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A Hawaiian Heroine's Journey: The Early Life and Career of Dancer Jean Erdman Campbell

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A HAWAIIAN HEROINE'S JOURNEY:
THE EARLY LIFE AND CAREER OF DANCER JEAN ERDMAN CAMPBELL

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Dedication

This writing is dedicated my dad, Nelson Baumann, with heartful thanks to my mom, Alice. Ron, thanks for your loving and enduring support. Chris Toumey, the Coolidge Fellowship and the journey of this manuscript would not have happened without your encouragement. This manuscript is written in celebration of the life and art of Jean Erdman Campbell.

Acknowledgements

The personal archives of Jean Erdman Campbell are a primary source for this research investigation. I am extremely grateful to the conscientious archivists in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library who assisted me over the course of several months. Archival access was granted by dancer, choreographer, and filmmaker Nancy Allison; this project would not have been possible without her. Allison has dedicated much of her own career to lovingly perpetuating the legacy of Erdman's artistic work.

I received critical research support for this project from Columbia University's Association for Religious and Intellectual Life (ARIL), from which I was awarded a Coolidge Fellow. Particular thanks are given to the Association's director, Charles Henderson, for his support. The ARIL made it possible to access special archival collections in the Butler Library of Columbia University. In association with ARIL, thanks are also due to the Auburn, Union, and Jewish Theological Seminaries of Manhattan, New York. Special recognition must be given to Matthew Baker of the Burk Library at Union Theological Seminary for his personal help in locating ancestral resources of interest for presenting the subject.

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Additionally, I want to thank the dedicated members and staff of the Joseph Campbell Foundation for maintaining and perpetuating the theories, philosophies, writings, lectures, and legacy of Joseph Campbell. Campbell's books were critical to validating the accuracy of Jean Erdman's personal records and touring schedules. The writings of Joseph Campbell provided the substantive underpinnings for better understanding the life and work of his artistic wife. Richard Buchen deserves special praise for his work and guidance as reference and special collections librarian for the Joseph Campbell and Marija Gimbutas Library at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California.

Special thanks are extended to the American Dance Guild and to the New York Harkness Dance Center for their enduring support and remembrances of teachers and artists. These groups honored Jean Erdman's legacy with a 100-year birthday celebration and performance festival in 2016 in Manhattan at the 92nd Street Y. I express my deepest appreciation for the kindness of Wendy Erdman Surlea, Jean Erdman's niece, whom I met at this time. Ms. Surlea shared insights into the Erdman ancestry, including her personal precious memories of working as a musician in Jean's company.

I am especially grateful to the professors in the University of South Carolina's College of Education who encouraged my interests in women's studies and biography as important topics worthy of research in the field of dance education. My interest in

biography was awakened in my first doctoral course taught by Dr. Craig Kridel, Educational Studies Gambrell Professor Emeritus of Education and former curator of the Museum of Education. In the same class, I was privileged to have read the archival papers of Harold Taylor, the former president of Sarah Lawrence College, under whom Jean Erdman and her husband, Joseph Campbell, were employed for many years. Taylor's Presidential Papers proved to be an outstanding connection to this biography.

Upon Dr. Kridel's retirement, I was thankful that Dr. James Kirylo assumed the role of committee chair for this dissertation. Dr. Kirylo's knowledge of education, religion, and biography has proven to be the perfect match of expertise for informing this project.

I am deeply grateful to Warren R. O'Brien for his enduring love, patience, and support throughout the research and writing processes.

Abstract

This biographical study covers the early life and career of dancer, choreographer, and avant-garde theatre artist, Jean Erdman Campbell (1916-2020). Based on extensive research of historical literature and archival materials, the manuscript traces Erdman's ancestry and follows the subject through age 32, when she became established as a star of modern dance and prepared for a world tour. The guiding question for this study was what influences shaped the life course, identity and artistry of Erdman, and how might the subject be presented as biography? The researcher examined the influences on Erdman as related to various dance traditions, especially Hawaiian hula, modern training with the pioneers of American dance, the historical and sociological frameworks, plus studies in the fields of mythology, psychology, spiritual and religious traditions, and feminism. Most noteworthy was the close relationship and shared interests of Erdman with her husband, Joseph Campbell, scholar of world religions and comparative mythology. Together, these influences led Erdman to develop an original approach to dance training, choreography, and performance. Erdman's choreographic themes and aesthetic were grounded in myth, the inner nature of women, spiritual traditions, dream states, and transcendent journeys. The narrative biography includes Erdman's ancestral history, early schooling, dance training, and first experiments with choreography. Erdman danced in the Martha Graham troupe from 1938 to 1943 and then launched her own company. This biography concludes with the first phase of her artistic work in 1948. Erdman's career extended into the late 1980s.

Preface

My professional career as an educator, dancer and choreographer has followed in the legacies of American modern dancers Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Erick Hawkins. I have intensely studied, professionally performed, and researched a vast range of traditional dance forms, including popular and ballroom styles, ethnic and national dances from various states of Mexico, Armenian dance, Russian and Ukrainian styles, Tunisian, Greek and Balkan, German dances, indigenous American dance, French-Canadian and American clogging, and liturgical dancing in the Catholic churches of Kenya, just to name a few. I have been deeply immersed in the related arts, especially designing costumes, teaching music for dance, acting, and leading a university interdisciplinary arts program.

Remarkably, I share many common interests with the subject of this biography, Jean Erdman Campbell (1916 – 2020). These shared passions include the love for modern expressiveness, cultural forms, and arts integration. The commonalities present a few reasons that Erdman's life is so fascinating to me. The similarities could be a good starting place for writing a biography of this remarkable and talented woman, yet the hand of Serendipity pointed to other happy discoveries by which I could further identify with the subject. I will relate a mere handful of the signs that propelled this author's interest in the direction of writing a biography of dancer Jean Erdman; some indications of these signs began as early as childhood.

My father's maritime interests and stories of ships set the stage for interest in Jean Erdman's ancestors, whose lineage, like mine, included those in the merchant trade. While growing up, I was surrounded with artifacts from India, Japan, and South America. Even as I write this story, statuettes of various Hindu gods and goddesses peer over my shoulder. These deities would have been familiar to Jean as she had often seen and learned about them while growing up on the island of Oahu in Hawaii. Many religions were practiced on Oahu by the diverse populations—of indigenous Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, European Christians, and various Polynesian groups—who were prominent there.

Jean Erdman's father was a non-denominational minister to a local Honolulu population as well as to various ethnic populations across the Territory of Hawaii. Similarly, members of both the maternal and paternal sides of my own family had religious vocations. One was a traveling pastor who served congregations across rural Illinois; another was the archbishop of New York who was responsible for building much of St. Patrick's Cathedral as we know it today. For both Jean Erdman and this author, religion and spiritual foundations were critical to building self-knowledge and finding insight for topics of choreography.

I did not know of Jean Erdman nor of her legacy until rather late in life. In 1988, when I was fifteen years into my dance career, I became aware that the prolific writer and scholar Joseph Campbell was Erdman's husband. I had long been a fan of Campbell's books yet had not, until 2013, recognized that these two personalities were husband and wife, nor that her dances were deeply influenced and intertwined with his philosophies on comparative myth, psychology, and religions. Along with millions of other Americans, I

was introduced to Joseph Campbell's philosophies and theories on comparative mythology through the six episodes of a PBS television documentary titled *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers* (Campbell, 1988).

The series was written and produced by journalist Bill Moyers. The mere conversations between Moyers and Campbell generated viewer excitement for the shows. Moyers quizzically probed Campbell, and the academician immediately responded, as if spontaneously, with a fountain of inspirational knowledge. I felt a kindred spirit speaking through Campbell. Moyers and Campbell addressed many spiritual and mythological questions that related to both my personal beliefs and my professional dance training.

Five years later, I revisited each of the telecasts when I discovered the video series was available at my local library. Campbell's ideas and explanations stayed with me throughout the course of my professorships and dance teaching career. Since then, Campbell's books have earned a permanent spot on the nightstand next to my bed.

It was not until 2014 that I became inspired to write biography. I was taking my first doctorate course at the University of South Carolina under the tutelage of Dr. Craig Kridel. Professor Kridel is a superb educator, museum archivist, and great aficionado of dance. Kridel affirmed the importance of biography as qualitative research (Kridel, 1998). My interests in biography were further amplified by studies in women's history and feminism, plus a chance meeting with Nancy Allison, regisseur of several of Jean Erdman's famous dances. Allison is the gatekeeper to the *Jean Erdman Papers* (1939 – 2001), an archival collection located in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library. It was at this library that I later pursued months of research about Jean Erdman.

Noticing that no one had yet written an extensive biography of the artist, I felt drawn to do so. As I peered into the Erdman archival files, again I detected a strong identification with her, this time regarding her performance and career responsibilities. From articles she had written, I gained appreciation for Erdman's approaches and discussions on dancing, teaching, and choreography. Just as Erdman had sewn many of her dance costumes, so I had designed and constructed my own. To run her company, she managed the tours and schedules necessary for a smooth operation. I also had borne these responsibilities. Coincidentally, during my performance career, I had toured through many of the older theatres where Erdman had likewise performed. I could see the dressing room counters, smell the wood, and feel the drapes of the stage as I read through Erdman's records. My legs had taken me through the same backstage passageways the subject had visited.

Jean Erdman was a catalyst in the American modern dance movement of the 20th century. Her dances demonstrated innovative translations of myth, various stages of a myth, or transformative states of being. Many times during the research, I noticed that Joseph Campbell was a crucial influence on his wife's choreography and also on Martha Graham's dances as well. Filled with symbolic meaning, today the Erdman dances have potential to reshape our thinking about life, human relationships, beauty, aspects of the divine, and notions of reality.

Through dance, choreography, and theatrical performance, Erdman excavated the obscured origins and pure experiences of dance that precede human words. She philosophically interpreted perceptions and ideas in a multiplicity of modes, especially through archaic channels of gesture, with voice, and with the modern languages of dance.

Thus, as if holding up a mirror to oneself, the images of humanity became reflected in the depths of her artistic compositions. To play on the words of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1970), Jean's dances shed light on our common humanity through "principle [principal] figures that determine the knowledge of resemblance" (p. 17) to the extent that "the profound invisibility of what one sees is inseparable from the invisibility of the person seeing" (p. 19). It is my hope that this biography will give insight into Erdman's life and elucidate the influences that shaped her views, beliefs, values, and approaches to the art of modern dance.

In this age in which our circumstances change so rapidly, Jean Erdman's life reads like an archetypal American heroine. Erdman's spiritual centering and firm grounding as an artist show her to be an exemplary model for young people today. Erdman's aesthetic is in alignment with the new era of global awareness and understanding. During her long lifetime of dance, she bridged understandings of culture, class, ethnicity, race, and gender, thereby pointing to new paths for others to follow.

Erdman's example moves us both inward toward the personal and collective unconscious, and simultaneously outward on planes of the conscious. Her dances often demonstrated mythological and introspective voyages that illuminate how we might navigate through a variety of thoughts or circumstances. Jean Erdman Campbell's life and body of theatrical work compel us to be courageous on our personal journeys, as hero or heroine, and to put aside fears that obstruct a vision of the wholeness of humankind. Therein lies the masterpiece of her life.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Foreword

On a remote island in the Pacific, at the geographic edge where East meets West, a Hawaiian girl was born in 1916. She grew up to later become a world-renowned dancer, choreographer, and avant-garde theatre artist. Jean Erdman was not only famous in her own right, but also was well-known to many outside the sphere of the arts, primarily through association with her distinguished husband, the famous scholar of religion, literature, and comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell (1904 – 1987). Together and individually, these formidable superstars profoundly influenced the thinking and artistic expression of the 20th century.

This biographical study presents the early life and career of Jean Erdman for the purpose of making her story and artistic contributions better known to dance audiences and the general public. The discipline of dance has struggled to document and disseminate a comprehensive history of American modern dance. Artists such as Erdman, who pioneered the field throughout the 20thcentury, are virtually absent from files and from current dance book selections. Existing studies have tended to focus on only a very limited number of dance personalities and their specific benchmarked achievements.

Up to now, researchers have not extensively documented and presented the life of Jean Erdman and her noteworthy contributions to dance and theatre. Lack of easy access to the story of Erdman's life represents a critical failure to track the intellectual and artistic progression of the field; this lack is a detriment to scholars, students, and the public. The author of this manuscript attempts to fill gaps in historical knowledge about

women in dance, reaffirm Erdman's legacy, and widen appreciation for her contribution to the foundation of a significant art form, namely, American modern dance. It is also important to recognize Erdman because, over time, her significance has almost become overshadowed by the fame of her husband, Joseph Campbell.

Erdman is significant to history in her own right. This study addresses Erdman's life during the first half of the 20th century, a noteworthy time for the arts in American history. Transformative ideas about dance and art took stage to fuel a revolution against traditional methods of training, performance, and dance making. Eurocentric ideas did not suit the American spirit of the time, as the antiquated methods used in dance had typically been perpetuated by men in the courts of monarchies.

Advancing the conservation of Erdman's legacy, and others of her era, could be accomplished by targeted efforts in scholarship, that is, by securing biographies for missing figures in the chronology of dance, creating rich educational materials, and embodying the quintessential aspects of the artists' dances for those involved in dance training. This biography is only one attempt to better educate the current and next generations. To foster recognition of the importance of Erdman's career and art, multiple perspectives are needed and suggested.

The guiding question for this study is this: What influences shaped the identity, life course, and artistry of Jean Erdman, and how might the subject be presented as biography? Herein, the researcher considers a multiplicity of influences on the artist's life, to include historical, social, cultural, personal, spiritual and religious, philosophical, psychological, mythological, artistic, feminist, and intellectual dimensions.

Part One of the manuscript is composed of two chapters and takes shape as a critical study. Chapter 1 explains the elements of the study, begins with a biographical sketch of the subject, describes the nature of the study, and explains the writing approach and form used in the biography. Common themes that support the biographical presentation and manuscript structure are also highlighted. These underpinnings are important for understanding Erdman's approaches to dance-making, her values, and the references in the manuscript.

The purpose of the investigation is described along with important data that were analyzed and synthesized to recount Erdman's life on paper. Following is a review of the philosophical issues, investigative frames, and problems that arose during the research process. The first chapter will conclude with a brief outline of the organization for the study and structure for the biography.

Chapter 2 looks closely at the foundations of Erdman's approaches to aesthetics and dance. The examination explores five threads of influence. The first section examines Erdman's studies in dance traditions that proved fundamental to her understanding of the world. The second section explains the distinct and distinguished influences of the American modern dance pioneers on Erdman's formational study in dance. Third, the study explores the strong influences of myth on the mind of young Jean as a budding choreographer. This exploration considers the influence of her husband's ideas along with important ideas derived from various spiritual and religious belief systems. Additionally, theories from the field of psychology are shown to have specific influence on Erdman's thinking and dance-making. The fourth section presents Erdman's life in the context of a modern woman living in America and her inclination toward feminist ideas.

Lastly, the previous influences come together to point to future artistic explorations for the subject. Chapter 2 concludes with Erdman moving in the direction of producing shows of integrated and total theatre.

In Part Two, Chapter 3 begins the narrative biography of the subject. It presents the historical context and ancestry of Jean Erdman's family. The subject's birth is situated amid the glorious beauty of the Territory of Hawaii at a time of tremendous political transformation. Jean's childhood escapades are followed to her departure to secondary school in New England. Chapter 4 introduces the heroine's quest to become a professional dancer. In the process, Erdman's studies in dance and theatre are guided by worldly and significant personalities.

Erdman's personal and professional guardians remain close as she matures. Chapter 5 shows the heroine navigating various trials and tribulations until she reaches the goal of becoming a professional dancer. She marries Joseph Campbell in 1938 and the next day begins her performance career in the company of Martha Graham; subsequently, she also joins the New Dance Group. Erdman's early career concludes in 1948, after she departs the company of both and takes a leap of faith to launch a solo career.

Jean Marion Erdman had an astounding array of influential friends who greatly influence her thinking and artistic direction, most importantly her husband. The essential theories shaping Erdman's artistic work are formed and guided through the immediate influence of Campbell, especially understandings of myth with its legacy of heroes, goddesses, and transcendent journeys. Essential theories underlying Erdman's artistic approaches are often described in Erdman's archival notes and the historical works of

Campbell. The biographic narrative of Erdman's life is punctuated with supplementary information from dancer oral histories, feminist theory, historical data, and quintessential cultural texts. Although portions of Jean Erdman's life story have, until now, existed mostly in archival collections and press memorabilia, in the dancing body of her protégé Nancy Allison, and in memories of associates, her story has mostly remained an immense and complex puzzle waiting to be assembled in one place.

In Part Three of this manuscript, conclusions are drawn about the impact of Erdman's life and career. The manuscript demonstrates that Erdman was a leader in the early modern dance scene. She substantively wove her dance ideas with Joseph Campbell's theories on myth and was the first choreographer to apply the monomyth theory to dance. Erdman may be the first American choreographer to have specifically utilized theories of the collective unconscious. She often focused her dances on spiritual dimensions and the inner nature of women. Together with Merce Cunningham, she broke concert traditions by improvising in a stage performance.

In the area of dancer training, Erdman advocated for going beyond a singularly elite training point of view, such as Martha Graham's method or the Humphrey-Weidman technique, to also include deep studies in various multi-cultural perspectives. Compositionally, this thinking led her to create a unique style for each dance. Erdman was able to take dance into realms of the abstract while captivating the minds and hearts of audiences. By age 32, she had created 17 original concert dances.

This study indicates that Erdman was a proto-feminist. In spite of circumstances beyond her control, she remained true to her personal convictions. The study of Erdman's early years demonstrate that she was integral to the development of modern dance and the

creation of the genre known as total theatre. Subsequently, she also became a leader in dance education administration and curricula. This author recommends that Erdman's choreographic process, with particular attention to monomyth theory, should be implemented in dance education curricula today.

Part One: Background for the Biography

of Jean Erdman Campbell

Chapter 1: Critical Elements of the Dissertation Study

Biographical Sketch: The Family Legacy and Life of Jean Erdman Campbell

Jean Erdman's maternal ancestors, the Dillinghams, were among America's first settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Generations later, the penchant for adventure remained in the family and some became seafarers. Forty-three years before the Pacific archipelago of Hawaii was brought into the union as an American state, Marion Dillingham, Jean Erdman's mother, was born in Honolulu in the Territory of Hawaii (Analia o Hawai'i). Native Hawaiians considered the Dillinghams one of the old *kama'aine* ("child of the land") families. Marion's family became wealthy industrialists responsible for developing Pearl Harbor, railways, and urban Honolulu. Jean's father, John Pinney Erdman, was a Christian evangelist preacher to local and distant populations in the Hawaiian territory. To be sure, adventure was in their daughter's "blood memory" (Graham, 1991, p. 1).

Born on February 20, 1916, Jean Erdman (1916 – 2020) was the fourth of five children. She grew up among her playful siblings, who enjoyed swimming, hula dancing, horseback riding, and going barefoot. Her family showed a love for poetry and theatrical antics. Jean Erdman began her education in the Elementary Academy of the Punahou School in Honolulu. There, she was introduced to a variety of dance styles, including the expressive dance of Isadora Duncan. It was also on Oahu that Jean first saw classical Chinese theatre; this made a profound and indelible impression on her creative imagination (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, box 5, folder 6 ["5:6"]).

The culture and history of the islands were critical to the formation of this remarkable child, born a fourth generation Hawaiian. Isidore "Isie" Bennet, Erdman's booking agent and professional associate for many years, described this environment in an undated letter: "She was reared in an atmosphere as close to the Orient as to the Occident" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, box 1 (series 1, sub-series 1), folder 14 ["1(1:1):14"]).[1] It was here in the middle of the Pacific—where diverse languages, religious beliefs, ideas about beauty, and cultural practices remained culturally distinct yet interwoven—that the choreographer's young mind took shape. Erdman's familiarity with these differences, and her respect and appreciation for them, made it possible for her to successfully bridge philosophical and theological understandings between Eastern and Western ideas.

While a teenager, Jean traveled to the continental United States to further her education at Miss Hall's School for Girls in Massachusetts. At first reprimanded for her "exotic" expressiveness at school, Erdman eventually found her artistic voice through theatrical studies at Sarah Lawrence College in New York (1934 – 1937). It was in the liberating college climate that she was introduced to personalities who would influence her life forever. She began taking classes with the dancer Martha Graham (1894 – 1991), pioneer in the American modern dance movement. On May 5, 1938, Erdman married one

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[1] Isadora "Isie" Bennet of Bennet and Pleasant in New York City was Erdman's booking and press agent for many years. In approximately mid-1955, she wrote to Erdman's Japanese collaborator, composer and dancer Teiji Ito: "Her father conducted non-sectarian church services in Hawaii and was most sympathetic to other religions…. And she was reared in an atmosphere as close to the Orient as to the Occident—closer, perhaps" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 1(1:1):14).

of her professors of literature, Joseph Campbell, who was twelve years her senior. They remained married until his death forty-seven years later.

Erdman's days at Sarah Lawrence were filled with dance. During the summer hiatus from formal studies, she devoted herself to learning and performing with the modern dance masters at Bennington College in Vermont. Bennington had become a renowned artists' colony of sorts, and for a few months each year, dancers from around the country and world would converge on the grassy greens to learn, not only from Graham, but also Hanya Holm (1893 – 1992), Doris Humphrey (1895 – 1958), and Charles Weidman (1901 – 1975). In 1938, after dancing at Bennington in a piece by Anna Sokolow (1910 – 2000), Erdman was selected to join the Graham Company. While in Vermont, she took classes from and also performed with the first male to join the Graham Company, Erick Hawkins (1909 – 1994). It was also at Bennington where Jean Erdman and dancer Merce Cunningham (1919 – 2009) met; they subsequently became life-long friends.

Martha Graham created numerous solo roles for Erdman. One of the most notable parts was dancing opposite Graham in the 1941 version of *Letter to the World*. Music critic for *The New York Sun* and Metropolitan Opera authority, Irving Kolodin (1941), described the piece as "the first authentically American Ballet." *Letter to the World* featured Erdman's multiple talents in acting and voice. With music composed by Graham's accompanist, Louis Horst (1884 – 1964), Jean Erdman was challenged to make her first dance, *Transformations of Medusa* (1942), which premiered at Bennington College and remained in Erdman's personal repertoire for the rest of her performing career.

The direction of Jean Erdman's life remained on a course that reflected her authentic pluralistic identity. In her youth, her artistry and aesthetics had been enlightened by her upbringing in Hawaii and from viewing traditional cultural dances on a tour of the globe with her parents. Jean became fascinated by performances from various cultures. The dances of Bali were of particular interest, as demonstrated in a video project transcript from a master class conducted in April 1987 at Sarah Lawrence (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:10). In the true spirit of *aloha*, Erdman, it seemed, viewed human diversity as a wondrous and mysterious phenomenon. Erdman's keen intellect, spiritual awareness, and physical discipline prepared her well for a life in dance. The truth of Erdman's life is perhaps echoed in the words of 20th century philosopher Michel Foucault (1993): "the revelation of the truth about oneself cannot be disassociated from the obligation to remain oneself" (p. 221).

Erdman remained true to herself in life direction, love, and art; she followed her path with pure *ananda*, a Sanskrit word meaning "bliss" (Campbell, 2004, p. xxiii). Erdman studied ancient hula styles from Mary Kawena Pūkui in Hawaii, Spanish dance with Jose Fernandez, Japanese dance at the Hisamatsu School, and classical dance at the School of the American Ballet. Her purpose was "to analyze the forms and principles of her art from every possible angle," according to poet and dance critic Edwin Denby, writing on April 9, 1949, in the *New York Herald Tribune*(*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 1(1:2):8).Erdman conducted a brief stint of dancing and teaching with the New Dance Group in New York, where she headed the Ethnic Division with dancers Pearl Primus (1919 – 1994) and Hadassah (Spira Epstein, 1909 – 1992).

In 1943, Jean Erdman and Merce Cunningham made a startling break from the respected yet domineering Graham by premiering their own dances for the Art Club of Chicago. Along with performing individual solos, together they presented duets: *Seeds of Brightness*, *Credo in US* and *Ad Lib*. The most groundbreaking innovation was that Erdman and Cunningham employed structured improvisation in a stage work; this departure from tradition was shocking to many American dancers (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):12).[2]

From 1943 on, Jean Erdman pursued the craft of choreography and created a signature approach to it. Her dances displayed inclusive views and ways of living, a global consciousness, psychology as modern artistic expression, and an adeptness for translating cultural myth into the language of dance. Some of Erdman's choreography and designs called up lush nature images reminiscent of her Hawaiian home (Hawaii State, 2016).After concentrating on developing solo dances, she began a performing company in 1944 and later opened her own school in Manhattan, the Jean Erdman School of Concert Dance. John Martin (1946), influential critic for the *New York Times*, signaled that Erdman was "keenly alert to modern experiments in the other arts—music, poetry, visual design—and employs them freely" (p. 10).

From this point forward and beyond the scope of this biography, Jean Erdman built a substantive repertory mainly of solo and small group original dances, which she performed regularly in New York City and on tour. The repertoire included the following

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[2] The reaction among American dancers was recorded on page 36 of the transcript of an oral history project on dance, part of the Dance Collection at the New York Public Library (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):12).

works: *Forever and Sunsmell* (1942), *Creature on a Journey* (1943), *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945), *Changing Moment* (1945), *Dawn Song* (1945), *Ophelia* (1946), *Passage* (1946), *People and Ghosts* (1946), *Sea Deep* (1947), *En Pélerinage* (A Medieval Tapestry) (1948), *Jazz Maze* (1948), and *Hamadryad* (1948). For Vassar Experimental Theatre, she produced choreography for Jean Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*) (1947). Additionally, Erdman taught dance at various colleges and studios. She was a mindful and careful educator who diligently considered various approaches to effectively train young dancers. Even as a young dancer herself, Jean Erdman was included in an exhibit of her performance programs and related photography in "Modern Dance—1945," now in the Dance Collection in the Music Division of the New York Public Library (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 5:1).[3]

By this time, Jean Erdman had not only established her career but drew important distinctions about her approach to dance. These distinctions were being noted by the critics. William S. Poster, writing for *The Hudson Review* in 1957 remarked,

> Miss Erdman, like Cunningham is a dancer first of all…. From the very outset, her art has been coherent, economical in the highest degree, and consummate in a field in which the opposite qualities are almost the invariant rule…. It is hard to imagine a greater contrast to the work of Cunningham…. (p. 433)

Erdman's philosophy can be recognized from her own words recorded in undated notes: "The dance…speaks of potentialities and aspects of humanity that are antecedent

[3] The exposition was also memorialized in a letter from Franklin F. Hopper, director of the New York Public Library, to Jean Erdman dated September 11, 1945.

to words, antecedent even to the spheres of personal recollection, and constitute the primary heritage of the human spirit" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):4). Acknowledging C.G. Jung's work, Erdman placed value on assimilating images from the unconscious mind (art, dreams, and myth). Speaking of the unconscious, Erdman concluded, "Hence it provides insight into dance as a powerful way of embodying and realizing the moving potential of the human soul" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):4).

The period of the late 1940s represented a time of transition for Erdman as she matured not only in artistry but also business acumen. Erdman was intelligent, well organized, literate, and physically beautiful. She forged and ran her own dance company venture at a time in history when women were unlikely to do so. In the early modern dance movement of the United States, Erdman had studied and performed among "the vanguard of progressive women feminists" who were "expanding the bounds of what was permissible" (Soares, 2009, pp. 123, 124). For these reasons, Jean Erdman might be considered a prototype of modern feminism. With the changing energies of the archetypal female in modern times, Erdman remained fascinated with the feminist principle in early Greek and Cretan literature. In *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945), she successfully imagined a female-only society, a matriarchal hierarchy with goddess-like creatures (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9).[4]

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[4] These insights are recorded in the production materials of the Jean Erdman Video Project, specifically in the transcript of *Jean Erdman: Conversation about Her Dances, with Nancy Allison*, dated March 20, 1988 (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9).

This biography of the early life and career of Jean Erdman concludes in the year 1948, but the following information is presented to give a more comprehensive understanding to the next remarkable steps in Erdman's career journey. When Erdman was only 32, she founded the Jean Erdman School of Dance. It was about this same time that both Erdman and Campbell struck up an extraordinary friendship with avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren (1917 – 1961) (Larsen & Larsen, 2002). Separately, both pursued special projects with Deren until Deren's untimely death in 1949.

