind must be in the state that is neither mobile nor calm, neither right nor wrong, neither standing nor walking. I fear that you may not comprehend my idea because your minds are bewildered. Again I ask you to strive to see your own original nature.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

These are the last words of the Sixth Patriarch that were given to his disciples. But when the Sixth Patriarch was dying, those famous enlightened disciples had left his place already and the younger unenlightened disciples were still clinging to the Master. Now the Master was very old; he realized he could not give any more aid to the young disciples. He pointed out precisely the main point to which the young disciples must strive. To attain enlightenment they must see their original nature. This is the main point of the Sixth Patriarch's Zen.

The master said: "After my passing into Nirvana, you must conduct yourselves well. You must not lament or weep as would men in the world. In a Zen temple, when the Master dies, all the disciples of the Master recite the sutras before his coffin before the cremation. Usually they recite three words of lament--"Ai, ai, ai." That is all. They don't weep or burst into tears. This was an old tradition in the Zen school. You must not lament emotionally, and you must not burst into tears, for your face must not be suffused with raining tears. In such a way this original record is written.

You must not wear mourning and receive condolences. At the teacher's death the disciples are not wearing anything special, just their usual clothes, not special black and white. Scattered disciples come to the main temple and before the master's coffin join their hands, burn incense three times

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and meditate. No one speaks a word. Sometimes a layman comes to the temple to offer condolences and raves about the Master. "Oh, your Master is dead; such a wonderful man. What can I do?" The monks just look sarcastic, saying nothing as they receive his condolences. And the layman says, "Oh, don't you feel sorry?" Well, if you have a true and honest mind you cannot say a word in condolence. Silence is the deepest condolence.

You must strive only to know your own original mind and to see your own original nature. This is the main point of the Sixth Patriarch's Zen...The man who was laughing and crying and speaking now has gone. He has left a great question to all human beings.

When you look at a dead man's face, there is no action in it, but he is not resting either. He is in eternal life, he is living. He has not gone when he dies. He has neither come nor gone. There is no beginning, no end. Therefore, there is no coming or going. And from the state of Reality there is neither right nor wrong. And nothing is standing or walking. The shadow of the bamboo in the moonlight is sweeping the dust from the stairs all night long, but nothing has happened. No dust has been swept. No stairs have been swept. From the standpoint of Reality, nothing has happened. No mote of dust has been swept. We came here, we lived, we died. Nothing has happened. Originally this is the bottom of the empty sea, from the standpoint of Reality.

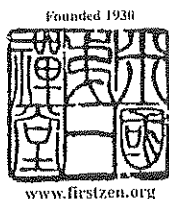
You are speaking many words from morning to evening, your emotions fluctuate like the waves of the ocean, but from the Reality of water, nothing has happened. At the bottom of the empty ocean nothing has happened. And on the surface of the sea nothing has happened either when you realize your original nature.

"Before your father and mother, what was your original aspect? Before the creation of the world, what were you?" This is a profound question. If you were not there, you would never be here. If you were there, before creation, what were you?

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