In 1949, Campbell went with Erdman to the Rocky Mountains, where she taught at the prominent Colorado College summer program, founded by modern dance pioneer Hanya Holm. The couple repeated this experience for five more summers. For three years Erdman directed the modern dance department at Teachers College of Columbia University in Manhattan (1949 – 1951). Subsequently, she also founded dance programs at other premiere institutions of higher learning, including Bard College and the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

Erdman began coast-to-coast tours with her dance company. She became an exemplary figure in American modern dance of the 20th century. She actively pursued strong collaborations with other artists, designers, and musicians who, in addition to Louis Horst, included John Cage, Greg Tucker, Aaron Copeland, Lou Harrison, Norman Lloyd, Gian-Carlo Minotti, Paul Nordhoff, William Schuman, and Teiji Ito. Music scores for the Erdman repertoire included both contemporary and classical genres.

In the early 1950s, Erdman embarked on a very successful performance tour to both Japan and India. This was a time when the post-war sentiments of East Asians remained mostly anti-American. Erdman's shows and diplomacy subsequently opened a

pathway for other American artists to tour in those countries, including, soon after, the Graham Company. The tour of Asia and visits made later to other countries would lead to Erdman's international stardom.

On the American continent, Jean and husband Joseph Campbell were first-hand witnesses to lives devastated by the Red Scare of McCarthyism. The scare seared the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College and the emotional health of the Campbells' mutual friend, dancer Pearl Primus. Erdman and Campbell, nevertheless, were able to maintain successful career tracks.

The late 1940s and the decade of the 1950s were a time when Erdman created many dances, among them the following: *The Perilous Chapel* (1949), *Festival* (1949), *Solstice* (1950), *The Fair Eccentric* (1950), *Portrait of a Lady* (1951), *Changing Woman* (1951), *Sailor in the Louvre* (1951), *Upon Enchanted Ground* (1951), *Pierrot, The Moon* (1952), *Bagatelle* (1954), *Strange Hunt* (1954), *Spring Rhythms* (1955), *Duet for Flute and Dancer* (1956), *Fearful Symmetry* (1957), *Harlequinade* (1957), *Four Portraits from Duke Ellington's Shakespeare Album* (1958), *Now and Zen–Remembering* (1959), and *20 Poems (from e. e. cummings)* (1960). The Campbells' circle of friends continued to expand, to include psychologist C. J. Jung and the American philosopher of Asian spiritual traditions Alan Watts.

Erdman's most noted production was a comedy-drama based on the literary work of James Joyce. Produced in 1962, *The Coach of the Six Insides* brought Erdman an Obie Award and a Vernon Rice Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. The story was based on *A Skeleton's Key to Finnegan's Wake* originally co-written by her husband and first published in 1944 (Campbell& Robinson, 2005/1944). In 1972, Erdman won the

Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Choreography for the Broadway show *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; this was accompanied by a Tony nomination for Best Choreography. Over years that followed, Erdman was bestowed numerous other awards. These included the 1993 Heritage Award from the National Dance Association and the 1995 Honorary Lifetime Member award from the Sacred Dance Guild.

Erdman's most important influence, ally, best friend, and the love of her life remained her husband. The couple's social circles read like a *Who's Who* of notable world personalities. After Joseph Campbell's retirement from a professorship at Sarah Lawrence College, the couple established a New York company together, Theatre of the Open Eye. They continued with the company until his passing from esophageal cancer in 1987.

Campbell himself was destined to influence other major artists of the 20th century, including dancer Martha Graham and later Hollywood screenwriters and film makers such as George Lucas (*Star Wars*) and Christopher Vogler (*The Lion King*). In honor of her husband, in 1990 Jean Erdman helped found the Joseph Campbell Foundation. Erdman served in the capacity of chair emeritus ("Who's who," 2019). Erdman authorized Stephen and Robin Larsen to write Joseph Campbell's biography, and she contributed many personal anecdotes to her husband's story (Larsen & Larsen, 2002).

In her closing years, Erdman resided in her hometown of Honolulu. At age 98 and also at age 100, she participated in birthday gatherings at the Still and Moving Center hosted by long-time friend and tai ji master, Chungliang "Al" Huang (2014). Additionally, the year 2016 was punctuated with several other centennial birthday celebrations for the Hawaiian-born modern dancer. On Oahu, the Hawai'i State Public

Library (2016) presented a month-long retrospective tribute to Erdman and her esteemed artistic work. In New York City, where Erdman had been a long-time resident, four events recognized her unique contributions to modern dance and avant-garde theatre, and her role as an American cultural ambassador to the world ("JCF update," 2016). Programs on myth and modern dance were performed at the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center. Those in attendance at the party witnessed traditional Hawaiian dance, archival footage of Erdman, live performances of her dances, as well as an Erdman dance artistically remade for film by Nancy Allison and Paul Allman (American Dance Guild, 2016).

Jean Erdman passed in 2020 at the age of 104. She remains a remarkable artist who modeled a life well-lived.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to present a narrative biography of the early life and career of American dancer Jean Erdman, to include the family genealogy, the foundational elements of her identity, and insights into the early stages of her professional training and career. As of yet, a comprehensive biography has not been written about her. This dissertation represents an effort in that direction, with the intent that this author will later extend the investigation and biography to include the artist's mature years.

This biographer has aggregated and pieced together a life based on available data on the subject and in recognition of the substantive contributions Erdman made to American history and the theatrical arts. In light of the findings, the author hopes to stand

Jean Erdman both together with and uniquely apart from the shadow of her very famous husband, comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell**.**

Because of the large scope of the project, this biography has been restricted to looking at the early years of Jean Erdman's life and the formational aspects of the dancer's identity from several perspectives: as a product of the times, places, and cultural spheres in which she lived (including family history); as others perceived her; through her interactions with others; through the expression of her interior sense of herself in her writings, utterances, and actions; and through her artistry. The time range of this study, therefore, covers Erdman's genealogy to the subject's birth, her childhood, and her years as a young woman to age 32, a point at which she makes major breakthroughs as a solo artist of national caliber.

Nature of the Study: Telling a Life Story

There are two aspects of biography discussed here. The first aspect is general observations about biography as it affected the writing process and structure of this work. The second aspect is an account of the more specific considerations and methodologies adopted by this author when writing a biography of Jean Erdman.

About biography.

In *Biography as High Adventure*, author Stephen Oates (1986) looks at historical writing as a form of literature that reveals the past in a way that enlivens the present. The intent for this study is similar. *A Hawaiian Heroine's Journey* attempts to go beyond a mere historical chronicle of events in the life of Jean Erdman Campbell. Instead, this author critically analyzes and tries to piece together Erdman's life by looking for consistencies among the philosophies, artistic principles, and intellectual theories that

were important to the subject. This author agrees with Oates: “I was fascinated with the polygonal nature of the discipline” (p. 124). The writer’s intent is to give the reader a deep experience with the subject while gaining an understanding and admiration for the artist and educator, Jean Erdman.

With biographical research, absolute neutrality is not possible in the observation of the subject nor in the language in which the subject is described (Kuhn, 1970). A complex problem for this biographer was the variety of configurations that could be given to the subject’s life. Tough decisions were made as to which configuration might offer the best or the closest true account of Jean Erdman Campbell. Due to interpretive research issues, a biography can never be completely nonfictional. Biographers are not trying to invent data, but it is the biographer who selects the material to be included in the manuscript and interprets it. Therefore, even this biography of Erdman offers, to some extent, an illusion of reality. It crystallizes a form of her life in time, and this author hopes to present it with admiration.

One can never completely define or explain the mystical interior sense of another human being; this sense can be found only within oneself, as captured in the Sanskrit phrase *tat tvam asi* (“thou art that”) (Campbell, 2001, p. 20). However, the way a subject lived gives clues about the inward consciousness. Primarily for these reasons, life histories will remain incomplete translations of a whole being. In what is probably an acknowledgement to Joseph Campbell, the biographer Leon Edel (1979) eloquently describes the writer’s act of probing a life:

> The biographer must learn to know the mask—and in doing this he will have won half the battle. The other half of his real battle, the most difficult part of the task

> [is] this search for what I call the figure under the carpet, the evidence in the reverse of the tapestry, the life-myth of a given mask. (pp. 24-25)

A biographer must wrestle with difficult and uncomfortable questions: "What has been said by the subject and what has been left unsaid?" "What is known about the subject and what remains unknown?"

The craft of weaving qualitative research into an imaginative and connected narrative makes art of the hypothesis. The literary approach to this biography, then, may reveal as much about this biographer as it does about Jean Erdman. The facts of the subject and the writer's approach inevitably affect how each will be perceived. Writer Mark Schorer (1986) has commented similarly: "…biography itself has two subjects and two subjects only—the figure whose life is being re-created, of course, and the mind that is re-creating it, the scrutinizing biographer no less the object of his scrutiny…" (p. 77).

With any biography, moral and ethical questions surround the writing of it. There is the dilemma of whose story is really being told, the subject's or the biographer's. There are obvious tensions and conflicts for the writer that result in various degrees of objectivity. Both the subject and the biographer inherently possess biases of age, gender, class, culture, or race as well as significant preferences concerning values, beliefs, and life itself. Points of view color the specific relationship between subject and writer (Smith, 1994).

It is the biographer who selects and presents information that might be considered significant or insignificant; the biographer grapples with the contradictions, which aspects should be illuminated, and which aspects may best be left for private pondering. Therefore, a biographer's decisions, feelings, and values become integral to the

interpretation of data and the assembling of "dust" to give form to a life (Mariani, 1986). The writing process is, as Mariani (1986) states, "like the God of Genesis breathing life into a few handfuls of ashes" (p. 102). Although this author has done her best to present an honorable biography of Jean Erdman Campbell, all of the difficulties mentioned apply to this manuscript.

Writing the biography of Erdman.

This investigation and account of Jean Erdman was written for the purposes of underscoring her significance in the history of American dance and theatre arts, understanding her signature choreographies, and offering alternative philosophies on dance-making and dance education. The hope is that her life's contributions will long be remembered and not left mostly hidden in archival boxes. From primary source materials and with the aid of historical and interdisciplinary literature, this biography has emerged from disparate pieces to fully form an image of the subject. The intent of this author was not to construct the mere façade of a person, but to assemble and synthesize the personality, thinking, motivations, actions, and essences of the subject's life.

As with grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is often used as a methodology by social scientists, psychologists, and educators, this investigative quest began with a collection of qualitative data. The life data was acquired from numerous archival collections and other primary source materials. For the biographer, the methodology permitted temporary freedom from structures that could have restricted an open mind, reception to indicators about the subject's life, and motivations.

When data was discovered, it was compared and pragmatically cross-referenced with multiple other sources. Conceptualizations evolved, and the general framework for Erdman's life on paper was sometimes reformulated. Unlike grounded theory, however, this author did not go so far as to assign codes to behaviors or concepts belonging to the individual subject. That action would have defeated the purpose of presenting a life story in narrative form.

The biographical investigation revealed Jean Erdman to be an active agent of her own education. She directed her life pathway through experiences and reflections that subsequently resulted in personal transformations. This biographer had the privilege to view how—each time Jean encountered something new—she reconciled, assimilated, or discarded the new knowledge based on previous ideas and experiences. The writer observed the educational theory of constructivism in two ways: (1) in the thinking processes and actions of Erdman's life, and (2) simultaneously in the biographer's own thinking as multiple representations of reality emerged (Jonassen, 1994).

Nothing in the research about Jean Erdman suggested that the subject led anything less than an admirable life. In her personal papers, no evidence reveals long-standing grudges or resentment toward anyone, whether a family member, friend, or stranger. Only a few professional tensions were evident, but it was Jean Erdman's disposition to negotiate these obstacles with forthrightness, dignity, and honor for both herself and others.

For the most part, Erdman dealt with personal difficulties in a private manner. She did not demonstrate self-righteous judgment toward other people; likewise, this author attempts to avoid judgment about the subject. In fact, this biographer adopted the

following Hawaiian phrase as a mantra during the writing process: *O ka meamaikaʻimālama, o ka meamaikaʻi ʻole, kāpae ʻia*, which means to "keep the good, set the bad aside" (Ka Hana Lawaiʻa, n.d., ref. 100103). This was easy to do with Erdman's biography, as she led a wholesome life.

By today's standards, some terms in the literature and the subsequent biography may seem dated or politically incorrect; however, this author decided to preserve them for the purpose of maintaining the original historical context. The terms are a sign of their times, and preserving them helps the reader properly reference the original meanings, specific ideas, and connections across the resources and within the biography manuscript. For example, such words as "Oriental" or "Occidental," were commonly used terms in the early part of Erdman's life.

The identity and personality of Jean Erdman Campbell would have been severely short-changed if the writings and life of Joseph Campbell had not been taken into consideration for this biography. Campbell conspicuously influenced Jean Erdman's life and work during their courtship and forty-seven years of marriage. Campbell's ideas are well ingrained in the mind of Jean Erdman because she edited and responded to so much of her husband's work, conducted dance research based on mutual subjects of interest and used that research in her choreography. Together, they entertained mutual friends and colleagues in their apartment home, travelled extensively, and vigorously participated in dialogues with Joseph Campbell's working associates. In the later years of the couple's lives, the two became formal artistic collaborators.

This author accessed books, films, and other media resources about Joseph Campbell throughout this project. Through them, she was able to map life events of the

couple. Although this tedious task was a labor of love, it served as the best way to also uncover the influences and associations that affected Erdman. It served as a means to grasp her values, understand her thinking, and draw connections to the artist's work. The best assistance for visualizing a complete timeline of Erdman's life came from Stephen and Robin Larsen's book about her husband, *Joseph Campbell, a Fire in the Mind: The Authorized Biography* (1991). Of course, the book focused on Joseph Campbell, but the work was so endearing to this biographer because it was comprehensive. It made clear many disparate pieces of Erdman's life that had been gathered from across dispersed archival collections.

Nancy Allison produced three invaluable videos that documented a large selection of Erdman's choreography. These videos were created with Jean Erdman's involvement. They are greatly beneficial for learning more about specific Erdman choreographies and for hearing authentic reminiscences of Erdman. The video series is known as *Dance and Myth—The World of Jean Erdman* (1995).

With the help of Jean Erdman's niece, Wendy Erdman Surlea, and two recent books—*The Ecstasy of Being: Mythology and Dance* (Campbell, 2017) and Joseph Campbell's *Correspondence 1927-1987* (Campbell, 2019)—the resources cemented several suppositions about the biographical subject. Campbell's frequent correspondence with business associates and friends sometimes revealed aspects of his wife's personality, such as the closeness and love for her husband; her astute observations, intellectualism, and feelings; and the artist's whereabouts during her performance tours and residencies.

Erdman was a prolific letter writer. Some complete correspondence and many full-length letters are available in the *Jean Erdman Papers.* Most of the archival letters,

some with marginal notes, were written in Erdman's own penmanship, which also gave clues to the subject's demeanor. Some letter drafts expressed thoughts not contained in the official letters.

Many of the literary influences that were important to Campbell also have value and meaning to the Erdman biography. Quotations from these influences are interspersed in the Erdman biographical narrative where this author believed they served to clarify, lend emphasis, or illuminate Erdman's idea or position. Such is the case with the work of 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, whose literature had a profound influence on Joseph Campbell.

Analogous to Campbell's writings, this biographer uses Schopenhauer's convictions from "Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of an Individual" (Schopenhauer, 1974/1850) to examine the whole of Erdman's life. The theory accounts for what constitutes the interior of a person, including reactions to exterior events, and also from what fate has set forth as a continuation of a systematic arrangement (Schopenhauer, 1974/1850, p. 204). When looking back over this biography, Erdman's life seemed to be supernaturally guided by the hands of the unconscious "in the consistency of an inborn character" (Schopenhauer, 1974/1850, p. 205), one already predetermined. A study of the family ancestry and Erdman's inborn character serves as an introduction to the biography of the subject. Today, the reader of biography may liken Schopenhauer's philosophical suppositions to 21st century DNA research.

In 1850, Schopenhauer proposed that a life proceeds in time and space, and with causality maintained by the *will* (1974/1850, p. 218). What plays out is a life that is

"profoundly conceived as the finest epic" (1974/1850, p. 204) and bears resemblance to a dream (1974/1850, p. 219).The dream resemblance is considered to be an experience of God—others unconsciously performing as agents in an individual's life and the individual performing as an agent in the lives of others—all synchronous as in a symphony "moved by the one will to life, which is the universal will in nature" (Campbell, 1991, p. 284). The idea of everything in the universe being linked is also a familiar mythic image found in the Indian *Upanishads*; the depiction appears as faceted gems in the Net of Indra. Campbell (1991) beautifully describes the net, "where at every crossing of one thread over another there is a gem reflecting all the other reflective gems" (p. 284).

This biographer borrows Schopenhauer's convictions to support the claim that the Dillingham-Erdman family legacy was critical for setting the stage of Erdman's childhood and for understanding how the subject's life unfolds in the biography. According to Robert Walter (2004), president of the Joseph Campbell Foundation board, it was Schopenhauer who observed that

> …the experiences and illuminations of childhood and early youth become in later life the types, standards and patterns of all subsequent knowledge and experience, or as it were, the categories according to which all later things are classified—not always consciously, however. And so it is that in our childhood years the foundation is laid of our later view of the world, and therewith as well of its superficiality or depth: it will be in later years unfolded and fulfilled, not necessarily changed.

Although not a religious scholar, this author accessed many of the wisdom texts referenced and discussed in Joseph Campbell's body of work. These included ancient resources such as translations of gnostic gospels, the Hindu Sanskrit epic *The Bhagavad Gita* (Johnson, 2008), Old and New Testaments of the Bible (e.g., *New American Bible*, 1992), and the Chinese *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu (Lao Tzu, 2005). Similarly, the research extended to contemporary interpretations of the ancients, such as Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen* (1957) and *Become What You Are* (2003). Interpretations of beliefs from these wisdom texts were drawn to support motivations, actions, and life behaviors of Erdman in the biography. Although not stated outright by the subject, this author concluded that Jean Erdman ultimately believed in human oneness with the universe, or, to adopt a more common phrase, "There is only one of us in the room."

Erdman had a strong upbringing in the Christian tradition and great familiarity with ancient Hawaiian spiritual practices. She was intellectually attentive to the religious and mythological messages of many other spiritual practices, especially those of Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. One thing that can be said about Erdman's actions that reflected this focused attention: She attended to life with vigor, and no moral uncertainty appeared in her actions. Erdman's compass in life was set to the north star—her pathway to bliss (Campbell, 2004). Erdman's understandings of life and her ideas about it were often communicated in sublime feelings and mythological messages that were symbolized in her dances.

Although the *Jean Erdman Papers* (1939 – 2001) offered much material to be considered for this biography, this archive did not necessarily offer a way to make sense of the artifacts of her life. Many archival notes and letters were left undated. Patterns and

interests had to be detected. The investigation was similar to assembling an enormous jigsaw puzzle without knowing the final image to be displayed. From the clues in archival papers, the author looked for consistent thoughts and behaviors that would make sense for how Erdman lived. Piecing together a complete life picture was the most difficult task for this author. The biographer looked for the hidden elements of Erdman's life.

In the subsequent chapter, other literature is described as having impact on the writing of this biography. However, the following questions will remain after this study is completed: Did the biographer capture the features behind the mask (Edel, 1986)? How well was the portrait of Erdman's spirit molded from the particles of "dust" (Mariani, 1986)? It is up to readers to make that determination.

Organization of the Study: The Heroine's Journey

Three major dimensions influenced the organizational construction of this study. The first is the overall writing of biography itself, presented in the chronological sequence of Jean Erdman Campbell's life. The second dimension reflects the dialogic, which interweaves various significant discourses in and throughout the story of her life. The third dimension gives attention to the heroine's journey as an overarching mythological theme and as a way of organizing the chapters within the biography.

Chronologic.

This project presents the biographical narrative in chronological format. It seems that most readers come to biography with the purpose of gaining insights about a person. This author chose to use a chronological format for biographical presentation because she believed it would make the most sense for a reader who identifies with the sequence for

living. Dates within the chronology offer benchmarks for connecting with actual historical events at both global and personal levels.

To make use of the quantity of data available on Erdman's life, the biographer undertook an analysis that required attention to tremendous detail. The study was sequenced by the significant events of Erdman's life. This author also discerned the meaningful threads that crossed through and tied together separate events. The next section describes various discourses that were chosen for the purpose of "sorting out the structures of signification" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9).

Dialogic.

The concept of identity emerged early in the process as a way of studying the facets of Erdman. The subject's identity is examined by exploring her life in the following ways:

- as an extension of the family ancestry;
- as a product of the many places in which she traveled and lived;
- as a product of the times in which she lived, particularly with regard to dance history and to 20th century feminism;
- as others perceived Erdman's personal life and career;
- through evidence of her interactions with her husband, family members, friends and strangers, especially professional colleagues, members of the press, and audiences;
- through what she produced as an artist and why it was significant;
- in the interior sense—that is, what caught her attention; how she thought; her motivations, drive, and concerns; what she knew, believed, and valued. This could

> be determined by what she saved and wrote, what she emphasized in her husband's biography, and resultant behaviors. Jean Erdman seemed to be deeply influenced by philosophies and theories related to mythology, religion and spirituality, cultural studies, history, and psychology. To better understand the subject, the biographer investigated each of these spheres.

These dialogical perspectives are intertwined within the biographical writing. This author hopes that the resultant study will be enriched by the deep investigation of the phenomena and influences that illuminate the subject.

As discussed in the preface, another dimension to the dialogic perspective remains, that is, the viewpoint of the author. This author enters the writing endeavor with the perspective of being a dancer. The selection of Jean Erdman Campbell as a subject of study proved personal for this writer, who felt that, in many ways, she had been planning this study her whole life. Catherine Drinker Bowen (1968) explains this feeling on behalf of biographical writers who identify with their hero or heroine: "Something in the subject's life has touched the biographer's own experience, even though the deed came no closer than a wish" (pp. 66-67).

During the investigation, opportunities seemed to open for this biographer that were not of her design. The investigative journey uncovered clues about Erdman through re-readings of both Campbell's expansive literature and dance history books in her personal library. These sources provided refreshment and enlightenment with respect to Erdman's approach to life. The resources elucidated the various theoretical frames needed for examining the subject.

Writing the biography was not an easy task. The camera lens had to be focused and refocused many times as more archival data was revealed. The subject was realized in a slow mode, like standing in a photography darkroom and watching a film develop over time. The investigation required this author to use her interdisciplinary arts skills to the highest degree to reclaim the visions of possibilities (Greene, 1995). The personal relevance of this biography proved to be an additional dialogic perspective on the biography.

Mythic.

The names of chapters in the biography have been titled to loosely resemble the phases of a hero's adventure, a psychological and mythological subject thoroughly described in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008) by Joseph Campbell. Chapter headings in Erdman's biography are intended to suggest a phase of life, a critical episode, or a particular course of action taken by the subject. Although Campbell wrote about the hero, this biographer has tagged Erdman as the heroine of a real-life adventure. Campbell's monomyth served as a contemporary twist for the dissertation title and the organization of chapters.

Joseph Campbell wrote about the hero's journey while Jean Erdman was simultaneously on her own personal quest—one that explored and blazed new pathways for the art of American concert dance. Since antiquity, the arts have reflected phases of hero's (or heroine's) journey. For this reason, understanding aspects of mythology will lead to better understanding the course of Jean Erdman's life. Specific phases of an adventurer's journey will be further explained in Chapter 2.

Sources of Data

This study was initiated with an introspective look at this author's own research and writings on the New Dance Group (NDG), a topic that had been a ten-year focus of curricula research beginning in 1997. Jean Erdman was a member of the New Dance Group for only a few years. Her name appeared in NDG data of the 1940s but was not given specific attention in this author's previous investigations. However, Jean Erdman's protégé—the dancer, choreographer, and film maker Nancy Allison—was familiar with the author's research and the dissemination of seminal dance works by NDG artists. Allison also desired to make known the work of Erdman as an independent artist. In the later decades of the 20th century and subsequently with the founding of Jean Erdman Dance in 2008, Allison worked tirelessly to preserve and perpetuate Erdman's artistic legacy (*Jean Erdman Dance*, 2020, Welcome [webpage]). Dance performances, stagings, films, educational programs, and a website presence furthered her initiative. It was in 2013 that Allison initiated a conversation about the Erdman legacy with this author. Much work completed by Allison was valuable to this biographical investigation.

Data drawn from Allison includes an interview recorded by the University of Washington Dance Department as part of a documentary DVD titled *Jean Erdman: Creature on a Journey*, in which Allison provided an oral compilation of Erdman's life (Allison, 2013). That interview remains relatively obscure to the public, but Allison recommended the recorded interview to this author in 2017. The University of Washington recording reaffirmed for this writer that a correct sequence of life events had been constructed from data collected for this biography.

Additionally, Allison has carefully reconstructed Erdman's quintessential early dances, most notably *Creature on a Journey* (1943), *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945), *Hamadryad* (1948), *Ophelia* (1946), *Passage* (1946), and *Transformations of Medusa* (1942) (*Jean Erdman Dance*, 2020, Repertory [webpage]). Allison's perpetuation of Erdman repertory has been advanced by the production of a three-part video series, *Dance and Myth*, which was produced in 1995 and includes Erdman's early dances (Allison, 1995-1), group dances (Allison, 1995-2), and later solos (Allison, 1995-3). The reconstruction of Erdman's work was conducted under the auspices of Jean Erdman herself; some sections of the films provide oral commentary by Erdman. Allison has since recreated numerous Erdman dances through workshops, film, the restaging of dances with young performers, and her own solo presentations. Allison informed this author that she had written much of the Erdman biographical information that can currently be found online.

Many details of the Erdman original dances, with production designs and instructions, can be found among the *Jean Erdman Papers* (1939 – 2001) housed in the New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division at Lincoln Center. Allison is the gatekeeper for access to the *Jean Erdman Papers*. Here, an important distinction must be made between life-story writing, on one hand, and, on the other, the interviews and artistic reconstructions of Erdman dances made as the result of Allison's efforts. Although important Erdman information is available from recordings and the *Jean Erdman Dance* (2020) website maintained by Nancy Allison, the online presence is primarily a vehicle for accessing Erdman's repertoire through Allison herself.

In addition to cross-checking Erdman's dances and some life events in alignment with the Allison resources, eight other areas of primary sources were key to benchmarking specific events on the timeline of the subject's life:

- the *Jean Erdman Papers* located in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division archives of the New York Public Library;
- the Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, which "is one of the largest theological libraries in the western hemisphere" (Burke Library, n.d.) and contained important resources relevant to Erdman's ancestral legacy, including missionary resources of the South Pacific Sandwich Islands;
- both the Jean Erdman and Joseph Campbell archival collections located in the Esther Raushenbush Library archives at Sarah Lawrence College;
- books written by Joseph Campbell and mostly published by the Joseph Campbell Foundation;
- dance oral history projects in the Oral History Archives of Columbia University's Butler Library;
- dance resources available through the American Dance Guild;
- the Bennington College Crossett Library archival records associated with summer programs held at the college during the 1930s and 1940s; and
- *Joseph Campbell, a Fire in the Mind: The Authorized Biography* (Larsen & Larsen, 2002).

Jean Erdman's own memories lent another dimension of understanding to the Campbell biography written by the duo Stephen and Robin Larsen. No contradictions were found across the sources, yet each source and collection lent rich, unique details to

the building of the biography. Any small gaps that remained in the timeline of Jean Erdman's life were filled by accessing a variety of primary and secondary sources across numerous disciplines.

A wide range of resources was used in the total investigation of Jean Erdman Campbell's early life and career. Chapter 2 provides an overview of critically important interdisciplinary literature that lends further explanation to the philosophical, theoretical, mythological, religious, cultural, psychological, dance, and historical frames that contextualize Erdman's life, actions, and artistic aesthetic. The frames of contextual information are presented with the hope that they will improve understanding of the subject for the reader.

Chapter 2: The Foundations of Erdman's Approach to Aesthetics and Dance

> "The dance…speaks of potentialities and aspects of man that are antecedent to words, antecedent even to the spheres of personal recollection, and constitute the primary heritage of the embodied human spirit." (Erdman, 1949a, p. 48)

Dance can be a gateway to an enlightened world for those who desire to awaken their inner consciousness. The transcendent power of dance can be accessed through its many styles of expression, from traditional to social, and from sacred to artful forms. Dance has the power to draw attention to the sublime and make meaningful a message that may once have seemed obscure. It often makes visible an emotion of the heart, idea of the mind, and desire or restlessness of the soul. The natural and innate capacity of dance connects people through the transmission of energies from the body of the performer to the senses of the viewer.

Jean Erdman knew the power of dance and was a practitioner of numerous dance forms. She had something to say through dance that could not be said with words alone, for dance supersedes the communication of discursive language. It was through the art of American modern dance that Erdman eloquently rendered and transmitted her once-secret interior creations to the world outside herself. She superbly manipulated elements of dance in symbolic and metaphorical ways to transport her audiences through dream-like states, awaken ancient memories, and present hopes. Erdman's dances were signposts

toward enlightened understandings of both human consciousness and mystical phenomena.

What was the groundwork for Jean Erdman's innovative first choreographies? Who and what were the sources of her choreographic motivations and inspirations? These questions are explored in each of the seven sections that follow: (1) Erdman's studies in ethnic traditions and culturally expressive dance, especially the customs associated with her Hawaiian homeland; (2) an exposé of Erdman's involvement in the pioneering American modern dance movement of the 20th century with the people who formed the important backdrop to her artistic ideas and practices; (3) the influences of myth on Erdman's dances, with its associations to innate bodily wisdom, psychology, and spiritual belief systems; (4) the meaning and purpose of the hero's journey as inspiration for Erdman's choreography; (5) how myth and religion informed Erdman's creative imagination; (6) Erdman's inclinations toward feminism; and (7) Erdman's propensity for evolving her career toward full productions of integrated and total theatre that became a signature of the mature phase of her work. Each of these topics represents a major influence in the early life and artistic career of dancer Jean Erdman.

Dance Traditions

The importance of dance traditions.

Erdman's studies in ethnic traditions and cultural dancing began at home, especially with the customs that were native to her homeland of Oahu, Hawaii. Oahu was an island rich in diversity. It was an alluring geographic place as well as spiritual space where contrasting beliefs and aesthetics met from East and West. Erdman exhibited the pluralism of both perspectives within herself and in outside interests. Her mother was a

Dillingham, a member of Hawaii's "First Family" (Leen, 1961, p. 87). Family members were active in the community and some studied the *heiau* (temple) *hula*, often with the well-known master and priestess, Iolani Luahine (Leen, 1961, p. 95).

With extensive and plentiful cultural experiences made available to Erdman through her worldly family, she did not hold a prejudiced or elitist attitude that favored one style of dance. To her, the varied and complex cultural phenomena represented opportunities to gain fresh perceptions on human existence and the sacredness of its diversity. Jean Erdman made sense of the variety of dance expressions by rationalizing that each style was somehow part of holistic human expression. She was not only fascinated with viewing traditional practices, but also desired to experience them first-hand. Jean Erdman realized that dance and the related arts had potential to unlock the various dimensions and mysteries of life. The phenomena of dance became a lifetime study for her.

A dance tradition is a practice that embeds or transmits the customs, values, and beliefs of a specific cultural group. A dance tradition can have secular or religious significance. A society may practice a tradition to insure its safekeeping especially its transmission to subsequent generations. The social transmission of a dance brings the members of the society together to practice the tradition, binding them in union with each other and providing a sense of belonging.

Traditional dance is critical to the identity, survival, and preservation of established values within a society. Dance is a sign and celebration of life itself. Using ritual and regular cycles of performance, traditional dances offer predictability for members in the group. The dances also provide a psychological balance for both

individuals and the society in which they are practiced. Generally, the context and performance of the dancer's actions are demonstrations for how an accepted citizen should behave. As Erdman stated, "There is value of the uniqueness of each dance tradition – and that each style should be approached as a complete unity" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 10(1:2):9).[5]

Outsiders not familiar with a society's traditional practices may be quick to judge the dances according to their own value system. In some cases, wondrous dance phenomena may be misinterpreted as "strange," "foreign," "unnecessary," "for entertainment only," "simplistic," or perhaps "uncivilized." When dance is not understood by outsiders, conflicts between societies can result. It is common to human nature that one society may judge and then subsequently attempt to diminish, devalue, or suppress the other group where values or beliefs are not in alignment with each other. Jean Erdman occasionally experienced such unfortunate misunderstandings.

When young Jean Erdman departed Hawaii to attend school in the continental United States, Hawaii had not yet become a state. The Territory of Hawaii did not join the union until 1959. To Americans on the mainland, Erdman's place of birth was often labeled "exotic"; outsiders viewing the hula might take a similar impression. The ancient style of hula dancing that Erdman knew from the hula master Mary Kawena Pūku'i employed expressive eyes and face, rhythmic feet coordinated with poetic vocal chants,

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[5] The source document is a letter dated October 16, 1958, from Jean Erdman to a Mr. J.K. Freisen of the University of British Columbia, referring to a lecture at a Brighton Canyon Conference. It is found in a sub-series titled "Tours and Shows, 1944 – 1978 and undated."

swaying hips, and active hands and arms. Thus, when Erdman was admonished for dancing her native hula at her New England boarding school, Miss Hall's School for Girls in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the incident was probably embarrassing and possibly confusing to young Jean Erdman, who had much respect for the dance.

When Erdman was a college girl, she traveled around the world with her family. On the trip, she was intent on learning as much about dance as she could, and she witnessed authentic Javanese, Balinese, and Indian dances in their native contexts. The exposure to a broad range of ideas helped to later stimulate Erdman's ideas for new choreographies in the modern genre. In a letter, Erdman wrote, "Whereas, most Americans are brought up in the context of Europe, I had the Orient and Polynesia in my background" and "I know that experience actually shaped my creative imagination" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 5:6).[6] Erdman actually considered herself to be Polynesian (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):12).[7] It was from this point of view that Erdman cracked open her personal ego, approached human diversity as fractured parts of a complete unity, and permitted her senses to be permeated with the experiences of the outer world; she then transferred her knowledge to the dance. It was becoming evident to Jean Erdman that all the outward roads of study eventually led back to enriching the inward self.

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[6] Erdman's statements appear in a letter dated July 26, 1982, from her to an unknown addressee, and stored in a folder of general correspondence.

[7] Erdman was talking about her time with Martha Graham, in a 1978 interview conducted by Linda Small as part of the Jean Erdman Video Project. The document is found in Series II, sub-series 2: "Theatre of the Open Eye, 1962 – 1989 and undated."

Hula traditions.

"Hula is the language of the heart and therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people."-– David Kalākaua, last king of Hawaii, 1875 (Zarobe, 1992, p. 13)

For followers of Hawaiian indigenous traditions, many ritual and rules must be followed in the worship of deities. Erdman understood these customs. In polytheistic and nature-worshipping Hawaii, "Gods are represented as chiefs dwelling in far lands or in the heavens and coming as visitors or immigrants to some special locality in the group sacred to their worship" (Beckwith, 1970, p. 3). The greatest gods of Hawaii are also recognized throughout Polynesia and include groups of gods primarily associated with Kū, Kāne, Lono, and Kanaloa (Beckwith, 1970, p. 3).

Stories about the gods and their family genealogies are preserved mostly through oral traditions and sacred rituals, which include chanting poetic texts and dancing hula. The traditional practices are "antecedent even to the spheres of personal recollection, and constitute the primary heritage of the human spirit" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:5).[8] Hawaiians preserve the dignity of their ancestral inheritance through their worship traditions, such as the traditions surrounding Kū.

Kū is a commanding nature god of war; he and his wife Hina are associated with procreation and fecundity. Among the Kū family of gods is Ku-ka-ohia-laka, the male patron of the hula dance. Given that he is also worshipped by canoe builders for his

[8] This statement appears to have been written by Jean Erdman in response to correspondence dated February 3, 1988, from Agnes George de Mille Prude.

source of the hardwood tree *ohia lehua*, the red blossoms of the tree are used to adorn the altar in the hula dance hall (Beckwith, 1970, p. 16). Moreover, Hina is represented as the growing ohia tree and is thus the goddess of the *ohia lehua* forest (Beckwith, 1970, p. 17). Much *tabu* (sacred power) surrounds both the wood used to make the hula altar and the blossoms that adorn it. The blossoms are never to be plucked or branches cut without invocation of specific rituals (Beckwith, 1970, p. 17).

The oldest Kū rituals, probably from about the late 1700s, involved prolonged ceremonies lasting at least ten days; often these rituals were instigated by the realization that a calamity might befall the people. In this case, perfect placement for a *heiau* (temple) would be sought and extravagant offerings made to Kū. The entreaties to Kū followed the strictest observance, and ritual offerings might include whole pigs, revered white cloth, special foods, or even the sacrifices of humans (Beckwith, 1970, pp. 26-27). Mistakes in the observance of rituals could mean death (Beckwith, 1970, p. 27). Hula performers, too, followed strictest observance in order to preserve sacredness.

In the 1800s, when sea merchants and the first Christian missionaries began to establish homes in the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii), Kāne was the leading God of gods and was considered an ancestor to both chiefs and islander family gods. Kāne was responsible for creation, in which he formed “the upper heaven of the gods, the lower heaven above the earth, and the earth itself as a garden for mankind” (Beckwith, 1970, p. 42). Thousands of names referred to this one god and thus the offerings to him were to be inclusive and embrace the diversity of all names.

In the prayers offered to Kāne, Laka and Ki’iaka, these goddesses of the hula are invoked; therefore, all flora associated with the sacredness of Kāne is also sacred to these

female gods (Beckwith, 1970, p. 52). Worship of Kāne, protector of life and identified with goodness, was paired with that of Kanaloa, ruler of the dead and often identified with evil. Together, it is believed, Kāne and Kanaloa occupy a secret island place with a garden similar to the earth-like paradise presented in the creation myth of Biblical origin. During periods of illness, Kanaloa's name was invoked in magic rituals to aid in a cure (Beckwith, 1970, pp. 60-61). This is not to imply that Erdman, as a dancer of the hula, was a practitioner of sorcery, but certainly hula dancers were aware of the prayers to ward off evil (Beckwith, 1970, p. 180).

Regarding hula practices, it is important to note the roles of two Pele sister goddesses, Pele herself and Hi'iaka, who are descendants of Kāne. In Hawaiian mythology, their roles are explained as follows:

> In the Hi'iaka myth Pele's messenger is represented as an expert in sorcery and the hula, of which the Pele family as gods of generation are special patrons. The whole Pele and Hi'iaka cycle of stories is rehearsed episodically in the hula dance…The hula songs are not composed by mortals but taught by the Pele spirits to worshippers of Pele. Those who learn the dances are supposed to be possessed by the spirit of the Pele goddess of the dance. An error in the step shows that the patroness has rejected the dancer. (Beckwith, 1970, p. 180)

Ancient hula dance themes frequently draw from aspects and details of the Pele and Hi'iaka stories.

There are three domains of the ancient hula repertoire: the dramatic form of the *hula ʹāla ʹapapa*, the *hula pahu*, and the *hula ʻōlapa.* Ancient hulas are indigenous and distinct from the commonly known Westernized, secular version typical of extraordinary

public shows, which are often seen today as representative of Hawaii. The ancient hulas are known as *hula kahiko*; the secularized versions are the *hula ʻauana* variety.

In *hula kahiko,* the dancer's "movements are vigorous and bombastic rather than soft and languid" as in the *hula ʻauana* style (Stillman, 1998, p. 2). The modern hula seems to have evolved from this last form. Therefore, there is a major distinction between the sacred hulas of the ancient variety, bound to strict observance of rituals that honor Laka, and the modern hula dances that lack rank and dignity and are known as the *hula ʻauana*. Today's popular *hula ʻauana* is easily identified by the sound of the ukulele and guitar played together in Westernized harmonies. It is usually danced for mere social enjoyment. It is probable this form was danced by Jean Erdman and her sisters when the girls were young and entertaining each other.

Historical sources for the ancient domain of *hula ʻāla ʻapapa* are important for having preserved much of the hula repertoire from the Kamehameha dynasty (ruling 1795-1872). This fact should not be lightly dismissed because the prevalent attitude, especially during the late 1800s, favored total suppression of indigenous Hawaiian culture. Prior to changes during the reign of King David Kalākahua,

> [t]he dancing of the hula was viciously attacked. Reverend Sereno Bishop… wrote, "The dance was one of the 'foul florescences' on the great poison tree of idolatry." Bishop said hula corroded Hawaiians and labeled it moral leprosy. (Mary Kawena Pukui, n.d.)

The ancient practices stake the claim of being continuously present since before the time of Hawaiian outsider contact. The distinctions between the *kapu* (sacred) and *noa* (profane) dances became more apparent during the reign of Hawaii's last king, David

Kalākaua (ruling from 1874-1891). King Kalākaua was an advocate for traditional practices, so when the rules of the society changed in favor of preserving them, the ancient hula was no longer banned.

Additional aural and visual criteria distinguish the old and new styles of hula (Stillman, 1998, p. 2). Musically, one instrument is commonly identified with the traditional practices of *hula ʻāla ʻapapa* and *hula ʻōlapa*. The instrument is the *ipuheke*, or double gourd. It is played by striking it on a cloth laid on the sand. The *hula pahu* specifically uses a drum that is covered with a head of sharkskin. *Hula pahu* seems to be associated with rituals performed outdoors. The form tends to be comprised of specific dances rather than representative of an entire style of hula (Kaeppler, 1993). The *mele hula pahu* are the most sacred domain of the dances and are dedicated specifically to the gods. (Stillman, 1998, p. 16).

The ancient hula forms incorporate *mele*, chanted poetic sacred texts. The vocalizations are performed by both the instrumentalists and the dancers. In contrast, modern hulas are mostly sung. There is an interesting structural and rhythmic difference between the two domains of *hula ʻāla ʻapapa* and *hula ʻōlapa*. The chanted *mele hula ʻāla ʻapapa* specifically aligns with the rhythms of the words and the uneven line lengths and sections. Its structure helps to preserve and convey the complete poetic thought of the sacred text (Stillman, 1998, p. 12).

The *mele hula ʻōlapa* is organized into “stanzas” (Stillman, 1998, p. 13), each with an identical number of lines. Each line is considered a musical phrase. Stanzas are separated by a brief instrumental phrase that has recently become known as a vamp. Correspondingly, the dancing of the vamp is indicated by a singular action or brief

sequence executed by one lower body movement motif (Stillman, 1998, p. 13). There is a set choreographic sequence that corresponds to the *mele* at the conclusion of each *hula kahiko* (Stillman, 1998, p. 8).

Sanctions and sacredness of Hawaiian tradition.

Mana is the sacred power that comes from rank (Stillman, 1998, p. 23). For example, the highest gods and goddesses obviously were of higher rank than earthly chiefs, and thus the deities possessed the greatest *mana*. Logically then, chiefs, nobility, and statesmen were of higher rank than ordinary citizens. It is believed that the *mele* as well as the hula dancing possessed *mana* and therefore the sacred power should be carefully employed together with rituals and altar prayers. Rules and prohibitions (*kapu*) were put into place to protect the revered powers, thereby delineating who could participate in ritual dances.

The most sacred dances required ritual protections for the performers, even during the processes of teaching and learning. As stated by Joseph Campbell, "The dancer was the transmitter of a supra-personal, anonymous, inherited form, and literally a priestess" (Campbell, 2017, p. 21). She was therefore set apart in her body and conduct, for through her dancing, she became a "temporary manifestation of an immortal presence. She was therefore *tabu*, her dance *tabu*, and the place of her dance *tabu*" (Campbell, 2017, p. 21).

By 1930, the attitude surrounding Hawaiian cultural practices seemed to be changing and young Jean Erdman had a role to play in the re-introduction and propagation of *hula kahiko* in Hawaiian culture. Erdman studied ancient hula with *kapuna* (ancestral source) Mary Kawena Pūku'i. Erdman aided Pūku'i's effort in the preservation of sacred texts and *mele* chants. In 1934, at the age of 18, Erdman made two

recordings with Pūku'i, thus demonstrating both Erdman's own knowledge and, additionally, her reverence and respect for Hawaii's indigenous culture. Both recordings were of the *hula ʹāla ʹapapa* domain and are noted in the quintessential book on the form, *Sacred Hula: The Historical Hula 'Āla'apapa* by Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman (1998). The recordings included *Poe Puna I ka wa'apololoa ka 'ino* (Stillman, 1998, p. 63) and *Punana ka manuiHa'ili* (Stillman, 1998, p. 70).[9]

It was in 1949 that the Hawaiian Territory's legislature commissioned Mary Kawena Pūku'i and Samuel Elbert to co-author the official *Hawaiian-English Dictionary*. Finally published in 1957, the essential book of language was followed by numerous editions. With her extensive scholarly writings, translations, and other publications, in 1981 Pūku'i was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1994, Mary Kawena Pūku'i's extraordinary work was deemed so important that she was the first inductee into the Hawaiian Music Hall of Fame (Mary Kawena Pūkui, n.d.). Pūku'i was not only a preservationist but a composer of new Hawaiian songs for both children and adults. It seems that Pūku'i served as Jean Erdman's earliest example of how an ancient form could find transformational new life in a modern world.

Ancient influences on the modern.

Jean Erdman's intellectual curiosity and self-regulation seem to have been at least partially derived from studies of various mythological traditions combined with deep understandings of Hawaiian spirituality and Christian theology. It was through the

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[9] According to Amy Kuʻuleialoha Stillman (1998), the recordings made by Erdman and Pūku'i are documented in a text source listed as "Mader 1934-40:9.37."

ministry of Erdman's father that the youngster gained extensive knowledge of Old and New Testament teachings, thereby developing an ability to make sound cross-cultural connections across theologies. Erdman's early experiences in various traditions and religious practices provided artistic inspiration for future choreography and contributed to the success of her modern dance career.

Jean Erdman's innovative choreographies were birthed from the joining together of ways both old and new. Whereas in the traditional hula culture an individual is sacrificed to the goals of the group, in contrast, modern dance fosters and features individual self-expression. Joseph Campbell noted that joining the two approaches offered the potential to positively unite the divided modern psyche (Campbell, 2017, p. 51).

As a choreographer, Jean Erdman often drew from world mythologies and traditions to communicate with audiences on a profound level. Erdman's modern dances made numerous references from myth to real life so that people could see relevance in the subject matter. Her mythic and dream-like choreographies often drew upon images such as trees, heroes, magical islands, the moon, or lovers. For example, one of Erdman's suite of dances, *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle*, tells of an island of virgins. One inspiration for the dance, whether conscious or subconscious, may have been a particular Hawaiian myth. That story tells

> …of a highborn maiden kept apart in a tapu [holy] place, surrounded by maidens, and watched over by careful guardians until a suitable match can be found for their ward. The setting here is that of one of the floating islands of the gods. (Beckwith, 1970, p, 501)

Other myths and folktales could be claimed as the source of inspiration for *Daughters*, including a 12th century Celtic legend about a Land of Maidens, or even an Arthurian legend that refers to a castle visited by the knight Gawain or another man, and what he might find if observing the maidens there (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 16:4).[10] It should be noted that similar myths about isles of women are abundant in other parts of the globe and could also have served as, or been assimilated into, source material for Erdman's dance. Jean Erdman, however, specifically acknowledged the influence of literature written by feminist Jane Harrison, who wrote of the Greeks and Cretans. Erdman asserted that the example provided a view of a matriarchal society where the goddess was supreme (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9).[11]

Jean Erdman would prove to be a life-long student of cultural traditions and dances. After leaving Martha Graham's modern dance troupe in 1943, Erdman studied Spanish dance with Jose Fernandez (Campbell, 2017, p. 162). In the 1940s, while Erdman was a member of the New Dance Group, she traded hula lessons for Haitian dance lessons with choreographer and anthropologist Pearl Primus (1919-1994) (Campbell, 2017, p. 162). In the late 1940s, Erdman continued studies of classical ballet at the American Ballet Theatre (Campbell, 2017, p. 162). She subsequently studied Yang T'ai Chi Chuan with master Chao-Li Chi (1927-2010). As a result of Erdman's deep education in dance, she advanced the position that an individual cannot claim ownership

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[10] Filed with papers dated 1943 – 1992, this document is an undated draft for program notes on early works.

[11] The cited document is p. 4 of Folder 9, "Production Materials, the Jean Erdman Video Project," in Series II, sub-series 2: "Theatre of the Open Eye, 1962 – 1989 and undated.

of a technique or dance form, for "[t]he style belongs to dance, not to the dancer" (Campbell, 2017, p. 162). Erdman explained that it was important not to simply combine elements from the vast storehouse of movement possibilities, but rather to understand and coordinate the dance elements "in terms of the range of movement that a technique for dance training can encompass" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 7:8).[12] The purpose, then, for Erdman's comprehensive studies in a variety of dance forms was to "analyze the forms and principles of her art from every possible angle. The result is a rich and magically eloquent style, profoundly grounded in a remarkable understanding" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 2:1).[13]

It was fitting that, at a 100th birthday celebration for Jean Erdman in New York City, a tribute to her modern dances was introduced by performance of a traditional style hula, *UaAoHawai'I* (*Hawaii Has Seen the Light of Day*) (American Dance Guild, 2016).[14]

The Influences of the American Modern Dance Pioneers on Jean Erdman

Jean Marion Erdman's contributions to dance were critical to the American modern dance movement of the 20thcentury. The pioneers of the modern dance revolution

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[12] The box is labeled "Correspondence—General, 1941 – 81" and the document is an undated draft letter written apparently by Jean Erdman in reply to Katharine Wolfe's letter of November 1, 1952. Wolfe worked in the administrative offices of the Seattle Public Schools.

[13] The source document is dated January 4, 1950. This information was disseminated in a second round of press releases by Jean Erdman's manager, Ellen Weller, and was directed to Mr. Seymour Peck at *The Compass,* a publication originating in New York City. The release was written following an Erdman performance at Hunter Playhouse on January 22, 1950.

[14] The program notes identify this dance among others for the performance at the 92nd Street YM/YWHA on October 14, 2016.

had been Erdman's teachers and mentors; they formed an important backdrop to her ideas, principles, and practices. Martha Graham, Louis Horst, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman influenced Erdman's own formulation of approaches for dance training, teaching, choreography, and principles of aesthetics. The grounding dance studies with the early moderns profoundly affected Erdman's work in the 1930s and 1940s, and they remained influential throughout her 20th century career. The foundations for Erdman's approach to dance will be examined in five sections: (1) the historical and sociological frames for the new American modern dance;(2) people who spurred the artistic development of young Jean Erdman and her career; (3) differences in dance technical training; (4) a nod to the musician Louis Horst; and (5) the beginning formulation of Erdman's new movement principles.

The historical and sociological frames for Erdman's approach to dance.

Modern dance arose during the very late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. It was distinctly different from the classical ballet style that was prevalent during the Romantic era, which was approximately from the 1830s to 1870. Classical ballet often presented a direct or literal interpretation of the music; both dance and music were performed together as entertainment and to enhance the spectacle. Prior to the 20th century, choreographers often imitated the musical rhythms of a score in the action of a dance; direct associations between the two arts were similarly adopted in terms of tempi, dynamics, and pitch. Ballet choreography primarily aligned itself to the form and structure of the accompanying musical composition. Interestingly, Jean Erdman, in the beginning stages of her professional career, had never seen ballet nor encountered its specific vocabulary of movement; she was not familiar with the relationship of ballet

action to music until she had already become immersed in the technique and dance-making of Martha Graham.

Classical ballets of the past had been patronized by the wealthy. The Western dance form had been dominated by male dance masters who created choreographies and tutored members of the royal courts. The powers of the court were to be displayed through an array of wealthy spectacle and courtly rank. Dances usually featured symbolism and topics favorable to the realm in power. Ballerina demeanor and actions in the early classical era were designed to emanate an aura of femininity. Ballerinas appeared ethereal and frail, and were typically supported by males in the execution of difficult balances and turns.

Modern dancers sought independence from male domination, a unique artistic voice, and opportunities to display a woman's strength of body and ideas. The modern dance movement represented a revolt against domination, especially against the monarchs of the European courts and all they stood for; the rigid ballet system certainly was integral to kingly realms. Therefore, as a symbol of the new style of modern dancing, the classical ballet pointe shoes came off in favor of dancing barefoot.

The American Isadora Duncan introduced many parts of the world to this naturalistic approach to artful dancing. Whereas the profile of the ballerina had traditionally been erect and nearly immobile due to the confines of a corset, the new style of concert dance favored a liberated torso and articulated spine. Whereas the upright stance of the classical ballet form provided a sense of floating above the cares of the common world, the moderns often displayed strength and did not hesitate to work the dancing body on the stage floor. Modern dancers freely offered commentary and

symbolically demonstrated the struggle of the human condition. The early modern dancers chose to explore the entire spectrum of bodily movement with its surprising range of energies and psychological motivations. As a result, new anatomical and kinesthetic training principles evolved and were adopted by the dancers. In contrast to the ballet, the modern dancers of the 20th century believed anyone could make a dance on any subject from personal to political. Modern dance emphasized the non-decorative, aesthetic of minimalism.

Various and unique movement principles were founded by individual dancers to meet the demands of training and performing imaginative choreographies. Thus, specific ways of training became identifiable with the techniques of the individual pioneers. Today, the various modern dance styles can be recognized by tracing a dancer's lineage back to a founder of the early period.

As a young woman, Jean Erdman made no association to the older European classical ballet style nor to its aesthetic with its preference for dazzling spectacles. Her first dance experiences were of the earthly realm. Jean Erdman had learned a variety of dance styles growing up in Hawaii, including the ancient hula and contemporary Duncanesque dance. These forms, in particular, required remarkable rhythmic and body part articulations not used in the ballet.

Erdman's background provided her with a unique socio-economic position that enabled her to see the value of ideas held by both rich and poor alike. Her family, the Dillinghams, frequently entertained high-ranking politicians and members of royal aristocracy. These spectacular occasions were marked by extravagant state dinners, political discussions, and the intermingling with world-ranking dignitaries. In contrast to

this lavishness, Jean Erdman's father was a minister who served the poor and immigrant populations of Hawaii, especially Japanese laborers. From an artistic point of view, Erdman was familiar with the minimalist aesthetic typical of Japanese theatre. The new concert dance of America commonly reflected this Asian aesthetic in its use of minimalism and abstraction. As stated by Joseph Campbell, "Modern concert dance is outside of thought and therefore closely aligns with Eastern theology" (Campbell, 2003, p. 6).

The first pioneers of modern dance included North Americans Loïe Fuller, Maude Allen, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. In Germany, Mary Wigman developed her own dance technique and expressions. Wigman had studied with Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, the developer of Eurythmics methodology, which combined drama and music with dance to emotionally express ideas. From Eurythmics, Wigman went further to formulate what became known as abstract expressionist dance; this was characterized by its emotional and provocative qualities.

Wigman had also been a student of Rudolf von Laban, who developed a system for analyzing and notating dance using symbols. By applying Laban's analysis to her own dancing, Wigman could identify specific dynamic energies that she felt best suited the emotional qualities for a specific choreography. The range of movement qualities employed by Wigman had not previously been seen in the field of ballet.

Wigman's approach to expressionistic dance was taught to Jean Erdman through Wigman's student, Hanya Holm. Hanya Holm, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman followed the first generation of modern dance founders. This

pioneering group came to be known as the Big Four. The Big Four were Jean Erdman's foundational teachers in the new modern dance.

In both America and Germany, modern dance began to reflect both the political and social concerns of the day. In 1927, one of Graham's new dances stood out to audiences because it clearly indicated a leaning toward social protest, this occurring at a time when many of New York's artists began expressing a preference for Marxism (Graff, 1997). Migrant and immigrant populations were ever-growing in the United States; the persecuted and many poor made their way to New York City. Many of New York's modern dancers were drawn from this population.

Dancers made activist statements on the economic inequalities and unfair treatment of factory workers. The modern dancers were concerned about alienation and the severe poverty in which they were engulfed. They danced about the economic depression and the numerous political struggles taking place in the world, including the Spanish Civil War and the climate of war in general. Although expressionistic dance could not survive in the sphere of rising Nazism in Germany, in the U.S., choreographers responded to the tragic times in which they lived.

In New York City, many artists arrived in the U.S. as a result of wars. Jews who were exiled from Russia and Germany landed in the United States. From the Southern U.S., unemployed Blacks migrated north to find work. Through no fault of their own, the exiled populations either remained unemployed or sought mechanized jobs in industrial districts of New York. The public needed relief from the thoughts of war, the boredom of factory life, and the stressful mechanization of the city environment. In a dance history book by Sali Ann Kriegsman (1981), the author interviewed George Beiswanger, a dance

aesthetician and a guest lecturer at Bennington School of the Dance during the summers of 1935 and 1938. He commented on humankind's need to address the social phenomena:

> The modern man is inescapably beset by the problems of a mechanized way of living. He wants to know what the values are which may be extracted from it. He needs an art which, accepting movement as its medium, may show him how to compel the machine to administer to his deeper wants. (p. 280)

Throughout these tough times, people mostly retained respect for the customs and folk traditions of their homelands. The stories of old sometimes served as inspirational sources for new dances in the modern idiom. Simultaneously, there was a fascination with the continued expansion of the western United States. U.S. and immigrant artists therefore struggled to discern a national identity: *Who is an American? What is American dance?*

The founders of modern dance "[t]urned away from two forms: the dry technicalities of the ballet, and the vague formlessness of the 'interpretive' dance" (Horst & Russell, 1961, p. 16). They were trying to find and define their original artistic voices. Modern dance opened itself to multiple perspectives and opinions. At the outset of her career, the modern dance movement embraced Jean Erdman, the young woman from the Territory of Hawaii.

Innovators who spurred the artistic development of young Jean Erdman.

At Sarah Lawrence College, Erdman's technical and choreographic approaches were first explored in the drama classes, dance activity, and extracurricular experiences in which she participated during her freshmen year (1934-35). Erdman (1980) had regular studies in literature of the theater (p. 22) and was comfortable improvising on a dance

theme assigned to her within the context of a play. With her Duncanesque background, Jean Erdman had until that time relied on her abilities to improvise. Erdman (1980) aimed her performance concerns toward "[f]eelings and significance and depth and strength" (p. 30). Erdman used her musical, speaking, and dancing abilities to obtain roles in various school productions, which were often produced by professional directors from New York City.

Erdman's regular dance classes at Sarah Lawrence in the 1930s were with Marian Knighton, who had Wigman training (Erdman, 1980, p. 12). Since Knighton's methodology was more of a physical education approach to movement innovation, it used some visual imagery but did not emphasize dramatic motivation (Erdman, 1980, p. 14). From Erdman's point of view, it was "purely kinetic and kinaesthetic" (Erdman, 1980, p. 14). Knighton's training for students was supplemented by studies with Martha Graham and various members of the Graham Dance Group who regularly taught at the college.

The techniques and vocabulary introduced in the Sarah Lawrence program with Knighton seemed to mesh well with the professional classes taught by Martha Graham (Erdman, 1980, p. 13). The Graham training involved considerable practice with breathing exercises, contraction and relaxation of the deep abdominal muscles, stretching and bending, and falling to the floor in various directions; there was also an emphasis on strong dynamic attacks (Erdman, 1980, p. 13). The source of Martha Graham's actions was centered in the pelvis and the spine, which she called "the tree of life" (Freedman, 1998, p. 63). While Jean Erdman was taking beginning classes with Martha Graham and Graham group associates, the young dancer saw a solo Graham performance and "was

absolutely transported" by the power of the new modern art (Erdman, 1980, p. 3). Erdman felt the need to understand and explore it.

Graham's solid reputation was growing and it was particularly enhanced among the teachers and budding dancers, such as Jean Erdman, who sought professional development at the Bennington School of the Dance during the summer of 1934. A member of Graham's early group, Dorothy Bird, told of the excitement and passion surrounding the choreographer:

> She made exorbitant demands upon herself and her students, terrifying many and alienating some. But most students admired her, and the dedicated young women who danced as members of the Group came to worship her. (Freedman, 1998, p. 64)

During this period, Graham was still developing her own choreographic voice and there seemed to be two prongs to her interests. Her choreography revealed political motivations, such as with the dances *Imperial Gesture* (1935), which demonstrated the disintegrating power of a monarch, and *Deep Song* (1937), choreographed in response to the Spanish Civil War. In 1938, Martha Graham's ensemble also performed a benefit concert on behalf of the democratic cause in Spain (Graham, 1991, p. 153). Yet Graham wanted her dances to be meaningful to audiences in other ways, and therefore she chose to explore dimensions of her inner self. In the 1930s, Graham began move away from political and controversial dances, and finally went beyond the compositional approaches of her early years, which had been heavily influenced by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn.

Primitive Mysteries (1931) was a testament to that change with its connection to the American Southwest and religious images. The dance was informed by a strong

mythological understanding. There appeared to be "an inward source and resource, affirmative of the ordeal of life, and … of a heritage of archaic and primitive ritual forms" (Campbell, 2017, p. 152).

The "inward turn" represented by *Primitive Mysteries* seemed a more favorable approach to Graham's selection of subject matter for choreography. She became entranced by ideas from depth psychology and world mythologies. The turn coincided with Jean Erdman's marriage to Joseph Campbell and Erdman's new role in Graham's group. Campbell remarked about Martha Graham's inclination toward using myth as subject matter, "Only in the context of the Graham-Horst studio and association was there anything like a serious study begun of mythological themes and principles of order, and even there only after Mary Wigman's two visits to the United States in 1930 and 1931" (Campbell, 2017, p. 150).

Following *Primitive Mysteries*, Graham continued to seek out myth as inspiration for dance; this could be seen in her dance commentary on sin and penance in *El Penitente* (1940). The piece, with music by Louis Horst, premiered at Bennington College Summer School of Dance in Vermont. The 1940s subsequently became known as Graham's "Greek period" as she continued to explore myth as inspiration for dance. Just as Joseph Campbell was to influence the thinking behind the great works of Graham, he was also to influence the life and career of his new wife, Jean Erdman.

Based on conversations about myth with Joseph Campbell and Jean Erdman (Graham, 1991, p. 163), Graham revisited her fascination with Greek myth well into her later career. This fascination is seen in such works as *Errand into the Maze* and *Night*

Journey, both created in 1947, again with *Clytemnestra* (1958), and *Phaedra* (1962). Graham commented on the source of the mythological influence in her dances:

> Jean Erdman, a dancer in my company, was there [Bennington School of the Dance] with her husband, Joseph Campbell…Joe was a luminous being in all of our lives, one who opened gates to mysteries past through his knowledge and insight into myths and legends that touch all civilizations. His intuitive soul and spirit guided him and us through these gates, on journeys of discovery. He enabled us to treasure and to use the past and to recognize the blood memory within each of us. I have so often said that dance should illuminate the landscape of man's soul, and in my journey through that landscape Joe was a profound influence. (Graham, 1991, p. 163)

As Martha Graham began her early dive into mythology, in 1934 the Bennington School of the Dance at Bennington College in Vermont was in its first iteration of offering summer intensives of professional training. The training was targeted to persons interested in the modern form. Jean Erdman's approach to dance training and composition rapidly expanded with her participation in the sessions. During the summers of Erdman's college years, she first attended the Bennington School of the Dance in 1937 as a select student in the general program (McPherson, 2013, p. 105). By this time, Erdman was distinctly using myth as a basis for her own choreographic inventions, beginning with her first complete choreography, *Transformations of Medusa* (1937).

Erdman attended the Bennington School of Dance during the summer of 1938 as a Graham Concert Group apprentice along with Erick Hawkins. Erdman and Hawkins were among the group of eleven apprentices that season (McPherson, 2013, p. 139). That

summer brought a severe diversion from the usual codified approach of Martha Graham. Beyond the modern dance training, Erdman experienced more varied dance technical exercises. This began when Martha Graham requested that Hawkins teach ballet to her dancers.

Within a very brief period of time, Erdman had gone from the training extremes of using modern dance's vocabulary of parallel leg positions and flexed feet to the vocabulary of the ballet using turned out positions and pointed feet (Erdman, 1980, p. 55). The range was physically demanding for the young dancer, yet it gave her versatility and increased proficiency in her performance capabilities.

Jean Erdman continued to study and perform with Graham at Bennington, and Graham began incorporating and combining words with abstract movement. Graham's first experiment of this nature was the dramatic *American Document* (1938), which premiered in Vermont and was created as a response to the rise of fascist propaganda in Europe.

The dance featured speeches and excerpts from numerous classic American documents associated with the founding of the United States. For this piece, Jean Erdman was performing in the Bennington group with the Graham company in which Erick Hawkins also made his debut in modern dance. Speaking appeared again, from another perspective, in Graham's Americana *Letter to the World* (1940) (Erdman, 1980, p. 49). Up to that point in Martha Graham's choreography, there had been no vocalizations; the "priestess" had adhered to the mantra "the movement explains itself" (Erdman, 1980, p. 50). The addition of speech to Graham's dance performance "was an aesthetic departure

for modern dance" (Erdman, 1980, p. 52). Nevertheless, from her childhood, Jean Erdman recalled seeing a similar aesthetic in Japanese and Chinese theatre.

The point of the Graham's experiment with speech was not for action to mimic the meaning of words, as is often done with exaggerated gestures in the ballet. Rather, the intent was for the actions of the dance to be enhanced by selective speech. Jean Erdman was performing in Martha Graham's company as increased attention was given to dramatic intentions. Works such as *Every Soul is a Circus* (1939) and *Punch and the Judy* (1941) were the result. The emotional drive for using words was derived from the physical organization (Erdman, 1980, p. 55). What Erdman discovered, when Graham gave her the dance with speaking parts, was that she could hold command of the stage on her own (Erdman, 1980, p. 56).

After leaving Sarah Lawrence, touring the world with her parents, and marrying Joseph Campbell, Jean Erdman performed as a member of Graham's Dance Group at Bennington through the years 1940-1942. In 1940, she premiered her original dance, *Transformations of Medusa*, under the direction of Louis Horst (McPherson, 2013, p. 170). Additionally, she danced in the first performance of Graham's *Letter to the World* (McPherson, 2013, p. 176). In the revised version of *Letter to the World* that followed in 1941, Erdman replaced the actress Margaret Meredith in the role of "The One Who Speaks" (McPherson, 2013, p. 191).

In the summer of 1940, Jean Erdman, Erick Hawkins, and Jane Dudley also gave a concert of their own dances. The trio performed together in the piece *In Time of Armament* (McPherson, 2013, p. 198). The same trio performed with Graham in *Every Soul is a Circus*, alongside Ethel Butler, Merce Cunningham, Nina Fonaroff, Pearl Lack

(Lang), and Marion Scott. That performance was part of a larger concert that included Doris Humphrey's *The Shakers* and Charles Weidman's *Lynch Town* (McPherson, 2013, pp. 199-200). That same summer Graham also premiered *Punch and the Judy*. A similar casting included Ethel Butler, David Campbell, Merce Cunningham, Jane Dudley, Jean Erdman, Nina Fonaroff, Martha Graham, Erick Hawkins, Pearl Lack (Lang), Sasha Liebich, and David Zellmer (McPherson, 2013, p. 204).

The last summer of the School of the Dance at Bennington was 1942. As usual, Erdman's participation was captured in the performance credits:

> The Martha Graham Dance Company performed *American Document*, and dancers William Bales, Jane Dudley, Jean Erdman, Nina Fonaroff, Henrietta Greenhood (Eve Gentry), Sophie Maslow, and Nona Schurman presented the work. In addition, Merce Cunningham and John Cage presented their first collaboration (co-choreographed by Jean Erdman) (McPherson, 2013, p. 208).

While at Bennington, Jean Erdman had gained critical dance knowledge and skills through focused studies with the Big Four—Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, and Holm—and later in the ballet with Erick Hawkins. Repertory performances were an important component of the summer experience for young dancers. The season culminated in formal and shared new works by the masters, and a few independent artists explored new choreographic themes and approaches. Martha Graham had encouraged three of her own dancers to take these steps (Soares, 2009, p. 144). During that last summer, Erdman, Cunningham, and Fonaroff were each featured in a concert. Each performed solos, and Erdman and Cunningham performed duets. "The content of this one concert gave a glimmer of the direction dance would take in the ensuing years," stated Janet Mansfield

Soares (2009) in her biography of Bennington's most renowned teacher, Martha Graham Hill (p. 144).

Additionally, in 1942 Jean Erdman performed in dances composed by up-and-coming stars such as Anna Sokolow (Erdman, 1980, p. 16; McPherson, 2013, p. 116). Sokolow later became known for her fusion of dance and drama. Erdman was present when Jose Limón crafted new choreography for the Bennington audiences. Erdman (1980) was keen to remember Helen Tamaris who performed abstract dances with a very independent mindset (p. 19).

Differences in dance technical training.

Throughout the period of the Bennington summers, a cautious and somewhat competitive attitude prevailed among the followers of the Big Four regarding the technical execution of exercises and choreography. As a student, Erdman had been influenced so much by Graham that she called herself

> a dyed-in-the-wool Grahamite. And I believed Martha Graham's philosophy of movement starting from the torso and going out from there into other parts of the body. And if you didn't do that, you were decadent or peripheral or something bad.
>
> So [t]hen I had this class with Doris Humphrey who had another whole idea about it. She had the fall-and-recovery thing. She taught us some very nice falls, the spiral fall and everything, but there was one fall that I couldn't understand from the point of view of the Graham way…
>
> Well, that idea of allowing weight to take over…articulation from the periphery…then having to go through the whole body. Never heard of it…And it

did not involve this center [specific source of bodily action]. (Erdman, 1980, p. 29)

Confusing Erdman was the execution of the fall; it was quite logical to the mind yet Erdman's emotional loyalties remained in Martha Graham's camp. The Humphrey-Weidman approach to the movement often and purposefully began in the periphery of the body, such as articulating the hands and pointing the feet (Erdman, 1980, p. 31). Erdman (1980) described her response to the contrasting techniques:

> There was a way of using the body in space that didn't involve enough of the torso attack which I had become so enamoured of…You see, every time you used a limb in Martha Graham's class, it would have come from some changes in the body and then…we would never follow the outside of yourself to the inner. You'd only go from the inner to the edge. And so whenever I wasn't given that kind of movement, I thought it was shallow. (p. 34)

In the Humphrey-Weidman classes at Bennington, Jean Erdman definitely enjoyed letting her body weight give into gravity and feeling the sensation of subsequent recovery away from the ground. The momentary lack of control from "giving in" was what, as Erdman (1980) remarked, "Louis and Martha Graham were really dead set against" (p. 31).

When it came to music, Jean Erdman (1980) especially liked the feelings associated with the rhythms and syncopations of the Humphrey-Weidman exercises and dance phrases (pp. 33, 35). The philosophical position of Doris Humphrey was that "[m]y dance is an art concerned with human values. It upholds only those which make harmony and opposes all forces inimical to those values" (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 287). Her approach

was to develop technique based on the natural movement of the body, as Humphrey described,

> I wish my dance to reflect some experiences of my own relationship to the outside world; to be based in reality illumined by imagination; to be organic rather than synthetic; to call forth a definite reaction from my audience; and to make its contribution toward the drama of life. (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 284)

It was critically important to find innovative ways of dancing in the new age of anti-ballet. Doris Humphrey had stated about the earlier dance forms, "I feel the old technique was foreign in every way to the world we live in and must be discarded" (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 284). Weidman expressed a similar position: "Active life demands that we be mentally and emotionally aware of the world's continual change and realize the constant progressions and retrogressions" (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 284). Participants at the Bennington School were well aware of their revolutionary position in the history of dance, and as stated by Martha Graham, "No real artist is ahead of his time—he *is* his time—but the public is sometimes unwilling to desert nostalgic memories of an earlier day and face the present as an artist must" (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 288). The demands for Graham dancers were indeed superordinary, for she called them "acrobats of God" (Freedman, 1998, p. 11).

At Bennington, the camps of each of the Big Four did not greatly intermingle. Again, there were numerous distinctions in the technical training approaches among the pioneers and each sought to advance his or her artistic cause within the confines of a trusted group (Erdman, 1980, p. 38). In the Graham group there was a degree of obstinacy toward Hanya Holm's instruction, which was rooted in the German Wigman

technique. However, Jean Erdman appreciated Holm's sound sequencing of instruction, especially the lecture demonstrations and the technical progressions of circular and curving exercises (Erdman, 1980, p. 35); with those actions, smoothness through the joints was emphasized but dynamic attack was not (Erdman, 1980, p. 36). Holm gave particular attention to the alignment of the pelvic area with the spine. When that alignment was correctly applied, "then the top of the torso was free and yet there was always control" (Erdman, 1980, p. 36). The beauty of Holm's work could be found in horizontal flows of action, bodily vibrations, and rebounds into the air (Erdman, 1980, p. 37).

Perhaps one of Jean Erdman's greatest insights on dance came from the philosophy expounded by Holm. As Joseph Campbell recalled, Holm emphasized an inner motivation for dance action, where the work "should evolve out of its own demands, not only in special gestures, but also in particular tension and even distinct technique" (Campbell, 2017, p. 145). (For further clarification, also see Holm, 1935, pp. 129-33).

Jean Erdman was present at Bennington in 1937 when Holm presented her first dance in the U.S. It required a massive cast with 33 dancers, and it may have had a critical impact on Erdman's thinking. The New York critic John Martin defined it as "one of the most important works of the period" and opined that it took dance on a "new road toward an organic synthesis of the theatre arts" (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 63, fn. 1)

The Holm method, which Erdman experienced, often started with relaxation. Graham was vehemently opposed to this approach, and Jean Erdman (1980) recalled that "Martha Graham used to say, 'There is no such thing as relaxation in dance. There is only

change"' (p. 32). Erdman observed how the principles of breath varied from one technique teacher to another. Wigman used deep breaths as impulses for movement, Isadora Duncan used natural breathing, and Graham's method coordinated the breath with the muscle contraction-release principles of her technique (Erdman, 1980, p. 32). The dynamics of how force appeared within a dance, the degree of strength or relaxation in the muscles, also contrasted between the teachers. Doris Humphrey emphasized a lightness to her jumps, leaps, and attacks, whereas Graham stressed strength and grounding in these actions. Jean Erdman's focus was to practice the strictly codified style of Graham.

Erdman personally related to Graham's technique, stylization, and aesthetic. Graham's methods were familiar to her, but also Erdman (1980) recognized Graham's own understanding of oriental theater and Japanese dance, and noted the aspects of Asian aesthetic in dances presented by Graham (p. 5). The young dancer's acquaintance with Asian dance and theatre enhanced her appreciation of Graham's choreography: "I knew enough of Martha Graham's repertory to recognize the movements" (Erdman, 1980, p. 10). Jean Erdman recognized steps even though they had been assigned different meanings (Erdman, 1980, p. 10). In fact, Graham had gained exposure to Hindu and Japanese aesthetics when, during her teenage years, she had studied with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn at the Denishawn School in Los Angeles, California. Jean Erdman's husband, Joseph Campbell, later observed of Martha Graham,

> [s]he took much inspiration from the Orient, particularly from Japan, by way of that great creative personality Michio Ito, and the art of Isamu Noguchi, the designer of her later [stage] sets. And this gave her the assurance of a substantial

mythic background, out of which to develop her own personal adventure." (Campbell, 2017, p. 60)

A nod to musician Louis Horst.

Through her years at Sarah Lawrence College and the intermittent Bennington summers, Jean Erdman received rigorous training in music for dance; this was important preparation for dancing in the company with Martha Graham. Music training and dance composition were taught by Graham's close associate, musical accompanist and composer, Louis Horst (1884-1964). Horst had been working with Graham since their time together with the Denishawn dancers in Los Angeles, from 1915-1925 (Stodelle, 1964, n.p.). It was Louis Horst and Martha Graham who organized the first New York concert of "Martha Graham and Dance Group" on April 18, 1926 (Freedman, 1998, p. 42). From then onward, Horst continued to compose and play for concerts as well as Graham's classes.

For the dancers, including Jean Erdman, Horst emphasized the study of historical musical forms along with their influence on modern dance. He taught classes in pre-classic forms, modern dance forms, and compositional studies. His course in pre-classic dance forms involved the study of music literature, compositional structures, and the qualities of the various period styles. These dance styles included the pavane, galliard, allemand, sarabande, courante, gigue, minuet, gavotte, bourree, rigaudon, passepied, chaconne and passacaglia (Horst, 1987). Many of today's college programs rely on Louis Horst's methods in dance major studies.

Horst believed that 20th century concert dance should no longer be secondary to music, as it had typically been in earlier centuries, and that dance should take a more

prominent position in the world of the arts. As one critic observed, “Like every great leader, Louie Horst cut through the wilderness of ignorance with a machete of conviction” (Stodelle, 1964, n.p.). Horst founded the *Dance Observer* journal in 1934, and it remained a prominent and widely read journal for 30 years, especially for those dancers who were studying and performing in New York City.

Louis Horst provided accompaniment in Jean Erdman’s classes with Martha Graham. Erdman (1980) learned a lot about compositional structure from him (p. 26). Horst was trying to bring form, structure, and style to the chaos and ever-experimental work of the modern dance (Stodelle, 1964, n.p.). Horst was adamant about enforcing “Four Don’ts” in the compositional exercises of his students. In quick summary, these were as follows:

- “Don’t rely for effect on technical virtuosity.” The purpose was not to draw primary attention to technique; instead, attention was best given to the idea of the work.
- “Don’t lean on a dramatic idea.” In other words, use metaphor, allegory, or symbolism to get beyond mere pantomime.
- “Don’t make the dance too long,” and
- “Don’t be unfaithful to your idea in order to make it palatable to an inexperienced audience.” Here, Horst is saying that a choreographer should refuse to sacrifice what she or he believes to be important (Horst & Russell, 1961, pp. 142-143).

The music instruction proved critical to the formation of all Erdman’s future choreographies; she gave music composition deep consideration when approaching new

choreography. Jean Erdman later enjoyed collaborating with a variety of respected musicians who composed original works for the dance.

Over the course of her career, Erdman's musical accompaniment for choreography embraced a wide spectrum of music, from classic to modern. It had been with Louis Horst that Erdman honed her musical understanding and skills. Jean Erdman learned to read and count the music, and to compose for dance without listening to the music. That helped Erdman develop a dance structure in counterpoint to musical structure, not imitating the music or relying on it (Erdman, 1980, p. 27).

During the music studies with Louis Horst, Jean Erdman was given her first opportunity to work on personal repertory. Erdman (1980) began to formulate choreographic ideas of her own, and it was at Bennington that dance composition permitted her to extend a class project that began at Sarah Lawrence (p. 15). Thanks to Horst's critical eye for dance, dancers were compelled to be thoughtful and selective in their choreographic choices. Jean Erdman (1980) deeply respected his expertise: "He was marvelous. He had such an eye, eyes all over his head. Even when he wasn't looking at you, he could see what you were doing" (p. 29).

In composition classes, Horst insisted that a dancer find a core motif from which the dance ideas could expand, a "divine awareness," so to speak (Erdman, 1980, p. 39). Erdman's first choreography, *Transformations of Medusa* (1942), heavily reflected the thematic and compositional influences of Horst, but also embraced the mythological ideas and theories of psychoanalysis she was evolving from conversations with her husband, Joseph Campbell. *Medusa* was based on the Greek myth of a Gorgon woman born human. Erdman used a very limited vocabulary of action with strict imposing

rhythms, and these devices were to imply the idea of being possessed (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9).[15] The message transmitted became instinctual from its source.

For Bennington audiences, Jean Erdman's solo dance, with music composed by Horst, was performed in three movements, "Temple Virgin," "Lady of the Wild Things," and "Queen of the Gorgons." The psychological study took viewers through several transformations, from an austere and almost fanatical temple virgin to a realization of earthly freedom through rape, and finally to horror as the Gorgon, filled with rage, held her power of life and death over others. The performance demanded both dance and acting abilities of Erdman. The piece was an "abstraction of essential beauty from the almost mathematical sharpness of old Etruscan figure painting and the skilled use of repetition of floor-plan, of movement, and of pose to convey three different moods." (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 8:3).[16]

Creativity and originality were characteristics of the new American modern dance and its music; however, as much as Graham and Horst were promoters of innovative ideas, they were not supportive of improvisation for dance, as was suggested by the music and compositional structures of the jazz age. Horst was especially opposed to the emotive and interpretive Duncanesque style (Stodelle, 1964, n.p.). In the early 1940s,

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[15] The cited document is a transcript of an interview conducted by Nancy Allison, "Jean Erdman: Conversation about Her Dances," in which the characterization of Erdman's vocabulary of action in *Medusa* is found on p. 1. The transcript rests in folder 9, "The Jean Erdman Video Project," among materials labeled "Series II: Production Materials, 1943 – 1992 and undated" and "Subseries 1: Theatre of the Open Eye, 1962 – 1989."

[16] The piece is so described in undated correspondence between Jean Erdman and "Ed," found in Box 8, "Correspondence 1949-89."

while still dancing under Martha Graham's wing, Jean Erdman experimented with improvisation and jazz. With Merce Cunningham, Erdman created a concert to the music of John Cage. The entire concert was improvised along a theme. Other modern concert dancers were shocked that the duo veered from what was considered acceptable to Graham and the other dance pioneers (Erdman, 1980, p. 24).

With a multitude of experiences under her belt, in about 1941 Jean Erdman sought her own artistic approach and voice. The process was "painful" (Erdman, 1980, p. 73), and the developing choreographer remarked,

> I identified very closely with Martha Graham's art, and it was a very personal art… So then came the time of feeling things on my own that weren't part of that, and she was not flexible, which was good for her, so it was a hard time… maybe a blessing in disguise—I received a knee injury, and was laid up…and that year I started doing my own research and thinking about everything…and of course my husband helped me in talking about things… (Erdman, 1980, p. 73)

Beginning formulations of new movement principles.

Jean Erdman began to formulate her own movement principles; however, she was not quite ready to appreciate all the nuances in what she had been observing and learning (Erdman, 1980, p. 34). Later in her performance career, Erdman (1980) was able to point out the major training differences in this way: "Martha Graham had a static base, like ballet. Doris and Charles had both a static base and a moving base. Hanya has a moving base" (p. 37). Erdman instead took in all the information and synthesized it to make her own interpretation of the varied approaches (Erdman, 1980, p. 32). She considered the commonalities of pure human movement and the sources for all action (Erdman, 1980, p.

38). Erdman came to the realization that every posture contained "a whole state of being or attitude toward life" (Ferguson, 1962).

By the late 1930s, Jean Erdman had distinguished herself as an up-and-coming star of American modern dance. She joined the ranks of the most successful dance innovators and embarked on a solo career. Her career lasted several decades, making her a direct link from the first founders of the American concert dance revolution to the dance innovators of the later 20th century.

As Erdman embarked on a career separate from Martha Graham, she developed the pioneering theories of American modern dance that had taken root within her. She reformulated and balanced the various perspectives she had learned. Jean Erdman saw that every form of dance contained the basic elements and principles, but the rhythm, pulses, and dynamics were what primarily differentiated the styles (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 7:8).[17] In her own work she emphasized both that the elements of dance should be "inflected to an aesthetic end." and that "[o]f crucial importance is the fact that these elements are not to be simply combined eclectically but to be coordinated in terms of a new view of the range of movement that a technique for dance training can encompass" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 7:8).[18]

Erdman once again turned toward myth and inward motivations to prompt inspiration for choreography. She considered the eternal lessons that could be learned

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[17] Jean Erdman was replying to a 1952 letter from Katharine Wolfe, who worked in the administrative offices of the Seattle Public Schools.

[18] Again, Erdman made these statements in a draft letter in reply to Katharine Wolfe's of November 1, 1952.

from primal and mythological sources. The purpose for Erdman's choreographies might best be expressed by her husband's words: "The fundamental idea is to restore man to a sense of relationship between the forms of his outward sensuous experience and the roots of his inward *joie de vivre,"* and thereby "unite the divided modern psyche" (Campbell, 2017, pp. 50-51). Erdman sought this objective.

Influences of Myth with Bodily Wisdom, Psychology and Religions

Jean Erdman's dances spoke deeply to audiences because of her often dream-like aesthetic and dance themes that seemed to transcend space and time. Her inspirations for dance were drawn from numerous sources. The themes for her dances intertwined critical interdisciplinary fields to create their effects. The connections derived from the primal wisdom of the body and Erdman's knowledge of psychology, mythology, various religious and spiritual traditions. The following sections refer to the various and often synthesized interdisciplinary themes having implications for Erdman's choreography. The exposé of these themes is intended to also demonstrate Erdman's meditations on women's lives, in which personal transformations have either been blocked or transcended. The integrated concepts eventually led Erdman to adopt principles of "total integrated theatre."

The natural body and transcendent wisdom.

> "To understand dance for what it is, it is necessary we know from whence it comes and where it goes. If [it]comes from the depths of man's inner nature, the unconscious, where memory dwells…[then,] As such, it inhabits the dancer." (Brown, 1979, p. 50)

Dance and the other arts have the potential to transport us from the weariness of the everyday world to realms beyond. The art of dance presents and awakens realizations in the mind and body that are not possible in other ways. Through a dance, one can allow the imagination to be fascinated and galvanized. It must be noted that the goal for modern dance choreographers is not necessarily to win the approval of audience members; the art of dance, instead, usually leads to a search for sources or an insight that seems to complete, and makes unique, an inner vision or purpose. Therefore, with a dance, the inner vision of a choreographer becomes visible to others through the actions, rhythms, spatial patterns, dynamic energies of the piece, and sometimes the symbolic meaning assigned to these elements. Indeed, Joseph Campbell maintained that "[i]n a work of proper art every aesthetic element has a psychological value equivalent to that of some mythological image or idea" (Campbell, 2017, p. 74). Creating choreography for the stage, then, presents many opportunities for an artist to explore and experiment in innovative ways to make these connections.

In a concert dance setting, dynamic energies transpire back and forth between a performer and the minds of the viewers. The moments of exchange may hold visual or kinesthetic stimulation, the rapture of beauty, or perhaps a transcendent experience of the mind. In the words of Joseph Campbell,

> It is a basic principle of aesthetics that art is produced not out of fear, or out of hope, but out of an experience transcending the two, holding the two in balance, and revealing the wonder of the world-harmony that keeps in circulation (whether life be sorrowful or gay) the spheres of outer space, the electrons of the atom, and the juices of the living earth. (Campbell, 2017, p. 5)

Human bodily expression and the universality of its deep-rooted meanings fascinated Jean Erdman. Her work in dance became deeply intertwined with the writings of her husband, an expert in literature, comparative mythologies and religions. Similarly, Erdman was interested in crafting dances that tied together the past and the present, and excavated the hidden messages of the collective unconscious, myth, spirituality, and cultural traditions. Erdman believed that artistic and ritual traditions were an "expression of something meaningful to the dancer, not a mere series of lively steps"(Erdman, 1948, p. 40). Erdman's dances thereby became potent experiences—shared with audiences—of the energies of life.

Jean Erdman sensed that bodily wisdom originated in life energies and the depths of consciousness. The primal qualities of every individual become evident through basic life actions beginning with the first signs of movement within the womb. A fetus makes discoveries through its involuntary and voluntary actions and reactions to the impulses of life. The unseen fetal form demonstrates dynamic efforts, such as punching and stretching, witnessed by the pregnant mother.

Upon birth, the natural urges, stimulated by the senses, then compel the infant to interact and process everything perceived by the body. These inclinations are the first ways all humans learn about the world. In fact, oral language originates from the movements of the body orienting and navigating in space. It is from these egocentric experiments that concepts of "I" and of "self" emerge.

The urge to rhythmically move and emotionally express oneself continues with development. Who has not seen a baby grasp the bars of a crib, bounce up and down in time with music, or rock to the rhythm of his own babbling? Such actions signal an

expression of emotional contentment—the baby appears happy and healthy. The infant's attitudes are perceived by observers, yet viewers cannot detect the whole story. Action presents evidence of child physical and emotional well-being, and watchers assign words to the actions with the intention of identifying the needs and desires of the baby. The infant's varied nuances of action could never be adequately described in oral or written language alone, for words are the mere representations of the authentic experience. It is the actions, grammatically described as verbs, that feebly attempt to describe subtleties of meaning, and yet, form the foundation for every language system.

Language aptly develops from experience. Simple words and phrases develop to dually serve functional and creative endeavors, such as the formulation of intellectual concepts, complex stories and myths, and descriptions for curiosities about the universe. Each individual is, indeed, one in collaborative action with the cosmos yet unique in the expression of it. Joseph Campbell offered an explanation of this phenomenon: "Since the human mind, like the body, is everywhere essentially the same, responding in like ways to a human lifetime's fundamental experiences, it is inevitable that similar myths should have arisen, practically everywhere, independently of historical contact" (Campbell, 2017, p. 178).

When individuals are in social contact, norms for acceptable movement behaviors become established. Sometimes specific actions are assigned meanings that may only be known to that culture. In the example of a traditional dance, set sequences and patterns of actions contain potent powers of communication. The rainbow of movement choices is infinite, yet each cultural group selects specific actions with which they can identity. The selected actions become characteristic of the group. In the case of modern dance,

particular movement characteristics can sometimes be identified with an individual choreographer. These characteristics, then, are also what constitute a dance style.

From the beginning of human existence, people have likely called upon the dancing body to awaken the mind to the mystical unknown. One example of the quest for mystical truth can be found in the Gospel of St. Thomas: “Jesus said: Recognize what is right in front of you, and that which is hidden from you will be revealed to you. Nothing hidden will fail to be displayed” (Davies, 2002, p. 5). This insight is also recognized by the Gnostic Christians, in that the knowledge of the self and of the divine are considered inseparable (Morris, 2008). These views imply a transcendent union, body and mind joined with the divine, to reveal a special wisdom. Such wisdom has long been understood in the great spiritual and religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

Transcendent wisdom through bodily transformation is manifested in the Christian concept of resurrection. In another example, a transcendent union is the goal of the whirling dances of the Sufi Islamic sect. Sufi dancers engage in turning for extended periods of time. The dancer’s actions mimic the rotation of the planets. The experience brings a dancer into a trance and a much sought-after, yet temporary, union with Allah.

Jean Erdman was attentive to the mystical connections and connotations that could be achieved through dance. Joe Campbell explained this concept by quoting his wife in the book, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and Religion*: “The way of the mystic and the way of the artist are related, except that the mystic doesn’t have a craft” (2002, p. 89). Campbell carried this idea further by stating that “the craft holds the artist to the world” (p. 89). Erdman’s craft was conveyed through the

magnificence of her well-trained, disciplined body, which delivered a powerful force for audiences. Her approach to art through bodily expression was in close correlation with the cultivation of enlightenment typical of Buddhist spiritual traditions, as in "The Way of the Bodhisattva" (Dalai Lama, 2009).[19] Erdman demonstrated sensitivity to the natural world and all beings; this aligned with the respect for nature that she had also known from Hawaiian theology and customs.

Jean Erdman's dance-making was generated from bodily wisdom, contemplative thought, studious research, improvisational experiments on a theme, and careful planning. When making a dance, she was attentive to the present moment and permitted dance ideas to percolate from her inner self to the outer world. Erdman's approach to dance and the body expressed innumerable generations of collected wisdom from the evidence of her life. It appears that her choreography aimed to awaken the mind. As described by those who knew Erdman and her work, it seems she was able to instill a comparable awakening effect of within the minds of those who viewed her dances.

Jean Erdman's performances were rich in sensory experiences. Her choreographic ideas were conveyed through means that varied among the solemn, dramatic, dream-like, and sometimes comedic. By the mid-1940s, Jean Erdman was becoming recognized as an exceptional and versatile choreographer whose dances often examined the inner aspects of women (Fox, 2020).

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[19] Although the Dalai Lama is speaking from the point of view of Tibetan Buddhist wisdom, the majority of Buddhist traditions together revere the way of the bodhisattva, including most Buddhist traditions of China, Japan, Vietnam, and the West. The concept of the bodhisattva does not, however, have a conventional place in those traditions closely derived from the early Theravadin school and now found in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

Erdman's academic foundations in aesthetics and psychology.

At Sarah Lawrence College, Jean Erdman took her first aesthetics-related course under her future husband, Professor Joseph Campbell. The course was on the literature of Thomas Mann (1875-1955), a German novelist and 1929 Nobel Prize winner who lived in exile from Nazism. Throughout Mann's highly symbolic texts, he provided psychological insight into the minds of artists and examined their role in society. Mann's literature served as Jean Erdman's philosophical introduction to political, social, and spiritual ideological structures and how these interact with personal consciousness. The works of Thomas Mann, and of all his major influencers, were highly significant to the writings of Campbell; subsequently, these works also became significant to the philosophical thoughts and artistic work of Jean Erdman.

One of Mann's important influences was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche examined human consciousness, the creation of personal identity, truth, morality, cultural theory, and the meaningfulness of existence. He introduced the idea of primordial aesthetic drives and the timelessness of myth, and advanced the theory of the "will to power" in the struggle for self-realization (Nietzsche, 1966/1886, p. 9).

A primary source of thought for both Mann and Nietzsche was *The World as Will and Representation*, a lengthy work by Arthur Schopenhauer (1958), originally written in two phases during the 1800s. Schopenhauer (1788-1860) built his metaphysical philosophies on those of transcendental idealism proposed both by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1933/1781) and by *The Vedas* (Fergus**,** 2017). *The Vedas* are the oldest religious texts of Hinduism, originating in the second millennium before the Christian era. They promote the idea that knowledge is constructed

from proprioceptive experiences and that existence is not separate from one being to another. Thus, the earlier literature had impact for Jean Erdman, the budding choreographer.

Schopenhauer (1958) had been deeply influenced by Buddhist thinking (p. 55). He described the need for the mind to release cluttering thoughts that cause blockages to thinking. He maintained that clarity of the mind resulted from a "suspense" of thought. Schopenhauer believed the suspension of thought aided in illuminating truth and comprehension beyond one's immediate reality:

> If the whole world as representation is only the visibility of the will, then art is the elucidation of this visibility, the *camera obscura* which shows the objects more purely, and enables us to survey and comprehend them better. (Schopenhauer, 1958, Vol.1 Book III sec. 52).

Schopenhauer proposed that humans come to know the world through investigations of the relationship between the body and the human will (desire). He also noted that success comes when the act of cognition is released from the service of the will (Schopenhauer, 1958, p. 81). Additionally, Schopenhauer advanced the notion that beauty or art has power to bring a viewer to a state of ecstatic contemplation. He proposed that ecstasy results when the mind becomes detached from the selfish desires of the ego. In Volume I, Book III on "Aesthetics," Schopenhauer (1958) contended that in moments when reason is suspended, the ego is released, and the aesthetic experience becomes transcendent. Schopenhauer's writing greatly influenced the psychoanalytic theories later put forth by Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung.

Described by Schopenhauer, the egoless state brings a moral response to suffering. Various spiritual practices seek release of the ego to bring about compassion (Odin, 2018, p. 54.). In many religious practices, participants hope to gain enlightenment through experiences that originate in contemplative prayer. A dancer can sometimes become immersed in contemplation or a state of ecstasy during performance. Some dancers report out-of-body experiences that are transcendent moments. A viewer of dance may sometimes encounter enlightening moments that stir the soul.

Erdman's theories on dance-making drew from the theories of each of these great intellectuals: Mann, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Freud, Jung, and Oswald Spengler. Volume II of *The Decline of the West* by Spengler (1928) was particularly noteworthy for Erdman, and through it, she and Joseph Campbell explored similar interests. *The Decline of the West* is a magnificent and expansive work spanning history from ancient to modern times. In the two-volume work, Spengler (1926, 1928) addresses numerous cultures of the world by examining unique characteristics of their expressions; he also discusses mythological patterns and commonalities across the cultures.

Erdman had plenty of time to study this book—one year in fact, during 1937-38. She read it on a tour around the world while conversing with Joseph Campbell through letter correspondence (Larsen & Larsen, 1991, pp. 243, 252-265). It was during this time that a full-blown romance commenced between the two. From a deep understanding of Spengler's work, Erdman's interest in psychology took hold.

Oswald Spengler and Sigmund Freud both employed terms that represented contrasting aspects of the individual psyche and that extend to society and culture. The terms are "totem" and "taboo," which appear as the title of one of Sigmund Freud's most

famous books, first published in English 1918 (Freud, 1946). Based on Spengler's and Freud's work, Joseph Campbell described "totem" as the feeling aspects that "cannot be taught but only awakened"; the grounding for totem lies in human DNA and is therefore inherited (Campbell, 2017, p. 121).

Taboo indicates a system of conventions and rules imposed by either an individual or society. The system becomes "a binding force" (Campbell, 2017, p. 121) intended to perpetuate a practice and can sometimes resemble a psychological neurosis. In traditional dance practices, a system of taboo is usually tied to a belief or religious system. For a concert dancer, taboo might be seen when the dancer becomes exclusively attached to only one teacher or a codified method of training. The student absolutely rejects the strict codes of another technical system, even if learning another system would benefit the dancer. Taboo, therefore, indicates the presence of conflicts between a natural impulse and its prohibition, about which Freud states, "The basis of taboo is a forbidden action for which there exists a strong inclination in the unconscious" (Freud, 1946/1918, p. 44).

Freud linked the sacred *tabu* of Polynesian theistic concepts to the term "taboo" used in psychotherapy. The customs and rituals associated with cultural *tabu* can easily be observed in a variety of settings. Dances involving *tabu* are designed to protect and guard the sanctity of revered people, beliefs, or special objects (for example, relics, plants, or animals). The sacred items are "off limits" to those who do not possess sanctity themselves or do not have permission to encounter them. Taboo dances may draw from, restrict, or revere the mysterious and strong powers that are associated with them. Freud recognized the taboo (and *tabu)* as also being linked to myth and discussed evidence of

this connection in both *Totem and Taboo* and in his earlier work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913/1900).

Jean Erdman strongly identified with the Freudian theories because there was a notable system of *tabu* associated with Hawaiian traditional dance practices. That system clearly separated sacred objects and acts from the profane. Erdman understood the term *tabu* because it applied to the many and various practices associated with the goddess Laka, patroness of the ancient hula. Through various routes, the writings of the intellectual giants in the fields of philosophy and psychology exerted substantial effect on the thinking of Joseph Campbell and, additionally, on the choreographic imagination of dancer Jean Erdman.

More influences from psychology and mythology.

Inquiries into traditional cultures, aesthetics, and the secret order of the subconscious mind continued for Erdman long after her coursework was completed at Sarah Lawrence College. Erdman's curiosity was sometimes ignited by her personal experiences and at other times through discussions with her husband, the foremost authority on matters of comparative mythology and religion.

Psychology, myth, and meaning in the secret order. Among Erdman's notes is evidence of her deep reflections on the subjects and relationships between psychology, mythology, and creative expression. She specifically states that

> Like all creative expression, dance arises from unconscious depths. C.G. Jung's work teaches us to value messages from the unconscious (dreams, myths, art, etc.) as well as the process of assimilating them. Hence it provides insight into dance

as a powerful way of embodying and realizing the moving potential of the human soul. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):5).[20]

Erdman sought to make sense and order of the chaos of the primal mind and body. For she understood, as described by Carl Jung (1959), "In all chaos there is a cosmos, in all order a secret order, in all caprice a fixed law, for everything that works is grounded in its opposite" (p. 32).

How are dreams of the collective unconscious and myth manifested in a dance? Movement, dreams, and myth are innate to humans and draw from the primal wisdom of the body. According to Joe Campbell (2002), dreams and myth are motivated from a single psychophysiological source—namely, the human imagination moved by the conflicting urgencies of the organs (including the brain) of the human body, of which the anatomy has remained pretty much the same since approximately 40,000 BCE.

Accordingly, as the imagery of a dream is metaphorical of the psychology of the dreamer, the imagery of a mythology is metaphorical of the psychological posture of the people to whom the mythology belongs (Campbell, 2002, p. xiv). The "postures," to which Campbell refers, are a feature of sociological groups and are manifested in what are known as folk or ethnic ideas, or cultural characteristics; these are identified with the customary practices of groups as generated through their beliefs, values, and rituals (pp. xiv, xv). Such manifestations are fundamentally rooted and motivated by the natural human urgencies of "feeding, procreating, and overcoming" (Campbell, p. xviii).

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[20] This passage is found among notes on random pages in Series II: sub-series 2, "Theatre of the Open Eye, 1962 – 1989 and undated."

All myths are products of the imagination, the part of the psyche that artists know well. Sometimes myths are misunderstood to be dreams; however, dreams are of a personal nature and belong to an individual. Dreams are spontaneous and unpredictable. Myths, on the other hand, bear the mark of universal consciousness and are sourced in the subconscious. The idea that humans are each and everywhere fundamentally the same was not a new development unique to the field of psychology in the modern era. Modern psychological theories about universal consciousness were foreshadowed in the Hindu sacred text, the *Bhagavad Gita*, part of the epic *Mahabharata*, dating from the 2nd century BCE (Johnson, 2008, 2:24).

Myth arises from universal consciousness. The use of myth with dance serves several purposes. Myth can serve as subject matter for a choreographic theme, or it can prompt the viewer of a dance to probe the values of their lives. Importantly, myth opens people to the wonder of all being. (Campbell, 2002, p. xx). It also serves a cosmological function by offering the realization of transcendence, for myth engages in

> representing the universe and whole spectacle of nature, both as known to the mind and as beheld by the eye, as an epiphany of such kind that when lightning flashes, or the setting sun ignites the sky,…the exclamation "Ah!" may be uttered as a recognition of divinity. (Campbell, pp. xx-xxi)

"Ah-ha" moments are sometimes discovered in a particularly meaningful dance brought to the viewer through myth. These moments can provide a glimpse of the sacred or profound. It is artists such as Jean Erdman who share the calling to cast new images of mythology, that is to say, to provide the contemporary metaphors that allow the viewer to

realize the transcendent, infinite, and abundant nature of being as it is (Campbell, 2001, p. 6).

Jean Erdman studied the inward nature of humankind to make the mythological form outwardly visible in modern dance. She drew from her distinct knowledge of traditional dance as inspiration for creative dance material with a modern sensibility. As her husband observed,

> It is a traditional dance that gives homage to this immortal presence in the earthly realm and represents the primary revelations that have been implanted in humans as sourced from this presence. In the traditional idioms, "the psychological stance of an entire people is epitomized". (Campbell, 2017, p. 163)

Erdman considered the inner realities of the psyche both as resources for dance inspiration and for an audience member's "participation in the field of meaning" (Campbell, 2001, p. 8). In most of her dances, Erdman fused artful aesthetics with myth, based on the archetypal orders of the unconscious (Jung, 2002/1912). Through the choreographer's use of archetypes, viewers could potentially see themselves in aspects of her dance.

Traditional archetypes to abstractions. In 1912, Carl G. Jung described the archetypes of the collective unconscious to be commonly associated with psychological imagery and mythological inspirations (Campbell, 2017, p. 130). According to Jungian analyst and psychiatrist Anthony Stevens (2003), archetypes are "[i]nnate neuropsychic centres possessing the capacity to initiate, control and mediate the common behavioural characteristics and typical experiences of all human beings irrespective of race, culture, or creed" (p. 352). The archetypal energies that reside in the subconscious are timeless

and universally understood. These energies manifest themselves in dream images. An archetype is usually identified by a particular role in a dream. The roles are commonly labeled using familiar terms, such as the caregiver, orphan, creator, destroyer, warrior, ruler, lover, sage or fool. Archetypal images presented in a dance have potential to activate something already present in one's mind or heart, for example, the circumstances that may have constrained childhood growth.

Archetypal forms refer to both human biological and spiritual natures. The concept of an archetype is based on a psychophysical system that evolves with a person's rate of maturation (Stevens, 2003, p. 45). Benchmarks of an individual's biological passage and stages of life may be visually recognized within the ethical and sociological frames established by the culture of the person generating the images. Additionally, it should be noted that the images generated in someone's mind reflect that person's cultural identification.

Archetypal forms may be derived and applied consciously or unconsciously to a dance by a choreographer. The forms, as superordinary facets of humankind, have aptitudes. meaning, and generate reactions (Stevens, 2003, p. 44). In the case of Erdman's dance *Medusa*, the Gorgon woman presents the archetype of a rape victim. Following psychological archetypal theory, Medusa, filled with hate and fury, becomes transformed into an abuser herself. In *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945), Erdman presents a trio of archetypes: a nourishing Creator, a youthful Seeker, and a mentoring Mother Figure.

For dance, the power of archetypal imagery is in the relatable poetic image shared cooperatively between dancer and viewer. As Jean Erdman stated,

> The dance controls in its own terms the whole range of the human experience, therefore, from the whole range of human existence, therefore from the primeval, germinal, first pulse to the most complex tapestry of civilized neurotic tension!… [It] expresses for no benefit the things that we require to make us know wholeness. This is the wholeness of the *puer aeternis*, the Wisdom Child, whom we associate instinctively with the very idea of dance…If we only will listen to the pulse of the dancer and let it be free to be itself, it will conjure the new, whole being that lies within us. (Erdman, 1949b, p. 66)

The mythological forms of universal archetypes take on various colorful costumes specific to a culture or ethnicity (Campbell, 1991, p. 61). In the case of Erdman's dances, actual places, cultures, and historical time references might be fictional, actual, or more illusory. But as Joseph Campbell (1968) noted, "For those in whom a local mythology still works, there is an experience both of accord with the social order, and of harmony with the universe" (p. 5). It is important to recognize that mythologies do not remain "the same throughout all time, they change with the time, place, and people who are living the myth" (Campbell, 2002, p. xix). In the past, traditional societies provided for the metaphysical needs of their group members and supported dance when both were in alignment with each other. Today, select modern dances have the potential to take on that role.

Jean Erdman became a master of using visual metaphor, symbols, archetypes, and mythological associations to take dance viewers beyond the world of words to reveal, as stated by Adolf Bastian in 1868, the "elemental nature" within us (Campbell, 1968, p. 653). When defining the elemental in a creative endeavor, the dance-making process

proffers a profound lesson in learning about oneself. The personal journey for the artist is a release of new realizations. As expressed in the *Tao Te Ching*, she "reaches an actualization of her luminosity" (Lao Tzu, 2005, Ch. 27).

Erdman's choreography, secured in *a priori* assumptions about the psyche, was intended to transport the mind. A viewer of a magnificent dance may have a transcendent experience. Joseph Campbell makes the following claim:

> The dancer … is not a semiphorist, but a work of art in the flesh; her function is not to flash messages back and forth from brain to brain (that is the role of the discursive paragraph), but to embody Significant Form. And what is Significant Form? It is the rhythm of life projected in the design; the invisible pattern of the psyche reflected in time and space; a profoundly inspired disposition of feeling-charged materials stemming from, and addressed to, that creative center where human consciousness and the unconscious fruitfully touch. (Campbell, 2017, p. 11)

Campbell's premise is clarified in correspondence he sent in 1940 to his friend Ed Ricketts:

> For the artist, as you no doubt know, <u>form is content</u>. In heaven, form and meaning are identical. It is only the dross of earthly "matter" which obscures from the eye the soul which is embodied. Ideally the word is to be made flesh. (Campbell, 2019, p. 45)

Some modern dances are creations of mere form, but Jean Erdman's dances were carefully crafted to provide meaning, feeling, and insight within the moving abstracted images. Erdman excavated the hidden archetypes of the unconscious to form potent

shared experiences with the audience. By using archetypical references, Erdman could provide "a sense of participation in such a realization of transcendence" (Campbell, 2002, p. xx). She manipulated metaphors associated with the spatial plan of the dance, discerned the desired effects of musical tempi and form, and selected the emotional energies that might dictate important dancer actions (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 15:1).[21] She identified which elements could be manipulated to "'slant' one's experience of the image in a certain direction" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 15:6).[22]

With mythology embedded into her dances, Erdman proved to be a powerful and artful force who evoked a sense of awe in the people who attended her shows. The correspondence between the artist and the dance viewer was specifically felt in the kinesthetic and empathetic systems of the body. Campbell (2017) reiterated the potential power of a choreographer's work: "The power is possible when the psychological effects of aesthetic form, as brought forth through the elements of dance, correspond to the archetypes of mythology and symbolism" (p. 19).

Jean Erdman had the fortunate opportunity to draw creative insights from not only Western classical dance but also the dance of Eastern Asia, where the arts never lost their connections to the mythological realms (Campbell, 2017, p. 181). Of recent centuries, the Western theatrical arts have displayed a divergence into separated disciplines. The compartmentalization is clearly evident in the academic arts departments of universities

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[21] Erdman sketched this description in the margin on notes of her plans for future dances, a document titled "1947-48-49-50 Chapel Solstice Notes" dated February 22, 1949.

[22] This information comes from Erdman's notes for a 1992 talk at a performance of *Pierrot, the Moon* and *Fearful* Symmetry at the 92nd Street YM/YWHA.

today: Studies in dance are often distinct from those of drama, visual arts, music, history, anthropology, religion, sociology, psychology, or even literature. Erdman's dance developments in the modern era sought to reclaim holistic awareness and mine the ancient meanings for relevance to today's cultures. In her productions, she carefully wove the separated artistic threads together again to produce lush and integrated works.

Radiance and rapture. Erdman was not the first choreographer to use mythical interpretations in the modern dance, German modern dancer Mary Wigman (1886-1973) had pointed the way. The "inward gaze" of Wigman's choreography drew upon the sphere of psychological motivations. Wigman's modern dances suggested the impulse to life with their cultural and mythological associations (Campbell, 2017, p. 147). In Dresden, Wigman's artful aesthetic developed simultaneously with Carl Jung's presentations on the collective unconscious. (Campbell, 2017, p. 147).

In another part of Europe in the same era, literature by Irish author James Joyce (1882 – 1941) was gaining notoriety. His clever word play lent insights into the mythic dimension (Campbell, 2017, p. 147). Erdman, of course, had close access to insights on Joyce's work from Campbell's own research. Joseph Campbell and the novelist Henry Morton Robinson (1898 – 1961) had deciphered Joyce's very complex work *Finnegans Wake*. In 1944, the duo first published their discoveries in a substantive book, *A Skeleton Key to* Finnegans Wake*: Unlocking James Joyce's Masterwork* (Campbell & Robinson, 2005).

For the first four years of Jean Erdman's marriage to Joseph Campbell, the literature of James Joyce was pressing on Erdman's mind (Campbell, 2017, p. 205, n. 8). Campbell had noted Joyce's attention to the concept of "aesthetic arrest" or, in other

words, the moments of rapture occurring when perceptions of beauty seize the mind and heart in a harmonious and meaningful way (Campbell, 2017, p. 99). Erdman considered these implications for dance.

From the work of Thomas Aquinas and James Joyce, Campbell (2002) clarified the ingredients necessary for this "aesthetic arrest" to take place. First, there must be a comprehension of *integritas* (wholeness) (p. 100). Additionally, there must be an understanding of the relationships among any grouping of specific objects or features, for example, colors, shapes, sounds, or proportions. The grouping needs to be perceived as within a singular frame of reference. A second characteristic is *consonantia*, which refers to noticing the rhythm and harmony existing in the relationships among those objects (p. 100). Thirdly, when all the features within the frame are instantly made radiant (*claritas*) to the mind and heart, there finally appears insightful meaning as a spontaneous manifestation of a divine nature (pp. 101). Erdman gave keen attention to these concepts as evidenced in her choreographies. Erdman had synthesized her knowledge, the theories, and applied them to concert dance.

The Meaning and Purpose of the Hero's Journey for Erdman's Choreography

Monomyth.

A monomyth is the template for a mythological story that has been present across time for all peoples since the beginning of humankind. It is a personal story of transformation that teaches important life lessons and meanings. The story is unlike a fairytale, which may only address the fantasies of childhood (Campbell, 2008, p. 12). Instead, a myth is a journey that forms in the recesses of the mind and makes itself known

through symbolic images that represent one's hopes, fears, desires, expectations, and struggles, and the quest for adventure that each of these emotions entails.

The purpose of a personal mythological journey is to bring about a transformation, whether it be emotional, social, psychological, physical, religious or spiritual. The quest of the journey can point the way to disengaging from unsuccessful behaviors, fixations, pathos, or a difficult problem. The cyclical journey of the monomyth represents stages of a repressed past or present, and particularly, provides a way to move forward. The route of progression is intended to bring about success, rewards, wisdom, or other treasure. Each person is the hero or heroine of one's own journey.

A mythological course uses visual images and symbols, which suggest implications and hidden meanings. The personal quest for transformation requires one to undergo reflections, initiations, and trials of the abyss. From such an adventure, the heroine emerges anew. At the conclusion of the journey, the heroine returns to the normalcy of the real world but with the rewards presented to the community.

Dances across time and cultures have reenacted matters of myth. Since a personal myth has universal meaning, stages of the monomyth are seen played out in the rituals of traditional societies and in dances for the stage. Myth and dance are important expressions of the wonder and mysteries of human life. Joseph Campbell affirmed, "The function… [is] to render to the outward mind a vision of the way to the inward life" (Campbell, 2017, p. 148).

Who is the hero(ine)?

It might be said Jean Erdman received a call to theatrical dance even before birth. In the mythological realm, it is believed that a hero(ine) is endowed with special powers

and abilities in order to accomplish what the gods had set out for her to do (Campbell, 2008, p. 274). From Erdman's ancestry, she inherited a sense of excitement for adventure, a sensible mind, and a sensitivity to others. From childhood, she was nurtured and prepared to venture into the hidden lands of the mind and the body. She advanced into the world with a fierce independence, a full commitment to strong ideals and ethics, and an appreciation for cultural traditions. She listened to the wisdom of the body, disciplined the spirit, strengthened the intellect, and fully developed her creative nature. She willingly prepared herself for the difficult tasks she was fated to undertake. It is through the accompanying biography that we follow Erdman's adventures.

Joseph Campbell makes the case for how the hero is prepared for the journey:

> The achievement of the hero is one that he is ready for. And it is really a manifestation of his character. And it's amusing the way in which the landscape and the conditions of the environment match the readiness of the hero. The adventure that he's ready for is the one that he gets. (Campbell, 2001/1988)

In order for a hero's journey to begin, the hero must fully submit and sacrifice himself or herself to the difficulties of the unknown, for it is in the darkest place of the mind that a transfiguration must take place. It is from meeting a crisis that light comes into the darkness and the hero can attain a higher spiritual dimension (Campbell, 2008, p. 12). The completion of a successful quest by the hero may manifest dispositions of calmness, peacefulness, and personal bliss.

Stages of the monomyth as inspiration for Erdman's dances.

> "My own urge to create dances came from a very deep, pre-verbal place, an exploration of the states of being…I realized that each of these states

was actually a human emotional realm which anchored at some point on the circular diagram of the monomyth." (Jean Erdman, n.d., n.p., in *Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:5).

In a mythological story or dance, the physical, spiritual, and emotional journey takes a heroine through changing settings and encounters with various psychological archetypes as matched to the unfolding situation. Joseph Campbell was the world authority on the hero's quest. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was first published in 1949 by the Bollingen Foundation. Over the decades, the book proved to be enormously popular, and subsequently, many to-notch writers, composers, film directors, dancers, and other artists have come to rely on the monomyth template for creative work.

Plotting the escapades of the hero's path has been enormously useful in popular culture, especially in film. George Lucas attested to using the monomyth in the construction of the *Star Wars* films, beginning with the release of the original episode in 1977. The monomyth structure and recognizable archetypes are well known in the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (2001 – 2003) and even in the adventure of Simba in *The Lion King* (1994).

In each of the above examples, the entire quest of the hero is followed by the filmmaker; however, Erdman treated the monomyth differently. She often focused her choreographic construction on a specific aspect of the journey and deeply explored that aspect with full intent. The successful connections made to audiences, as evidenced by box office receipts, becomes clear when we realize that the hero of the fictitious dance journey was not alone in the quest. The hero or heroine proceeded with every member of the audience. The success of the monomyth concept is explained by Campbell himself:

> The heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero path.[23] And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall find ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be one with all the world. (Campbell, 2008, p. 18)

The dreams of the psyche announce the way to the hero. The theme compels us to reach for something just beyond our grasp. In educational theory, this idea can be likened to the psychological theory known as the Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone was proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) and suggests that learners use their wealth of mindful processes to close the gap between what is already known and the next level of potential development. That level occurs slightly beyond the current capability of the hero. A scaffolding effect takes place whereby the learner, or in this case the hero, uses current knowledge and problem-solving skills to launch himself into the next developmental phase (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This theory is clearly useful in video game platforms as gamers immerse themselves vicariously into the role of the journeying hero.

The success of the monomyth formula can be categorized in three stages, which are most often mapped onto a circular diagram. The stages are (1) separation, (2) initiation, and (3) return (Campbell, 2008, p. 23). It is useful to know more detailed facets of the monomyth as an aid for understanding the creative work of Jean Erdman; therefore, each of the stages will be more thoroughly explained. The journey cycle is

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[23] Here Campbell is subtly referring to the thread supplied by Ariadne in the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

summarized from the book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (2008, pp. 28-29).

It should be stated outright that although the biography of Jean Erdman presents the subject as the hero of her own life, it is the male who has traditionally assumed the role of the hero who seeks permission to know her. The traditional mythological role of the female is that of the goddess, who remains as creator, destroyer, and controller of life itself, the one whom a hero might seek as

> the paragon to all paragons of beauty, the reply to all desire, the bliss-bestowing goal of all the hero's earthly and unearthly quest…she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul's assurances that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the bliss that once was known will be known again. (p. 92)

As a new mythology for the modern times, this biography places Jean Erdman in a performance that gives power to the female to play both roles, that of the traditional goddess who retains all feminine attributes, and the role of a hero(ine) in the phases and cycles of worldly life seeking knowledge of herself. The duality of this perspective permits a heroine to retain all the attributes of the first order. The goddess and adventurer exist, therefore, in every woman. Adopting these assumptions for this biography, the female can be examined again in the hero role as described by Campbell (2008) in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

The adventure of a hero(ine) has its starting point in everyday reality, but soon she is pushed into a realm of the unknown. The mythological journey may begin in several ways. The heroine may hear a call to adventure, or perhaps, feels a pull from the

outside coming in the needed direction. The heroine has the opportunity to take up the call, wait—perhaps for further motivation or instruction—or reject the call completely. If the call is answered, then the first stage begins with the heroine's separation from the world of the familiar.

Usually, there appears a supernatural aid to assist the heroine. The aid may come in an experience of helping hands, signs pointing the way, mysterious "coincidences," or even the appearance of a special mentor. When the aid is accepted, the heroine properly crosses the threshold from the current reality into the dark and treacherous "belly of the whale."[24] The threshold represents an initiation into the world-wide womb (Campbell, 2008, p. 74). According to Campbell, crossing the threshold from known to unknown realities represents self-annihilation (p. 77). A pair of threatening or weaponized guardians typically guard the threshold passage to keep out those who might be unworthy for the journey (p. 77). From here, the heroine moves into the realm of a dreamscape full of tests and ordeals (p. 81). Supernatural aids are present to assist the traveler through a perilous labyrinthine of passages within the mind's imagination (p. 84). Both reliable and untrustworthy characters may appear in the darkness. The heroine must discern whom she can trust on the "road of trials" (pp. 81-90). Spiritual, mythological, and psychological symbolism point the way to the deeper and more dangerous part of the journey, and ultimately, enlightenment.

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[24] The belly of the whale originates in the story of Jonah in the Bible. Metaphorically, it is a place where the hero or heroine may be slain or dismembered only to be resurrected in wholeness at another time.

In stage two of the journey, the heroine is out to accomplish a task that requires annihilation of the ego. She must have the courage to meet and slay the personal monster(s) that stands in the way of her success or reward.

The heroine is sometimes offered respite from trials by figures who may appear in forms recognized from spiritual and religious traditions, such as the Hindu Mani-dvipa in the abode of the "Island of Jewels," or the Virgin Mary of Catholicism. If things do not go well for the hero or heroine, a seducer might be cause for interaction or perhaps the protagonist may need to seek atonement with the father.

Deep in the abyss, the adventure reaches a climax when the heroine accomplishes the primary task of defeating the nemesis. Through the sacred process, the heroine is released from her own bondage and is transformed for the betterment of herself and humankind. This represents a Buddha-like moment of inner transformation and is a point of re-birth for the heroine. The reward for the personal sacrifice may come in numerous forms, such as a magic elixir, a grace from the gods, a special treasure, or wisdom that will be brought back to the community from whence the heroine departed.

Every culture offers stories of the mysterious monster. The creature is easy to recognize for we know it from many sources, such as in the biblical story of David and Goliath, or in the art of Martha Graham's well-known dance *Errand into the Maze*. In that performance the female heroine overcomes the male nemesis of her tale. The mythological heroine must navigate past danger and horror to, once again, find freedom.

Stage three of the monomyth cycle begins the return home. The heroine is now in a state of a complete and integrated self—one that has reconciled the drives of the inner self with the outer world. Perhaps the heroine's guardian will reappear to direct the way

back to normalcy, but some heroes or heroines may not choose to return home. The new state of realization and ecstasy may be the preferable residence for those victors. Alternatively, if the heroine chooses to return home, then she begins the last phase of the journey.

The return home may go smoothly for the heroine and she might easily be accepted back in society, or a complex chase could ensue and the heroine must escape with her life (Campbell, 2008, p. 270). The heroine must recross the threshold with boon in hand. The heroine's new-found self-actualization has awakened her to personal potentialities, as expressed by the title of another book by Joseph Campbell (2001), *Thou Art That*.[25]

With the return, the fractions of the earlier heroine are now fully resurrected as she becomes whole once again (Campbell, 2008, p. 186). But the return of the heroine might not be fully welcomed by the original community. The heroine must accept the real world and try to live within it, with or without the benefit of the boon that she has presented. Joseph Campbell claims there are some heroes or heroines who are able to master residence in both worlds. He refers to Nietzsche's theory of the Cosmic Dancer, who "does not rest heavily in a single spot, but gaily, lightly, turns and leaps from one position to another. It is possible to speak from only one point at a time, but that does not invalidate the insights of the rest" (Campbell, p.196).

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[25] Campbell's book describes the process to personal realization and bliss (Campbell, 2001).

The narrative of the enclosed Erdman biography uses the heroine's journey as a metaphor for the entirety of Jean Erdman's early life. The chapters loosely associate the phases of her personal quest to aspects of her real life. In each difficult situation, the heroine is not seen backing away from obstacles. Instead, Erdman's tendency was to continually press forward, not choosing to resist or delay the inevitable. Her active and creative mind assimilated the monomyth into her work.

The choreographer created several solo dances in her early career that were tied to points along the monomyth journey. The heroine might either be successful or fail in a portion of the quest. Erdman's solo dances *Ophelia* and *Passage*, both choreographed in 1946, specifically addressed women crossing the threshold points of the monomyth cycle; one successfully crossed while the other did not.

Myth, Religion, and Creative Imagination

Jean Erdman sought the primary and universal sources of human expression and made visible the ancient archetypal images through the creation of her dances. For the dance *Hamadryad* (1948), Erdman combined her knowledge of Greek myth with the theology of Hinduism. The title itself indicates a reference to minor divinities in the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Hamadryads are supernatural beings who have the freedom to interact with both gods and mortals and aid in their attainment of enlightenment. They are tree spirits. As aspects of nature, they personify life-giving powers and are symbols of energy. According to traditional Greek mythology, there seem to be eight hamadryads; each is a daughter of Oxylus. In Erdman's dance, *Hamadryad,* she takes the knowledge of the

Greek spirit myth and synthesizes it with aspects of the monomyth and Hindu Vedic tradition.

According to the monomyth of a hero, the role of the hamadryad could fall under several categories, for example, that of providing supernatural aid, or as an ally or helper for the hero on his journey through the underworld. How then did the choreographer portray the characteristics and feeling of this uplifting spirit? How might one encounter the spirit in a dance? The choreographer takes a twist with another insight.

According to the choreographer's archival papers, Erdman aligns the aesthetics and emotions of the dance with descriptions that are consonant with Hindu Vedic tradition (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9 p.7).[26] The dance seems devised for transmitting a feeling or quality of a major essential emotion (rasa), which transmutes the sentiment of pure peacefulness (Rangacharya, 2014).

In Erdman's dance, with flute music by Debussy, the dancer has the effect of emoting a state of pure bliss (*ananda*); her actions are open and show vulnerability. There appears no room or gain for the ego; no suffering (*dukkha*) is evident. Jean Erdman's goal for the dance was to evoke, as suggested by Joseph Campbell, a paradise in the present moment of time (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9 p. 8).[27]

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[26] The source is a transcript of an interview of Erdman conducted by Nancy Allison on March 10, 1988, titled "Jean Erdman: Conversation about Her Dances." The interview was part of the Jean Erdman Video Project, and the transcript is found in a series titled "Theatre of the Open Eye, 1962 – 1989 and undated."

[27] Again, the source is the transcript of Nancy Allison's interview of Erdman, continuing on March 20, 1988.

The power of this dance lies in that fact that spectators of the dance can embrace this feeling as their own. Jean Erdman's artistic philosophy aligns with the fact that modern dance frequently frees audience members to muse or make associations to a dance without the choreographic dictation for how audiences should receive or think about it. Each viewer is therefore free to create meaning for the dance based on the viewer's personal experience. This point of view corresponds to the insights that one can discern when observing a great work of art. The aesthetic understandings are derived from the shared human experience. It is akin to the Hindu legend of Indra's net of gems. Understanding of a dance is possible because, it is believed, beings are not separate. Like a grouping of multi-faceted jewels, each life, like a jewel, is reflected in the lives of others.

Campbell, and subsequently Erdman, had great familiarity with the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. Their mutual paths followed the search for truth, liberated consciousness, and bliss. It is liberated consciousness that brings self-knowledge and awakening, well-described in an excerpt from the Hindu sacred text *The Bhagavad Gita:* "Those who with the eye of knowledge thus know the difference between the field and the knower of the field, and the way in which creatures are liberated from material nature, attain to the highest" (Johnson, 2008, 13:34).

Erdman could draw from religion and various spiritualities as inspiration for new dance. Furthermore, in addition to knowledge of Hinduism, Erdman's upbringing provided deep familiarity with the indigenous polytheistic and animistic belief system of her Hawaiian homeland. Erdman's extensive reading of literature and discussions with Campbell secured extensive understandings of the nature religions of both East and West.

From her father, the minister, she had grasped the theology of Christianity. Through a mutual friend of the Campbells, Zen master Alan Watts, Erdman learned extensively about Zen Buddhism.

As religion, myth, and literature frequently employ metaphor, Erdman expertly employed it in the dance. Her aesthetic in many dances, and especially *Hamadryad*, might be described as a vehicle to opening the collective unconscious, for it "was suffused with the dreamlike aura of myth and legend" (Fox, 2020). The power of metaphor for seekers of eternal understanding is stated in an ancient Chinese text written in the late 4th century BCE, the *Tao Te Ching:*

> Look for it, it cannot be seen.
>
> It is called the distant.
>
> Listen for it, it cannot be heard.
>
> It is called the rare.
>
> Reach for it, it cannot be gotten.
>
> It is called the subtle.
>
> These three ultimately cannot be fathomed.
>
> Therefore they join to become one. (Lao Tzu, 2005, Ch. 14)

Erdman's modern dances were directed toward the eternal and not bound to earthly political propaganda; she avoided those entrapments.

Principles of Zen can be noticed in the Erdman dances where, within the body, "Heaven and earth are like members of this organism" (Watts, 1957, p. 175). Each dance created by Jean Erdman was a work of art "not only as representing nature but being itself a work of nature"; furthermore, "from the standpoint of Zen it is no contradiction to

say that artistic technique is discipline in spontaneity and spontaneity in discipline" (Watts, p. 174). Also, according to Watts, "[t]he aimless life is the constant theme of Zen art of every kind, expressing the artist's own inner state of going nowhere in a timeless moment" (Watts, p. 181). This principle is aptly displayed in Erdman's dance from 1943, *Creature on a Journey*.

In this brief solo dance with Balinese qualities, Erdman articulated her arms and legs to create a bird-like figure. The vibrantly colored creature appears excited and diligently searches everywhere, and yet nowhere, for its path in life. The bird's darting action and quick changes of direction indicate no specific focus or orientation to a particular path. The percussion score by Lou Harrison matches the tone and style of the dance. Small gongs, turtle shells, woodblocks, and the sounds of various cymbals added to the fascinating aura of the performance.

The bird seems fascinated with the glory of its beautiful self and tail. The creature pauses for brief moments to reorient itself and then abruptly takes off in a new direction. Even the music reflects the lack of focus because, at some points, the time signatures begin to change at every measure. Subsequently, each musician veers off independently while playing in a varied array of time signatures. After a brief sequence of traveling and preening, the bird's ego seems content. Then the routine begins again—the creature appears to be going somewhere with nowhere to go. The situation in the dance perfectly reflects Watts's statement about the aimless life.

For Erdman's *Creature,* the movement evolved naturally and in accordance with the body's rhythms, not with forced effort; it seems free from the constraints of time. When a dancer works with few constrictions of rhythmic time and pattern, there is

opportunity for a liberated consciousness in the actions. The process gives focus to the present moment of creation. Consequently, Jean Erdman's creative process or methodology, as illustrated by her technique in *Creature*, afforded her great freedom of artistic expression.

Other aspects of Asian wisdom and practice seem to speak to Erdman as a dancer and seeker of Buddhist wisdom. As Alan Watts (1957) explained: "Because Zen does not involve an ultimate dualism between the controller and the controlled, the mind and the body, the spiritual and the material, there is always a certain 'physiological' aspect to its techniques" (p. 197). A physiological aspect to dance is the breath. Zen Buddhism does not strive to force the breath or consciously control it, but there is astute awareness of it. In numerous East Asian spiritual practices, including Taoism and yoga, attention is given to the breath in the meditation and training exercises. A correspondence then develops between the breath and the contraction or release of muscle tensions. Mindful attention to the breath was also common in early modern dance training techniques and these gave Erdman direct experience of the non-duality of the mind and body, spiritual and material.

In religions of the Eastern sphere, one seeks to experience and find identity with the divine (Campbell, 2003, pp. 7-8) through mind-body practices. The far-reaching and deep-seeking approach adopted by Erdman in her choreography was sometimes a point of dismay for her peers, as in Jean Erdman's interactions with the New Dance Group, where she was briefly a member. Erdman's dances pointed to the eternal Dances by New Dance Group members were primarily concerned with social justice; the contrast in intention and purpose became a source of consternation for Jean Erdman. This "sticking point"

may have been the reason that Erdman felt compelled to leave the Group and launch a solo career.

Nevertheless, each stage of Jean Erdman's life journey, however painful or challenging, provided the necessary tests that would bring her closer to self-realization and personal bliss. Various stages of discernment can be seen in the events of Jean Erdman's life, including separating from her parents, leaving the puritanical Miss Hall's School for Girls, exploring beyond the tutelage of her modern dance mentors, and finally, parting from her respected colleagues in the New Dance Group.

Feminism

It is proposed that Erdman was a proto-feminist. Erdman demonstrated a powerful presence in the workforce at a time in history when this was not common for women. She became a leader in the early American modern dance movement. American modern dancers had mostly rebelled against the aristocratic nature of ballet with its origins in the patriarchy of European courts; such dancing was neither democratic nor representative of the American spirit. The new modern dance began mostly as a response to the changing political, economic, and social times of the early 20th century. But Erdman went much further by delving into dance themes that were pervasive and eternal. She kept the spirit of independence and innovation alive throughout the many decades of her career by producing a continuous stream of original works. Erdman stated that "a choreographer should never depend on a personal style but rather create for each new dance a unique role of movement intrinsic to its subject" (Jean Erdman, 1971, p. 14).

Erdman modeled courage, independent thinking, intellectualism, and self-reliance in pursuit of a professional career while often touring as a solo dance artist. She operated

in a mode of fully awakened consciousness; she was an agent of self-change. In the *Dance Observer*, a publication regularly read by the performing artists in New York, Karen Wolfe (1942) noted Erdman's originality at the very start of the choreographer's career, stating that Erdman was "a dancer to be reckoned with in the future, for she has something interesting to say and a refreshing and convincing style with which to say it" (pp. 88-89). Jean Erdman's originality came from steering her own course toward a new definition of what it meant to be an American career woman in both the arts and business, and for this reason, she is a heroine for modern times.

Erdman used her standpoint as a contemporary woman and seamlessly fused it with knowledge of historical, legendary, and mythological women's stories to create new artistic narrative. To her credit, Erdman's timeless feminist approach gives us more comprehensive accounts of the world past and present, of multiple dimensionalities, and the possibilities for living a life with full understanding. In the sphere of business, Erdman became a successful entrepreneur, running her own company and dance school in New York City. She had established her success through solid communications, sound management, astute marketing of her shows, and by earning the respect and cooperation of people from around the globe.

Erdman's life as an artist coincided with the start of the modern era. She began her artistic pursuits endowed with a specific and situated knowledge, rooted in a family and society of economic and ethnic contrasts. Jean Erdman's unusual upbringing set her apart from the stereotype often imposed on women from previous generations – that of a domesticated and fragile woman.

Typical women's clothing of the Victorian era in the United States during the late 19th century and first decade of the 20th century was confining. It exaggerated the womanly figure in a sexual way and was tormenting to wear. In the world of dance, the classical ballets often portrayed women as frail and passive. Ballerinas were not authentically themselves; they were supported and manipulated as puppets in fantastic narratives constructed by male choreographers. Roger Copeland, reflecting on that phenomenon in the "Arts" section of the *New York Times* (1982), stated, "Hence the odd paradox that dance—the only art form whose primary raw material is the live human body—began to idealize the image of the disembodied woman."

Erdman exuded femininity and beauty. As a child she had learned Duncan dance, a form of independent expression that was natural and freeing. The dancing was performed without the usual constraints of shoes and cumbersome undergarments so typical of women's garments in the first part of the 20th century. The modern model of femininity fit well with Jean Erdman's upbringing in Hawaii, for as dancers commonly know, Isadora Duncan "dared to dance uncorseted. Dressed in a loose-fitting, free-flowing tunic, she rebelled not only against the corset *per se*, but also against everything it symbolized: The constraints—both physical and psychological—imposed upon women of the Victorian culture" (Copeland, 1982). Undulating, rhythmic bodies and bare feet were acceptable norms associated with dancing in the Pacific islands, and therefore Erdman's standpoint (Hartstock, 1993) on dress and moving bodies was distinct from the notions being propagated about dance and women in the continental United States.

Young Jean Erdman was extremely curious about the world and longed to make her mark in it. When in high school, she left Hawaii for New England to further her

education. As Erdman (1980) stated later in life, “I took myself to a strict boarding school” (p. 2).

Later, although her family had hoped that Jean Erdman would attend Vassar, she instead chose to attend the new and experimental Sarah Lawrence College in New York (Erdman, 1980, p. 11). At the time, Erdman had never heard of modern dance nor had she seen a performance (Erdman, 1980, p. 3), yet she felt compelled to try it herself. She began her Sarah Lawrence dance studies with Marian Knighton and Martha Graham or Graham’s assistants, such as Bonnie Bird, Ethel Butler, and Dorothy Bird. Drama and dance became so important to Jean Erdman that in her third year at the all-girls’ school, she stayed superbly focused and earned the role of William Shakespeare in a school production. She carefully prepared for the part, and in her affable and fearlessly independent way, she put her professors on notice:

> I went to my professors and said, “Well now I’m not going to be coming to class and doing the work for the next four weeks or so because I’m going to be concentrating on this play.” Well, I just took them at their word. They never thought a student would do that. And I was so elated that they had a big confab to decide. “Well, we’ll just see what she does.” (Erdman, 1980, p. 21)

Within the expected time, Jean Erdman excelled in the play, completed all schoolwork, and additionally was invited to conduct a class for the teachers (Erdman, 1980, p. 22).

Erdman married her professor, Joseph Campbell; they were equal and harmonious partners. Each had profound respect for the other and helped one another to achieve astounding intellectual accomplishments and professional goals. Each was dedicated to a chosen career and the numerous daily hours that were necessary to achieve extraordinary

renown in their respective disciplines—she in dance, and he in literature, comparative mythology, and comparative religions.

While still a young woman, Jean Erdman remained torn on the direction of her career. Martha Graham was the influence that helped set Jean Erdman's resolve. As Erdman (1980) later recounted, she insightfully realized "that, instead of being a playwright, or an actress, you know, an actress wouldn't necessarily be a playwright, I could be a creative artist" (p. 23). In other words, Jean Erdman felt the freedom and had the courage to pursue a career of her own design, direction, and tempo. Such a career would permit Erdman to retain power over her work and remain autonomous:

> I was beginning to choreograph my own dances, and I was really beginning to identify with that…[M]y decision was made on the basis of the fact an actress always had to wait from some producer or director to practice her craft, but a dancer could just go right ahead and do it. Nobody had to ask you. (Erdman, 1980, p. 6)

Jean Erdman's college learning in dance was supplemented with studies at the Bennington College Summer School of Dance; there she had access to learning from the foremost pioneers on the American dance scene. Erdman attended the summer school first as a student, subsequently as an apprentice with the Martha Graham Dance Company, and finally as a full-fledged member of the troupe. Although a dancer must be exceptionally strong and determined to survive in any company, the Graham experience offered Jean Erdman the most stringent training and challenges. At one point, Jean Erdman stepped forward to privately challenge Martha Graham for a specific performance role that included speaking on stage within the dance. Jean Erdman's plea

earned Martha Graham's respect and therefore she was given the opportunity to create other roles for herself within the company repertoire (Erdman, 1980, p. 56).

At Bennington, Erdman found herself surrounded by a powerhouse of feminists with tremendous work ethics and well-formed opinions. The modern pioneers generally took charge of their bodies both onstage and off. They were free thinkers with political inclinations that often leaned to the left. In a *New York Times* article, author Roger Copeland (1982) commented on the dominion of women in modern dance: "In the work of choreographers such as Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham, the issue of women's rights is often subsumed into a concern with women's rites." Copeland went on to say that "the fact remains that modern and post-modern dance are probably the only art forms in which various stages of feminist thinking are literally embodied." Yet, Erdman's choreographies were neither a call for radical social justice nor a demonstration of a particular feminist standpoint (Smith, 1990a, 1990b); such routes were frequently pursued by early moderns. Instead, Erdman's artistic ideas were pitched to eternal matters—the joys, trials, and connections to the immortal. Audiences viewed her dancing as a goddess in action.

From Jean Erdman's experiences with Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Hanya Holm, Erdman sought a balanced approach to composition and the working body; consequently, Erdman was able to form her own ideas about dance and composition that were distinct from the original masters. These distinctions were clear to the New York dance critics.

Following a joint performance by Jean Erdman, Nina Fonaroff, and Merce Cunningham at the Humphrey-Weidman Studio Theatre in New York City, George

Beiswanger (1942) wrote in the *Dance Observer*, "They played with ideas and themes and forms and theatre accoutrements and aids that would have terrified young dancers ten years ago" (pp. 120-121). On the program, Erdman's mythological *Transformations of Medusa* had turned heads. It was in this work that Erdman realized the unique epistemologies of women and their inner lives as representative of past, present, and future goddesses; these are the powers belonging to every woman (Campbell, 2013, p. 16; Fox, 2020). Jean Erdman's first myth-based dance was followed by other insightful and fascinating dances that were studies on women, such as *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945), *Ophelia* (1946), *Passage* (1946), and *Sea Deep: A Dreamy Drama* (1947).

In *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle,* womanly relationships are displayed. Erdman became fascinated with the feminine principles that examined the female without the male. Additionally, she looked to ancient Cretan civilization as one source of inspiration because it was a matriarchal society with a goddess as the main deity (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9 p. 4).[28] In performance of the dance, three women can be observed moving slowly and deliberately in a calm and magical atmosphere. They begin in a circle, holding hands and facing outward; they return to this posture at the end. The performers are dressed alike, in long dress-like costumes that seem reminiscent of a time past but of "no recognizable scene." They "advance" and "recede" as if into a mist. The choreographer wrote of her piece,

[28] The source is the transcript of an interview of Jean Erdman conducted by Nancy Allison, dated March 20, 1988, and titled "Jean Erdman: Conversation about Her Dances," a part of the Jean Erdman Video Project.

> Three qualities of a woman here manifest themselves: the nourishing, creating; the youthful brilliantly flashing; the yearning, eternally insatiate…The dance is an expression of that which is female without the male, rather as potential than as fulfilled, in a place visible to the natural eye—outside of time and space—in fact nowhere at all, yet everywhere; as the very principle that invites the male to action, making vivid the answer to why the world goes on creating itself. (Erdman, 1949a, p. 49)

In Erdman's personal papers, she saved a quote by Terry Walter, writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*. On December 31, 1945, Walter commented about *Daughters*, "It is a beautiful dance, no more difficult to understand than the beauty of moonlight on water…" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 65:2).[29]

Erdman sought to create meaningful human connections through abstract dance and theatrical productions based on myth. Her creative constructions were multi-layered communications that commonly conveyed women's identities through her own embodied accounts of life and thought. The vehicle of dance permitted the choreographer to cross many timeless and universal borders of time, space, and bodies (Said, 1983). The dance transmitted Erdman's own transcultural messaging and created publicly shared transcendent experiences. Myth and dance, Erdman believed, was a gateway to awakening the senses and communicating deeply within and across human consciousness.

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[29] The cited document is numbered "MGZMD 170."

Martha Graham discovered the power of myth (Campbell, 1991) for dance through conversations with Jean Erdman and Joseph Campbell (Graham, 1991, pp. 163-164). Using myth, dance could open up the journey of the male hero to embrace the conflicts and journeys of women. A newer power of myth, then, is that it can hold up heroines as models in the current age and recognize women as creators of knowledge (Harding, 1989). As Joseph Campbell (2013) observed,

> Each woman has the opportunity, for the first time, to find her own path, to take on her new role—not simply as Woman, but as *this* woman, *this* personality…[I]t's the personality of the individual woman that is going to find itself, and the roles will no longer be simply the classic ones. (p. 263)

According to feminist writer Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1999), each woman is an expert in and of herself; therefore, to become an agent of change, one must "make the personal political: to create awareness (through shared experiences) that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared" (p. 400). Jean Erdman courageously interpreted and presented the lives of women through dance, but there was no political "party line" *per se* linking her choreography to a specific time. Erdman's choreography transcended time. Her perspective presented a woman's truth and reality quite distinct from the masculine epistemologies that, until then, had commonly been accepted as the "true" historical representation of the world and of women.

It was as if Erdman had anticipated the direction of the feminist movement. For it was not until the late 20th century that feminist Donna Haraway (1988) brought to the world's attention the concept of women's situatedness. Jean Erdman's dances then were

opportunities, as Karlyn Campbell (1999) might have said, for audience members to find their own truths and experience "consciousness raising" (p. 400).

It was no small matter when Jean Erdman made the decision to take advantage of performance opportunities beyond Martha Graham's eyes. Jean Erdman had learned well from Martha Graham but did not succumb to the commanding power and control of the "high priestess," as she was commonly called. Yet when her mentor and esteemed director learned of Erdman's departure, there seemed to be no hard feelings toward the young dancer. In fact, Jean Erdman, Joseph Campbell, and Martha Graham remained life-long friends. With her keen intellectual mind, artistic creativity, business acumen, and perseverance, Jean Erdman launched and subsequently maintained a successful life-time career in dramatic and abstract dance by championing the goddess within herself. She continued to explore aspects important to the feminist perspective.

Sea Deep was a sensuous dance for four women and one man. The dance was composed of remote narrative as well as abstraction. As described by Erdman (1949b),

> The theme is that well-known problem of adolescence, of a young maiden's conversion from the *farouche* state of "Daddy's little girl" (or the tomboy imitator of her brothers) to the romantic readiness of the young woman aware of what she is. (p. 64)

The study of female emotional, psychological, and physical disembodiment fascinated Erdman and she sought to create a dance about it; this she realized in the creation of *Ophelia* (1946). Erdman portrayed the tragic character of *Ophelia* as a struggling woman coming apart at the seams. A writer from *The Hudson Review*, William Poster (1957), observed that Erdman's *Ophelia* coupled the understanding of the

Elizabethan female to that of the modern woman of the 20th century; he recognized Erdman's piece as one of the indisputable classics of modern dance (p. 434):

> *Ophelia* alone…gives one the sense of being a planned step in the history of art, focusing the critical attention of the spectator on the dancer as she moves on a long plane of reference to the past and future, inscribing the graph of her dance on the coordinates of literature, history, and psychology. Every movement appears to have been scrutinized for originality and validity as it reveals a feminine figure being acted upon by powerful, conflicting forces, internal and external, which slowly twist and derange it till the dance closes upon a remarkable final image of static, maimed, paralysis. (Poster, 1957. p. 435)

Ophelia is demonstration of a heroine who is unsuccessful in her passage across the threshold of the heroine's journey. The dance seems to illustrate the fragmentation of a mind and body wracked by the neurosis of clutching to the identity of the ego. William Poster once again comments on the curiosity:

> It is very much the reaction one had to a work like Balanchine's "Apollo" and both are similar, schizophrenic dualities of mind and feeling hoisted on to the stage and kept going by brilliant manoeuvres [sic] of the imagination, fulfillments and turning points in the careers of their creators (p. 435).

On the other hand, the dance *Passage* was a distinct contrast to *Ophelia*. "Passage" heralded the successful completion of the heroine's mythological cycle. Passage was a reference to the imaginative and spiritual flights associated with the transformative experience of an inward journey; as such, it also represented a more expansive awareness associated with the psychological and spiritual states of becoming.

Of course, Erdman could not literally demonstrate flight, so she did it metaphorically: "Louis Horst used to say…you don't have to run around the stage to express running around" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):9 p. 7).[30] Therefore, Erdman avoided a literal interpretation of the theme and instead showed the spirit and abstracted nature of flight.

In the process of Jean Erdman's explorations of the inner female, she threw the old feminine baggage of convention and expectation overboard. She became the agent of her life's destiny and surged forward to direct the course of her journey.

Toward Integrated Total Theatre[31]

Jean Erdman was raised in a family that appreciated both the stories of Hawaiian mythology and those of the Christian Bible. Her mother loved to sing and Jean was actively engaged in both indigenous and theatrical dance styles from a young age. These early creative experiences in multi-arts made an enduring impression on the girl, and she eventually pursued the arts in her college career at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York. Her childhood interests later gave rise to serious study in dance coupled with a dual fascination for acting and theatre. When she was only ten years old, she had an experience that was to forecast the direction of her remaining years, as she later recounted:

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[30] The source is the transcript of an interview of Jean Erdman conducted by Nancy Allison, dated March 20, 1988, and titled "Jean Erdman: Conversation about Her Dances," a part of the Jean Erdman Video Project.

[31] Erdman's term for her multi-disciplinary theatrical work was "total theatre." The term "integrated" clarifies that, in total theatre, the various arts were fully interwoven to create a powerful whole.

> My own theatre work has been inspired by the Total Theatre of the Orient, which I experienced in Hawaii as a child. I saw a performance of the great Chinese classical actor, Mei Lan Fang; he was a *dan* actor whose work impressed both Brecht and Stanislavski. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 5:6)[32]

During her college years, Erdman benefitted from sound instruction in music for dance from Martha Graham's musical composer and associate Louis Horst. In workshops, the composer drew attention to how dance and music could together provide full and rich experiences for audiences. Under Horst's tutelage, Erdman grasped a sense of creative possibilities that would lead to dance experiments and collaborations with some of the most renowned composers of modern music.

Jean Erdman was an avid reader and learned much from the historical, cultural, and psychological literature recommended by her husband, and especially from the writings of Campbell himself. Additionally, she and Joseph Campbell enjoyed modern art, a frequent topic of conversation. Erdman appreciated the numerous friendships acquired in fields supplemental to dance production, including her personal associations with costumer and visual artist Xenia Cage (1913 – 1995), former wife of musician John Cage (1912 – 1992), and avant-garde filmmaker, Maya Deren (1917 – 1961). This rich background contributed to Jean Erdman's aesthetic principles.

When Erdman opened her own New York City studio in 1948, she was able to draw on her unique knowledge, sound anatomical principles, and a neutral approach to

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[32] Erdman wrote this in a letter dated July 16, 1982, to an unknown recipient. Mei Lan Fang (1894 – 1961) performed in the style of traditional Peking Theatre. The term *dan* actor refers to a male actor who specializes in women's roles.

teaching dance that synthesized and expounded upon her own study of world dance forms, along with technical training such as she had received from the founders of modern dance. In Erdman's archived notes, she revealed startling reflections about the narrow focus of her own training with the masters:

> I felt cheated on my technical training when I first left the Graham studio— not because hers is not very good but because it is limited in style as Ballet—and there were certain movement areas and balances and dynamics I have never been introduced to but which seemed to me when I discovered them to be of fundamental importance to creative work. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 7:8)[33]

Jean Erdman's notes among her archived papers reveal that she was not convinced the training, of the types she received from the Big Four, would have long-term value for the development of a budding artist. She believed that strict adherence to just one of the varied systems of technical training could be a detriment to artistic expression, for "they are proven to be a great hindrance to the young dancers who have not found a way" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 7:8).[34] In the same stream of papers, she reflected that she had encountered denial and rigid opposition to some ways of moving that were considered culturally decadent. Nevertheless, Erdman held "deep

[33]The document has no date.

[34]This note by Erdman is undated.

humility before the achievements of the artists in the field" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:8).[35]

Unlike her mentors, Erdman was not interested in creating her own technique or style that would become an extension of personal ego. Erdman therefore adopted the position that "[i]t isn't a choreographer establishing a personal style, but that a choreographer makes a style for each dance. And that style comes from the material of the dance, the theme of the dance, and the choreographer's spiritual disposition" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:10).[36] Much like the attention Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863 – 1938) and Lee Strassberg (1901 – 1982) gave to self-analysis and inner impulses in the training actors for the theatre, Erdman instituted such explorations for choreographing dance. Thus, during the time that Jean was with the New Dance Group (1943 – 1949), she formulated and clarified her choreographic and teaching approaches (Jean Erdman Papers, 1939 – 2001, p. 7:8).[37]

In the evolution of her teaching concepts, Erdman reexamined the basic principles of movement. She became adept at articulating her views and methods in lectures, writing, and interviews. When Doris Hering interviewed her in 1950, Erdman already had a well-developed philosophical approach, advocating

> [a] basic dance training that would, in its most elementary form give the novice an essential experience of the art form, and in more complex variations create a

[35] The document is undated.

[36] The documentary source is a transcript for the Jean Erdman Video Project and concerns excerpts from a Master Class conducted in April 1987 at Sarah Lawrence College.

[37] No date appears on these notes.

> professional dance artist with a completely articulate instrument capable of responding in movement to any choreographic impulse. (Hering, 1950, pp. 15)

Erdman's foundational experiences led her to discover that she was capable of fully integrating all arts to produce meaningful and intimate dance theatre productions. Her artistic aesthetic became closely aligned with philosophies of the Eastern world: "The fundamental thought in the Oriental philosophical world is that the mysterious, ultimate truth, that which you seek to know, is absolutely beyond all definition" (Campbell, 2003, p. 6).

On the sacred space of the stage, Erdman presented a wonderland of harmonious and unexpected results. She did not merely combine disparate elements to create fascinating shows of dance, but instead introduced an integrated choreographic system of "total theatre" that connected people across time and space, past and present. Erdman had an intense fascination with and sensibility for the psychological, mythical, and aesthetic possibilities of performance that sparked her creative imagination (Campbell, 2017, p. 158).

Integrated and total theatre applies metaphor and myth, and creates mind-body connections through perceptual integration, giving agency to the viewer. It permits individuals to retain a point of view; the choreographer has no need to be overly explicit. It is the viewer who assigns personal value and meaning to the theatrical experience. Personal meaning is triggered by associations to memories, emotions, and experiences, which then expand the horizon of the mind. The encounter with these triggering associations produces discovery through the unexpected.

A total theatrical experience provides meaning to viewers at a more instinctive level, one that values play within the consciousness. Frequently, the viewer's expectations of the performance conflict strongly with what the choreographer presents through the dance. The viewer attempts to reconcile these two poles. In this way, the unpredictability and uncertainty of the dance experience generate new thoughts.

A good choreographer, such as Jean Erdman, understood the value of pointing beyond the immediate circumstance to doors of the subconscious that expand the parameters of the audience experience. By 1945, Erdman's emphasis on presentations of abstract solo dances was being recognized. Dance critic John Martin (1893 – 1985), writing for *The New York Times* in 1950, commented that Erdman's work was as "near to being non-associative as movement can be" and was "freely creative" (p. L18). Martin went on to say, "The method of composition, though naturally without story content, avoids any connotation of being merely decorative, much as non-objective painting avoids it, and manages to be just as strongly evocative" (p. 18). Erdman continued to choreograph solos, and subsequently began to choreograph for groups of dancers. The early experiences in the multi-arts remained critical to her identity. She was on the cusp of developing longer productions of integrated "total theatre," as she came to call it. These first experiments became signposts to the accomplishments and pinnacle of Erdman's later career.

In the years immediately following World War II, Erdman embraced lessons learned from audiences and artists whom she met during solo performance tours to Japan and India. She began to immerse herself more fully and purposefully in the endeavor of total theatre, and again permitted herself to be informed by the Asian aesthetic. She began

dramatically translating and integrating dance with structures inherent to other artistic and poetic forms, producing a profound and avant-garde form of theatrical art. She incorporated the poetry of e e cummings into dance, collaborated with the remarkable musician Teiji Ito, and turned toward the literature of James Joyce, particularly *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce, 1939), the densely allusive masterwork—packed with myth, metaphor and dream imagery—that her husband and a co-author explored in *A Skeleton's Key to* Finnegans Wake (Campbell & Robinson, 2005/1944) (and see Campbell, 2017, p. 171). The mystical literature of Joyce and his heroine, Ana Livia Plurabelle, held particular fascination for Erdman. A climax of her life's work, with full integration of the theatrical arts, finally came to realization in the ground-breaking production of *The Coach of the Six Insides* (1962).

In *Coach*, Erdman presented the archetypes of a family and upwellings of the unconscious in a dramatic reinterpretation of *Finnegans Wake.* The award-winning work resulted from her dance, theatre, and aesthetic interests awakened early in life. The production became known as a remarkable achievement of performance art and toured the globe for three years, including two runs in New York City (Campbell, 2017, pp. 172-173). The *Coach* continued to tour throughout the 1960s. As a result, "Universally recognized mythological memories and archetypes awakened contemporary audiences to archaic associations relevant to today's world" (Campbell, pp. 175-176).

With her husband, Erdman founded The Open Eye Theatre in 1972. As stated in the biography of Campbell,

> It seemed as if he and Jean were giving birth—not to earthly but to spiritual offspring. The Open Eye would encompass both hemispheres of the creative

> mind: Joseph's exuberant verbal presentations and Jean's magic of movement and stage imagery. Over the years, the two zones seemed to interpenetrate. (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 475)

With a creative company of artists, The Open Eye premiered new works in Connecticut and New York City and held an international tour in 1973.

Erdman and Campbell continued to develop their artistic interests; both were fascinated by the writing of William Butler Yeats (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 476). Each continued to personally and professionally develop their special areas of bliss—she in the performing arts, and he with writing, lecturing, and intensive professional development sessions offered at the Esalen retreat center on the West coast. In 1982, reuniting with memories of earlier days, they returned to her homeland in the Pacific, and split the time between Hawaii and New York until Campbell's death in 1987.

The entire cycle of Jean Marion Erdman's life can be spoken of as the legacy and journey of a remarkable heroine of the arts and contemporary life. She blazed new artistic pathways for society through the creation of imaginative and insightful choreographies. Her artistic innovations continued to evolve, developing into comprehensive and meaningful total theatre productions. She stayed on course to retain her identity and authentic womanhood. She remained true to a personal mission, and so the universal goddess and heroine emerged.

It appears Erdman's life became a self-fulfilling prophecy, one that Campbell enunciated in *Thou Art That* (2001): "A person is a hero or heroine when he or she is functioning in the interest of values that are not local to the person but are of some greater force of which the person is a vehicle" (p. 93). Erdman lived face-to-face with the

eternal mystery of life. As sure as the grass grows and the snow falls, the die of Erdman's life was cast long before she made an appearance in this earthly life. By the end, she left a long-lasting impression upon humankind's expansive course in the arts.

Today, Erdman is remembered by her friends and admirers as a courageous, sensitive, noble, adventurous, and compassionate woman who sacrificed her ego to live life to the fullest capacity. According to Campbell's writings, such a life signifies the most significant teaching of the Judeo-Christian tradition, that we must "die to ourselves in order to rise to that vision that reveals that we share the same human nature with all other persons" (Campbell, 2001, pp. xx). When Jean Marion Erdman passed in 2020, at the age of 104, she was remembered for her remarkable accomplishments:

> Jean Erdman was among the first American choreographers to exploit the inherent theatricality of dance, melding it with drama, poetry, music and visual art to form a seamless whole, or "total theater," as it was known then. Today it might be described as performance art (Fox, 2020).

Part Two: A Heroine's Journey:

Erdman's Early Life and Career

Chapter 3: The Staging for Erdman's Adventure

The Die Is Cast: The Ancestral Story of Jean Marion Erdman (1100-1915)

As explained by Jean Morrison Brown (1979), editor of the first edition of *The Vision of Modern Dance*,

> To understand dance for what it is, it is necessary we know from whence it comes and where it goes. It comes from the depths of man's inner nature, the unconscious, where memory dwells. As such, it inhabits the dancer (p. 50).

Similarly, to understand the dancer and choreographer Jean Erdman for who she was, the biographer must probe the nature, character, and context from which she emerged. One who would tell her tale must sail the seas and walk in the footsteps of her forebearers. To do so will be to discover the dream-like epic of a life profoundly conceived (Schopenhauer, 1850/1974, p. 204).

Erdman bore the images, consciousness, and memories of past ancestral generations, but manifested them in stunning new ways. The inspirations for her life direction came from world religions and mythology, a study of the inward self, the psychology of the collective unconscious, and collaborations with other artists. Yet, the die of Erdman's life was cast far ahead of her birth in a place where Asian and Western worlds clashed among the waves of the Pacific.

Long before Hawaii was brought into the United States as a full-fledged state, Jean Marion Erdman was born on February 20, 1916, in Honolulu in the Territory of Hawaii. As a fourth generation Hawaiian, Jean Erdman grew up in the Pacific

archipelago, formerly referred to as the Sandwich Islands. Later, when this genius of 20th century American dance and the international stage performed, choreographed, or created theatre productions, she drew on many powerful ideas learned from lessons in her homeland, world travels, mythologies, religions, and literature. She also carried the childhood and the collective cultural memories of her family, whose ancestral lines were comprised of sea captains, entrepreneurial businessmen, and fervent Christian evangelists. Erdman noted specific tensions that evolved from the "two divergent strains in Island society—the missionary group on the one side, and the sea-captain-and-trader group on the other, which historically were often in conflict" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 5:6).[38] The sometimes conflicting strains united in Jean to imbue her with a thirst for adventure, an interest in everything human. Therefore, adventure was in her "blood memory" (Graham, 1991). Wherever she went, Erdman embodied the ideals of *aloha*. Native Hawaiians considered Jean Erdman one of the old *kama ʻaine* families, or "child of the land." Her New England ancestry seems not to have colored the temperament of this remarkable child, who considered herself to be Polynesian (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):12).[39]

An understanding of the settlement of Hawaii aids in a better understanding of Erdman's position. Although details of early human society in the Hawaiian Islands are

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[38] Clifford Gessler of the *Oakland [CA] Tribune* related his observations on Erdman's family heritage in a letter to Isadora "Izzy" Bennet, Jean Erdman's publicity agent. The letter is undated but stored in a folder dated "1950 – 1982."

[39] Erdman's comment to this effect is found in production materials for the Jean Erdman Video Project of the Theatre of the Open Eye.

uncertain, Polynesians from the Marquesas Islands established a small settlement around 500 CE, and Tahitian travelers arrived around 1000 CE (Honolulu: History, 2008). In about the 12th century, Tahitian immigrants introduced a system of belief in gods and demigods. The system created a strict social hierarchy based on *kapu*, that is, objects, foods, times, places, dances, chants, and people set apart and forbidden according to the holiness assigned to them. These complex principles of *kapu* were aimed to propitiate the gods.

> As recorded by a *haole* ("white person"),
>
> The primitive Hawaiians were Polynesians, of the lineage also found in Samoa, New Zealand and other Pacific Islands. The language of all these South Sea Islanders is similar, and the local traditions which have been handed down orally from generation to generation show remarkable agreement. (Hawley, 1922, pp. 19-20)

Similarly, it must be noted that the ancient traditions, such as those learned by Jean Erdman, were handed down through generations by kinesthetic, musical, and oral traditions.

The grouping of the Tahitian and Marquesas settlements became popularly known as the Sandwich Islands, as designated by British Captain James Cook in 1778. Until that time, conflicts between island chiefs were common. It was King Kamehameha I (c. 1758 – 1819), a famed warrior chief, who defeated rival chiefs on the neighboring island. Because of the flourishing sandalwood and whale oil trade with foreigners, Kamehameha I was able to forge important foreign alliances that would help him to unite the kingdom. Subsequently, the islands became a British protectorate.

The first foreign missionary encounter occurred when the Hawaiians came upon the sailing vessel *Thaddeus,* which had arrived on the west side of the big island of Hawaii. The first *haole* families hailed from the Park Street Church in Boston and included the Reverends Hiram Bingham, Asa Thurston and Samuel Whitney, their wives, and four other couples. As Emily Hawley (1922) recounts, "the pioneer missionaries landed on April 12, 1820, at the 'king's village,' Kailua, located on the slope of the extinct volcano Hualalai, and the gospel was first proclaimed there" (p. 13).

Kamehameha II and his wife welcomed the missionaries in a hall adorned with Chinese furniture (Hawley, 1922, p. 28). The missionaries received permission to remain one year and were given thatched huts to live in. Within that time, the missionaries acquired the Hawaiian language and were invited by the Hawaiian king to devise a Hawaiian alphabet. Within two years, the first reading, grammar, and arithmetic books were printed in the Hawaiian language.

Chiefs of the five islands commanded schooling for all residents, and within a few years all natives Hawaiians could read and write. Additionally, within four years of the first missionary arrival, the first Christian church was organized (Hawley, 1922, p. 15). Although Kamehameha II did not permit foreigners to own land until 1848, he was very interested in the ideas and messages brought to him by the Christians. The friendly relations between the Kamehameha dynasty and the missionaries continued until 1864.

During the first years of missionary residence, the chiefs established, built, and furnished schoolhouses for 900 native Hawaiians. There was no reading or writing of Hawaiian or any other language in 1820 when the missionaries arrived, yet just twelve years later the literacy rate improved to 95%, the highest in the world.

Education was free and several types of schools were established: boarding schools, a manual labor school, a school for educating teachers, and a royal seminary for young chiefs. This last endeavor was led by Mr. and Mrs. Amos Starr Cooke, who were originally from Connecticut (Hawley, 1922, pp. 33-35). One of the graduates of the first class of seminary school was poet David Malo, who proudly reflected on the important unifying influence of the Hawaiian school as "the torch that the winds of Kawaula cannot extinguish" (Smith, 1956, p. 252). Today the original seminary school is the flourishing Lahainaluna public high school.

To meet the growing needs of Christian evangelization, foreign missionaries continued to arrive on the islands. As later chronicled by Hiram Bingham (1855), one of the original missionaries, in 1833 a sixth company of missionaries was sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (p. 618); seven future residents of Hawaii were aboard the ship *Mentor*. With their arrival in the islands, the number of resident missionaries totaled about 50. Two of the travelers were the Reverend Lowell Smith (1802 – 1891) and his wife Abigail Willis Tenney (1809 – 1885) (Bingham, 1855, pp. 454, 618), who would become the maternal great grandparents to Jean Erdman. The Smith's daughter, Emma Louise, grew up to be a poet on Hawaiian topics. Living under the shadow of an impressive volcano, Emma Louise reflected on its potential fury in her poetry collection *Diamond Head*:

> Of chaos thou wast truly then apart.
> Thy breast the seat whence lurid fires did dart,
> Thou filled'st the heavens with angry sulfurous breath,
> That wrapped all nature's dawning life in death. (Dillingham, 1891)

The presence of the missionaries widely influenced the native culture. Within the first 15 years of their arrival, both churches and schools were established on the five major islands (Hawley, 1922, p. 29). There were no roads; preachers delivered the gospel on foot (Hawley, p. 31). During the later years of the 1830s, there appeared to be a "great religious awakening," when the indigenous people, including royalty, converted from their former "heathen" religious beliefs to Christianity (Hawley, p. 33). French missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church aided in this conversation with their arrival in the islands in 1827 (Beissell, 1912).

In 1837 the "French Incident" occurred, leading to the temporary expulsion of the Catholic priests from the islands under an edict from the Protestant Queen Kaʻahumanu. Prejudice against Roman Catholic converts and priests had given rise to harassment and torture, and the priests' banishment (Beissell, 1912). In 1839, France responded to the persecutions and demanded reparations from the queen under a threat of war. Persecutions stopped and religious liberties on the islands were then granted to the Catholics and those of other faiths (Beissell, 1912). A new edict of reparation for the victims paved the way for improved religious tolerance in the islands. Becoming more democratic, the Hawaiian Kingdom under Kamehameha III was recognized as a constitutional monarchy in 1840.

In 1841, in order to assist missionary children with their own education, a tract of land known as Ka Punahou was granted to missionary Hiram Bingham by the chief's granddaughter; subsequently, Protestant Congregationalist women established the Punahou School (Hawley, 1922, p. 34). Shortly thereafter, new leadership took charge in

1844 and relocated the school to downtown Honolulu. This was the school that, decades later, Jean Erdman attended as a child.[40]

According to social historian Bradford Smith (1956), by 1848, 130 missionary children were in the islands (p. 292); therefore, the missionaries needed to make their settlement permanent. Because the cost of living had become exorbitant for the missionaries, they sought permission from the Hawaiian king to raise their own crops and flocks. The king granted permission for the missionaries to acquire property, and planting began with crops of coffee and sugar. During this time, the king and the islanders enjoyed 28 years of prosperity. It was also during this time that "missionary cousins were drawn to each other, often married, and became a tight knit social group" (Smith, 1956, p. 328). The growth in trade introduced many new faiths to the islands; in addition to the native gods and various Christian denominations, Buddhist, Shinto, and other groups also gained adherents on the islands. Smith (1956) noted that the Evangelical Association churches became divided according to the languages of the populations they served, such as Hawaiian, American, Japanese, or Filipino (p. 329).

Bradford Smith (1956) also noted that capitalism changed Hawaii with the "demand for farm products by Californians" (p. 291); the selling of goods became quite profitable. This was especially true for the business partnership of Castle and Cooke (p. 311), the genesis of the Dole Food Company. Children of missionary parents often abandoned preaching to follow profitable pursuits (p. 312). As the missionaries' relatives arrived to settle in the islands with the hope of prospering as merchants, politicians, or

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[40] In the 1970s, the future 44th President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama, also attended the Punahou School (Punahou School, 2015).

planters, the former missionaries themselves tended to live quite simply as "children of the land" (*kaka ʻaine*) (p. 323). By 1862, three-quarters of the real estate on Oahu was under foreign control (Smith, 1956, p. 324).

While commercial shipping, whaling, and plantations were bringing prosperity to the Sandwich Islands, traders also brought danger to the island inhabitants in the form of diseases. New pathogens of influenza, tuberculosis, and typhoid were introduced to the indigenous populations throughout Polynesia; subsequently, the unfamiliar diseases decimated the native populations (Martin & Combes, 1996, p. 360). In 1853, a smallpox epidemic killed thousands of Hawaiians and threw island life into complete disarray. At the end of the smallpox epidemic, which lasted about a year, trading vigorously resumed. This was not to be the last of the epidemics for the century. In 1866 leprosy began to spread rapidly among the people of the islands. The disease forced the exile of thousands of people to the isolated peninsula of Kalaupapa on the island of Molokai. The law of forced exile for lepers remained until 1969.

During times of both prosperity and epidemic, Jean Erdman's maternal great-grandfather, Reverend Lowell Smith, conducted his pastoral work. In 1865, he made friends with a young man in the hospital, Benjamin Franklin Dillingham (1844 – 1918), who. later married the missionary's daughter Emma Louise (1844 – 1920). The well-known story is told that "a young man from Massachusetts broke his leg in a fall from a horse while his ship was at Honolulu" (Smith, 1956, p. 324). With Dillingham needing time for his fractured leg to heal, his ship sailed on without him.

George Nellist (1925), who compiled the biographies of many of Hawaii's prominent men, summarized the story: The young man who suffered the accident was an

experienced seaman and first mate. First inspired by the call of adventure at age 14, Dillingham served on his uncle's vessel on a trip from New England, around the horn of South America, to San Francisco. In 1863, he was serving as an officer for the Union during the Civil War, but his ship was plundered and burned by a Confederate naval vessel. Dillingham survived the incident, ending up in Brazil; although destitute, he was able to make his way to New York. In 1864, he embarked on the three-masted ship *The Whistler* for a voyage across the Pacific that made the fateful stop in Hawaii (Nellist, 1925).

Benjamin Franklin Dillingham hailed from Cape Cod, Massachusetts. His family had settled in New England during the early colonial period of the United States, and the original saltbox home survives to this day in the town now known as Brewster. The Dillingham House, built around 1660, remains locally infamous for stories about family sea captains and notorious pirates. Jean Erdman saved newspaper clippings about such stories in her personal files; one follows:

> When a pirate ship was sighted off the [Massachusetts] Bay, John [Dillingham, 1629 – 1715], a Lieutenant in the militia, gathered the neighbors to his house and led them marching around the building, firing the guns, beating drums, and shouting. The pirates, after viewing what appeared to be a long column of the militia were frightened off and did not try to land. (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 4:10).[41]

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[41] The article, from a local Cape Cod newspaper, is titled "Brewster Dillingham House named to national register" and bears the incomplete date of Tuesday, 14th, 1976. The clipping was sent to Erdman by Norine D. Maher, a Dillingham and at one time a dancer with the company of Ernestine Stodell (1912 – 2008) in New Haven, Connecticut.

When Benjamin Franklin Dillingham gave up his adventures at sea to marry Emma Louise Smith, the couple remained in the summer-like tropical beauty of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

By the late 1800s, the islands were becoming more widely celebrated for their remarkable beauty even as they became ripe for more vigorous economic development. Foreign visitors could not deny that the islands seemed like paradise. In 1866, the young newspaper correspondent Samuel Clemens, who had recently taken the pen name Mark Twain, fell under the spell of Hawaii; years later in April 1889, the writer uttered this apparently spontaneous praise in a public address reported in journals of the day:

> No alien land in all the world has any deep, strong charm for me but that one; no other land could so longingly and beseechingly haunt me, sleeping and waking, through half a lifetime, as this one has done. Other things leave me, but it abides; other things change, but it remains the same. For me its balmy airs are always blowing, its summer seas flashing in the sun, the pulsing of its surfbeat is in my ear. I can see its garlanded crags, its leaping cascades, its plumy palms drowsing by the shore, its remote summits floating like islands above the cloud-rack. I can feel the spirit of its woodland solitude; I can hear the splash of its brooks; in my nostrils still lives the breath of flowers that perished twenty years ago. (Paine, 1912, Ch. CLXVIII, quoting Twain)

At home on Oahu, Benjamin Franklin Dillingham proved to be a hard worker and willing to take entrepreneurial risks. As a man of integrity, he was respected among both the *haole* and native islanders, and therefore was able to enlist support for his business endeavors. He began as a hardware clerk, but later bought out the business with

his friend and partner Alfred Castle, the son of Samuel Northrup Castle of Castle and Cooke (Nellist, 1925).

As there was difficulty getting milk on the islands (Hawley, 1922, p. 27), Dillingham tried his hand at dairy farming. Not long thereafter, he became heavily involved with the sugar plantation economy. He attempted a vast venture that required him to acquire 60,000 acres of land. He proposed that the underdeveloped and unproductive lowlands of Oahu could be used for growing sugar by using a unique irrigation design. He gained investors and established the Ewa sugar plantation, which ultimately became the top producer of sugar in the world.

One of the greatest difficulties of raising sugarcane far from a shipping port was that there were no roads to bring farm products from the island outskirts to Honolulu (Nellist, 1925). For this reason, Dillingham founded the Oahu Railway and Land Company. B. F. Dillingham subsequently became one of the first industrialists of Hawaii.

The Dillingham successes extended to the other islands. However, Dillingham also suffered numerous business failures. His ambitions were so extreme that by 1903 his financial obligations, at approximately $4 million, were beyond those of the entire Republic of Hawaii for the time (Nellist, 1925).

Dillingham and his wife had six children, four boys and two girls. Two sons died as infants, Charles (1872 – 1874) and Alfred (1880 – 1880). Walter Franklin (1875 – 1963) became a world-famous industrial tycoon and head of the Hawaiian Dredging and Construction Company. His company was responsible for dredging Pearl Harbor and Honolulu Harbor, and then using the fill to prepare Waikiki Beach. The youngest son, Harold Garfield (1881 – 1971), saw active military service, became

president of the Army National Bank, and was a financier of international shipping, railways, sugarcane plantation ventures, and insurance. With white families on the islands maintaining close ties, in 1885 Harold Dillingham joined with the Smith lineage by marrying Margaret Bayard Smith.

The athletic and prosperous Dillingham brothers expertly handled and solved the financial problems of their father. Subsequently, they brought success to many of the varied enterprises already in operation. Walter and Harold ("Harlo") carried on with B. F. Dillingham Company, Ltd., when their father became ill (Nellist, 1925).

The brothers built houses on prestigious properties of Diamond Head. Walter Dillingham's home on Pona Moi Road, above Honolulu's Kapiolani Park and polo grounds, was known as La Pietra. The location had been a sacrificial altar site many decades earlier but had been abandoned by native Hawaiians (Dingeman, 2018). Designed in the Renaissance style of a Florentine villa, La Pietra became Hawaii's key gathering place for movie stars, presidents, high-ranking military, and kings. Visitors were enthralled by the natural charm of Oahu. Harold Dillingham built his home on the nearby mountainside on Noella Drive.

A penchant for poetry seemed to run in the family. One of B. F. Dillingham's daughters, Mary Emma (1870 – 1951), became a published poet. Her writing reflected the beauty of the Hawaiian environment as well as the romantic aspects of the islands:

On the edge of the world my islands sleep

In a slumber soft and deep.

What should they know

Of a world of woe

And myriad men that weep? (Frear, 1911)

Mary Emma Dillingham married Walter Frear (1863-1948), who later was appointed the third Territorial Governor of Hawaii. Their youngest daughter, Marion Eleanor (1883 – 1972), became Jean Erdman's mother.

By the turn of the 20th century, Hawaii had entered an age of industrialism and the Dillingham family was at the forefront of economic development. With a high dependence on shipping, operations had to be run with the utmost efficiency to secure a profit (Smith, 1956, p. 330). Unusual political developments had also taken place in the Kingdom of Hawaii. The long-standing Hawaiian Kamehameha dynasty of kings ceased in 1873, and the house of Kalākaua became the reigning monarchs.

On the cultural front, the pious work of the earlier missionaries had begun to wane, yet missionary children retained a sense of civic obligation (Smith, 1956, p. 329). They were quick to pioneer research needed for a healthy agricultural economy. By the last quarter of the 19th century, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions became ineffective and withdrew from governance of the Hawaiian Protestant churches. The local churches were then free to carry out their individual pastoral missions and realigned themselves as the Hawaiian Evangelical Association.

With the formation of new plantations and other industries, foreigners from across the western Pacific began immigrating to the islands. These non-Christians sought work as contract laborers in sugar, rice, or the railroads. As a result, existing Christian missions had to change their focus to meet the needs of immigrants, and preachers realized they

would have to be fluent in both Hawaiian and other Asian languages. Jean Erdman's father, John Pinney Erdman, was such a man.

John Erdman was born in 1874 (d. 1941, Honolulu) in Morristown, New Jersey, to a Civil War Army chaplain veteran, the Reverend Albert Erdman; his mother was Sara (Pinney) Erdman.[42] In 1866, John Erdman's abolitionist father had founded the South Street Presbyterian Church at Morristown, and he subsequently served for 38 years as its pastor. As evidence of his stringent position on matters of social justice, a descendant quoted Albert Erdman's description of his own declarations on the issue of race in a public speaking engagement in 1865: "I spoke decidedly of the duty devolving in the nation to give the Negro the ballot. It's no use to mince matters, and I didn't" (Coughlin, 2016).[43]

John Pinney Erdman inherited his father's fire for evangelization. He attended Princeton University and completed his theological seminary training in 1899. As an ordained Presbyterian minister, he was invited by the thriving Central Union Church in Honolulu to become superintendent and subsequently assistant pastor of Palama Chapel, where he served for two years.

Erdman's acceptance of an assignment in Honolulu followed several critical changes in the political affairs of the Hawaiian Islands. In 1893, powerful American and

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[42] The maiden name of John Erdman's mother is variously spelled "Pinney" and "Piney" in historical and genealogical documents.

[43] David Erdman related his great-grandfather's words at the dedication of the Erdman Room in the Parish House at South Street Presbyterian Church in October 2016. Albert Erdman made the quoted statement in a letter he wrote in 1865.

European colonists deposed the Kalākaua monarchy (“Hawai’ian Monarchy Overthrown,” 2021; Sai, 2018) Queen Lili’uokalani had tried in 1893 to restore royal authority diminished under the 1877 Constitution, but her efforts provoked colonists’ opposition. With the support of Minister John L. Stevens, local representative of the U.S. government, and the U.S. Marines and sailors of the warship USS Boston, but without the permission of the U.S. President or Congress, the colonists who controlled much of Hawaii’s economy overthrew the Hawaiian Kingdom in a peaceful yet controversial coup. A new government, the Republic of Hawaii, was declared by a small but powerful group in July of 1894. In 1895 some of the Queen’s supporters attempted an insurrection, but hundreds were killed; ultimately, she had to abdicate the throne to save the lives of captured royalists. Queen Lili ʻuokalani was the last reigning monarch of the Kingdom of Hawai’i (“Hawai’ian Monarchy Overthrown,” 2021; Sai, 2018).

Numerous controversies surround the coup against the native Hawaiian government and the inappropriate actions by Minister Stevens of the United States. These claims remain controversial to this day; however, as history tells us, the islands were successfully annexed as a U.S. Territory in 1898.

The population of the Hawaiian Islands continued to change rapidly. At the turn of the 20th century, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints dominated the religious groups (Alstrom, 1972). In terms of greatest numbers of members, next came the Congregationalists (now United Church of Christ) and finally the Presbyterians and Roman Catholics; much later, the Buddhists became significant in number (Alstrom, 1972).

The Chinese had a period of early immigration beginning in the mid-1800s, so that by 1886 throngs of Chinese people occupied large districts in Honolulu. The immigrants lived in crowded squalor that was the center for gambling and other vices. The Chinese districts defied sanitary laws. In 1886, an accidental fire broke out and burned Chinatown for three days, causing extensive homelessness, loss of businesses, and loss of personal possessions, though little loss of life (Greer, 1976). Non-Chinese commentators celebrated a silver lining in the destruction of deeply unsanitary conditions and highly flammable structures that predated the fire (Greer, 1976, p. 42), but presumably the dispossessed Chinese residents were less impressed by this aspect of the fire's destruction.

By December of 1899, the cramped, unhealthy conditions had resumed in Chinatown. This time, the bubonic plague struck the population, and subsequently the "great fire of Honolulu" ensued. It began on January 20, 1900, and burned the city for 17 days. The fire left 4,000 Chinese and Japanese residents homeless ("Hawai'i Timeline: 1900," 2021).

Still, new immigrants to the islands were arriving regularly and many of them sought entertainment at the Chinese theatre that offered performances biweekly. According to Hawaiian historian Clarence Glick (1976), the theatre had been built in the late 1870s (p. 138). It not only employed a regular group of actors but also planned for commercial ventures that brought in top professionals from South China (Glick, p. 139). The theatre was very popular with the Chinese locals, but many island Caucasians complained about the late hours and loud noises associated with the performances. The Cantonese theatrical productions continued through the late 1920s (Glick, p. 140) until

American movies began attracting many entertainment customers. The Erdman family's appreciation for Chinese theatre and its close proximity to their home made it possible for Jean Erdman to experience this art form at an early age (Erdman, 1980).

Following the political, public health, and economic upheavals of turn-of-the-century Honolulu, John P. Erdman married Marion Eleanor Dillingham in 1904. Subsequently, Erdman was appointed to go with his wife to Japan as a missionary to serve during the Russo-Japanese conflict, a war aggravated by Russian expansionism into the far reaches of Asia. In the conflict, the Empire of Japan prevailed against the European power to gain control of the Manchurian and Korean territories. It was during the couple's stay in Kobe, Japan, that the Reverend and Mrs. Erdman had a son; he was to be Jean Erdman's oldest sibling, Harold Randolph Erdman (1905 – 1931).

In 1907, the young family returned to Oahu when John Erdman was recalled to serve on the Hawaiian Board of Missions, a role he then filled for many years. The Palama Chapel, where the Rev. Erdman had earlier served as superintendent, began to act as a social service agency, and in 1905 the chapel became known as the Palama Settlement. The settlement served the important function of providing assistance to Chinese residents made homeless by the Honolulu fire of 1900 (Gee, 2020). Today, the settlement continues to serve Honolulu's low-income families by providing an array of programs to cultivate a nurturing environment for residents.

As Hawley (1922) reports, an interesting profile of the Hawaiian population appeared by 1910: Japanese residents made up Hawaii's largest constituency with 79,675 people. Caucasians totaled 44,048. The native population had been reduced to 26,041, and those who were identified as part Hawaiian included 12,506 residents. Of

other groups, the Chinese represented 21,674, Korean residents 4,533, Filipino 2,361, and "Negro" 695. All other races and ethnicities tallied 376. The number of native-born versus foreign-born residents was about equal (Hawley, p. 43).

The Hawaiian Evangelical Association (HEA) remained busy serving churches associated with each of these populations. The Hawaiian Board distributed its papers and magazines in Hawaiian, English, Chinese, and Filipino. In 1919, the HEA had "66 Hawaiian, 11 Union, 18 Japanese, 8 Chinese, 2 Portuguese, and 3 Filipino churches" (*93rd Annual Report*, 1915, p. 23). In 1915, while in the role of superintendent of the Hawaiian Board of Missions, the Rev. Erdman identified the need for more well-equipped pastors (*93rdAnnual Report*, p. 25) and reported, "The day will come when we shall no longer distinguish churches by national adjectives but simply by local names" (*93rdAnnual Report*, p. 23)

John P. Erdman was active on other fronts as well, helping found the Christian Workers' Institute in 1910; from this organization the Honolulu Theological Seminary arose in 1921 (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 598). The Rev. Erdman remained highly influential in both the community and the Hawaiian Board of Missions. By 1918, he had held the important positions of superintendent and field secretary, and headed the overall program (Larsen & Larsen, pp. 598-599), which also included the Sunday school department and the Filipino department.

Erdman continued to preach in English, Hawaiian, and Japanese to people of various ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds throughout the islands.[44] Mrs. Erdman

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[44] Like John P. Erdman, many of his family members played leading roles in the Protestant Christian movement in various locations in the world. His brother, the Rev.

often toured with her husband on evangelist campaigns and "was a great help to the effectiveness of the meetings" (*93rd Annual Report,* 1915, p. 27). During the period of John P. Erdman's service on the Board, he and Marion gave birth to four more children: Emma Louise [Erdman Henderson] (1906 – 1996) known as "Lou," Dorothy Eleanor [Erdman Vonhold] (1911 – 1993) referred to as "Da," Jean Marion [Erdman Campbell] (1916 – 2020), always called "Jean," and Marjory [Erdman Fairbanks] (1919 – 2007), referred to as "Barj" or "Bargie."

Aloha, Jean: Erdman's Birth and First Years (1916 – 1920)

Jean Erdman was born on February 20, 1916, the fourth of five children born to Marion Dillingham (1883 – 1972) and the Reverend John Pinney Erdman (1874 – 1941). Jean was fourth-generation Hawaiian on her mother's side. In the year of Jean's birth, the mountain of Mauna Loa on the Island of Hawaii generated a great lava flow. In the traditional Hawaiian view, the goddess Pele presided over the fire gods to activate the crater again, and the volcano had a spectacular eruption just three years later. As seen from Honolulu on Oahu Island, the "heavens lit up with an apricot glow" and a flood of

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Paul Erdman, was a missionary to Syria. Their father, the Rev. Albert Erdman, was the founder and long-time pastor of the South Street Presbyterian Church of Morristown, New Jersey. Their paternal grandfather, the Rev. John Brooke Pinney (Dec. 25, 1806 – Dec. 25, 1892), was the first Presbyterian missionary to Africa. He helped found Liberia College (subsequently known as the University of Liberia) and exerted continuing efforts to support and strengthen the school (Allen, 2010; Biography, 2010). Before and after the American Civil War, he assisted and accompanied Africans and African-Americans, including both escaped and freed slaves, who desired to return or emigrate to West Africa. He made a dozen trips to Liberia in his lifetime and served as the U. S. Consul General to Liberia under President Abraham Lincoln. Pinney spent much of his life working with and for Black Americans and Liberians in an attempt to redress man's inhumanity to man. (Allen, 2010; Biography, 2010).

molten lava "belched forth" (Hawley, 1922, p.17). These events might be seen as extraordinary markers of Jean's birth and childhood, for as lava cascaded from the mouth of the volcano, it seemed the Hawaiian spirit of *aloha* poured forth from the Hawaiian deities as a sign of affection for the island child.

Indeed, as Jean Erdman grew, her personality seemed to assume the heart and soul of pure *aloha*, for *aloha* is

> not only love, but a warm-hearted regard for all men, a willingness to accept difference without discrimination, to match the natural beauty of the islands with responsive good humor and good will. (Smith, 1956, p. 331)

It is not merely about hospitality, humility, or gratefulness. At its core, *aloha* embraces and honors the dignity of all people.

The Hawaiian missionaries held "a vision of the noble dignity of man" (Smith, 1956, p. 330). As she matured, Jean Erdman would seek truth, maintain the highest integrity, practice excellence, and aim for harmony and unity. She would be a seeker of wisdom, pursuing knowledge of self, various cultures, and the divine. She would learn to persevere through the range of life's circumstances, not focusing on the unpleasant but proceeding with joy and right intention. These, too, are qualities of *aloha*. The *aloha* sentiment seemed evident to those whom Erdman encountered. The sentiment is similar to a saying attributed to the Gautama Buddha (563 – 483 BCE) in the second verse of the *Dhammapada:*

> All experience is preceded by mind,
>
> Led by mind,
>
> Made by mind.

Speak or act with a peaceful mind,

And happiness follows,

Like a never-departing shadow. (Fronsdal, 2020, Chapter 1)

Nature's disruptive lava flows seemed to also correspond with the timing of World War I. The extraordinary events of the war became first in the minds of the people of the new American territory. It was known that Japanese ships prowled the Pacific and were ready to destroy German ships; yet the port of Honolulu remained neutral as a central Pacific destination. For the islanders, a conflict seemed imminent.

In the early 1900s, the U.S. Navy requested improvement of facilities at Pearl Harbor. Permission was granted in 1908 and dredging operations ensued. According to the United States Foundation for the Commemoration of the World Wars (USFCWW), by June of 1916 the Organized Militia of Hawaii changed to the status of National Guard and was headquartered on Oahu ("Hawaii's involvement," 2021). Naval personnel began sailing out of Hawaii regularly starting in September. German ships, which had been interned at port in Hawaii, were subsequently confiscated by the Americans in 1917 and converted to U.S. combat use. International businesses based in Hawaii, such as the sugar businesses, sought privacy by maintaining their own telegraph equipment, but the communications resource was subsequently seized by the U.S. government ("Hawaii's involvement," 2021).

The USFCWW historical timeline of war-related events in Hawaii also states that the lights of the Honolulu Harbor were kept dark to deter attacks by German submarines ("Hawaii's involvement," 2021). It was believed that German sabotage lay at the root of an anthrax outbreak on some cattle ranches. In June of 1917, military draft boards opened

for local residents to enlist in the war effort; joining the guard was believed to be an important civic duty for residents ("Hawaii's involvement," 2021).

In the Hawaiian archipelago, changes were taking place in preparation for war. In earlier years, navigational fires had been lit on the volcanic crater of Diamond Head to assist canoes in reaching the shoreline in darkness ("Hawaii's involvement," 2021). In 1917, the Diamond Head Light was commissioned to substitute and make permanent a visual aid for navigators. Again, the historical timeline of the USFCWW provides important details concerning war preparation. There was intense support for the war effort and men representing every culture went to the training camp at Schofield Barracks, about 17 miles from Honolulu, via the Oahu Railway. More than 36,000 troops from Hawaii served during the war. This same year was the last in the life of Hawaii's deposed queen, Liliuokalani. The queen, who had been especially active with the Red Cross and helping soldiers overseas, died exactly one year prior to the end of the war ("Hawaii's involvement," 2021). The immediate aftermath of World War I gave little scope for optimism. A horrendous influenza pandemic ran its course from 1918-1919. About 500 million people became infected, and deaths worldwide were estimated at approximately 50 million (Centers for Disease Control, 2019).

If all these occurrences were not enough for the people of the tiny Pacific islands, a highly political controversy reared its ugly head. The Territorial legislature requested an internment camp to be set up in the islands. Although it did not happen during WWI, the conversations at that time set a precedent for establishing Japanese internment during the Second World War.

The content and tone of the conversations could be grasped in a publication that marked a 100-year anniversary of the first missionary group's arrival in the islands. In spite of an extraordinary six-day celebration marking the event, including a visit from His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Reverend John P. Erdman indicated a concern over the uncertain status of the Japanese population in the American territory. Erdman, very knowledgeable of the precarious Japanese situation and fluent in the language, was serving as chairman of the Secretarial Council of the Hawaiian Board of Missions. He reported there were 2,000 American children in the missionary schools but there were 22,000 of Asiatic parentage (Erdman, 1920, pp. 77-79).

In the same report, Erdman's contemporary, Arthur L. Dean, president of the University of Hawaii, forthrightly addressed the controversy and plight of Japanese and Japanese-Hawaiian residents. He and the residents of Hawaii recognized that the livelihood of the island residents was quite American in most respects (Dean, 1920, p. 86). Viewing the world at large, Dean did not underplay the deep hatred that the Chinese and Koreans had for the Japanese; this view was pervasive in the islands. The depth of feeling was due to the foreign policies of the nation of Japan, and the extreme tensions reverberated not only in Hawaii, but around the world. Dean remarked,

> The course of Japan is beyond our control, but in our dislike and dread of that course we must not forget to be just in our treatment of Japanese here, very few of whom are in the least responsible for Japan's policy. Because we must perforce be on our guard against Japanese aggression we should not be false to the fundamental principles of Christianity or the American love of justice and fair

play. We can cut no very impressive figure, if through fear we lose our own souls. (Dean, 1920, p. 87)

The situation had been carefully considered. There was no good solution to the problem for the Japanese who lived in Hawaii. Dean recognized that the older Japanese loved their homeland; he remarked,

> The best we could offer them is the dubious status of a man without a country. The American born of Asiatic parentage is quite another matter. There we have a great opportunity and a duty not to be avoided. These are Americans by birth and if we are true to our alleged principles, they must become Americans in very truth. (Dean, 1920, p. 87)

The most difficult policy facing the American Territory was one established by Japan itself, which decreed that Japanese of any age, born in their native country or born in Hawaii, were Japanese citizens. President Dean recognized the threat and the helplessness of the situation, and reiterated the Hawaiian focus on the role of education, especially for youngsters: "We stand committed to the American view that every child should have the opportunity to make the most of himself, whatever is going to come of it" (Dean, 1920, p. 88). President Dean concluded his report with a substantive question appropriate for any time, "How can you Americanize anyone whom you refuse to accept as an American?" (Dean, 1920, p. 88).

A Girl in Hawaii: The Unconscious Where Memory Dwells (1920 – 1932)

The young Jean Erdman grew in the remarkable environment of the diverse cultures and activities of Oahu. The political climate and her family's sensitivity to it would inform Jean Erdman's later associations and decisions. In the meantime, the

young, athletic and expressive girl attended school barefoot, but on Sundays, she donned shoes and was likely to be seated in Sunday school or listening to sermons at the Central Union Church of Honolulu (Sato, 2014).

Central Union Church had historically evolved from a merger of the Bethel Union Church, destroyed during the Chinatown fire of 1886, and Fort Street Church. The original church occupied the corner of Beretania and Richards Streets, across from the Iolani Palace of former Hawaiian Queen Lili'uokalani. Yet, when Jean was only eight years old, the church moved to the corner of South Beretania and Punahou Streets. To Jean and her siblings, the Congregationalist church was affectionately known as the Church in the Garden. It was in the church garden that she enjoyed skating lessons (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939-2001, 4:10).[45]

Jean Erdman exhibited several characteristics of the Dillingham ancestral line. She was as adventurous as the sea captains and as entrepreneurial as the businessmen of her lineage, yet these characteristics were synthesized with traits particular to the Erdman side—honesty, humility, and a full commitment to ethical ideals. Her life united the two divergent strains of the established white families on the islands (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 5:6).[46] The Reverend John P. Erdman, in the spirit of Protestant evangelism, had a dedicated history of serving the native Hawaiians and the many subcultures that

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[45] Mary Metzler (Mrs. Hugo Metzler, Jr.) recounted these shared memories of their youth in a letter dated March 18, 1958, to Jean Erdman.

[46] This correspondence bears no date but appears to have been written in about 1954 by Clifford Gessler, a writer for the *Oakland [CA] Tribune.* It is found in a folder titled "Correspondence—General, 1950 – 1982."

populated the islands. Among Jean Erdman's family members, he was the only one without a business background. Jean Erdman "was reared in an atmosphere as close to the Orient as the Occident—closer, perhaps"; her father "conducted non-sectarian church services" and "was most sympathetic to other religions" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 1(1:1):14).[47]

Along with the firm Christian foundation provided by her family, young Jean's curiosities and learning were further shaped by the unique surroundings of Oahu. The island was rich in cultural offerings, sports, and indigenous traditions, and was home to varied religious practices. In Honolulu, she participated in dance and drama growing up, even in Sunday school. Additionally, members of her family were strong horseback riders; the men had begun the family tradition of playing polo back in the 1880s.

The Erdman family home on Beretania and Alexander Streets in downtown Honolulu was filled with the playful escapades of Jean and her siblings. Her parents were in community theatre; it made no difference that her father was a minister. Jean's mother had a beautiful singing voice, as the daughter recounted in an oral history for the Bennington Summer School of the Dance Project:

> My mother was a marvelous woman. She was beautiful and a very graceful woman herself, and though nobody in our family had done anything professional, she was a singer…she sang in church…So she had a great appreciation for the theatre arts. (Erdman, 1980, p. 7).

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[47] The information appears in undated correspondence to a "Mr. Ota" from Jean Erdman's press agent in the 1950s, Isadora "Isie" Bennet of the firm Bennet & Pleasant, which had offices at 37 West 52nd Street in New York City. The letter is stored in a folder bearing the date range of 1954 to 1970.

Social dancing, especially the hula, was typical for the Hawaiian residents (Erdman, 1980, p. 2). Jean's family members learned ancient hula following specific traditions taught by a respected *kahuna* (Leen, 1961, pp. 94-95). For Erdman, ancient hula would serve as an introduction to dance as a sacred endeavor.

Just a few blocks away from the Erdman home was the Punahou School, which Jean joyfully attended. The original school had been founded on valuable land granted by Boki, high chief and royal governor of Oahu, to the Rev. and Mrs. Hiram Bingham. The land was to be used for schooling the missionary children but was later opened to all classes and ethnicities of island people. The land had a perpetual bubbling spring and was appropriately named Punahou, or "spring" (Gulick & Clark Gulick, 1918, p. 53). When the school was later moved to its current location, a few blocks from Jean's home on Beretania, the new lily pond became the popular water feature. According to a school bulletin, it was at Punahou that Jean was introduced to the pioneering art of American modern dance (Sato, 2014).[48] She was fortunate to have a physical education teacher, Mrs. Helen Campbell, who taught interpretive dance in the Isadora Duncan style. From her schooling, Jean Erdman discovered that both the individually expressive dance style and ethnic traditions were fascinating to her (Erdman, 1948, p. 40). At Punahou, the children were encouraged to participate in group dancing as a way to nurture healthy bodies and minds. Mrs. Campbell also established the Punahou Girls Athletic

[48] In this bulletin, the story of Jean Erdman and her accomplishments was featured simultaneously with a story about another exemplary graduate of Punahou, "Barack (Barry) O'bama [*sic*]," the 44th president of the United States.

Association, which offered opportunities for athletics. The physical education program was a distinctive feature of Punahou life (Sato, 2014).

Dance was always central to the cultural life of Punahou. May Day activities around the school's lily pond and other spring dance recitals were events for which students eagerly prepared. Jean Erdman participated in the extravagant 1926 production of "Dream of India," which offered a memorable display of student talent; it had a cast of 90 girls (Sato, 2014).

Outside the school, Jean had seen Japanese dancing and Chinese theatre. The Chinese form impressed Jean as being "angular and formal" (Erdman, 1980, p. 5). Extracurricular dance activities continued elsewhere for Jean, including tap dance lessons at the Courtland Hotel. She was nine years old when a college athlete visiting Hawaii from New York City stayed at the Courtland; years later, Erdman's future husband, Joseph Campbell, would write about that coincidence in his personal journal (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 55).

From her stays at the family's Mokoleia ranch on the north side of the island, Jean kept fond memories of swimming in the surf and riding horseback among the hills. The ranch and other nearby lands amounted to 7000 acres when originally purchased by her grandfather. The family lodge was built by her mother and two uncles, Walter and Harold Dillingham (Dillingham Ranch, 2016). The large country estate was located on land that touched both the sea and the mountains. On the ranch was a polo horse breeding program, and many international sportsmen enjoyed playing polo there.

In 1929, Jean Erdman's brother Harold married Mary Chickering of Oakland, California; they soon had a child, which made Jean a young aunt. Just two years later,

when Jean was only 15 years old, she and the rest of the Erdman family suffered a terrible tragedy. Harold died in an accident with a polo horse. The polo grounds across from the Mokoleia ranch home were subsequently donated to the local YMCA and renamed Camp Erdman in honor of Harold. Camp Erdman functions to this day for the benefit of all children. Its mission includes a dedication to social responsibility with a strong commitment to equity and inclusion ("About the Y," 2021). Mary Chickering went on to become a great protector of the Hawaiian landscape and especially of its flowers.

Lessons from childhood were to remain with Jean Erdman throughout her years. Looking forward, the young Jean would soon be launched into the adventure of young womanhood. Shaped by the rich tempering of her upbringing and graced with self-confidence, Jean Erdman discovered inspiration in the myths and psychic patterns explored by her husband, Joseph Campbell, and the earlier thinkers he also turned to. In *Pathways to Bliss*, Campbell (2004) quotes the 19th century writings of Arthur Schopenhauer to highlight the lasting power of youthful experiences:

> [T]he experiences and illuminations of childhood and early youth become in later life the types, standards and patterns of all subsequent knowledge and experience, or as it were, the categories according to which all later things are classified—not always consciously, however. And so it is that in our childhood years the foundation is laid of our later view of the world, and therewith as well of its superficiality or depth: it will be in our later years unfolded and fulfilled, not necessarily changed. (p. 286)

Like many girls from her school, Jean Erdman left Punahou at the end of her junior year to attend a girl's boarding school in the eastern continental United States. It

was originally thought that Jean might attend the Dana School in New England (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 239), where both her mother and her sister Da had gone. The alternative for a college prep school was Miss Myrna Hall's School in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which her sister-in-law Mary Chickering Erdman had attended (Wright, 2002). Jean's preference for Miss Hall's School seemed to hinge on the fact that she wanted to remain with her best friend, Elizabeth Cooke, or "Beba," as Jean called her. And so with this decision, Jean Erdman began the quest of her womanhood and career (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, pp. 239-240).

Chapter 4: Trials

The Quest Begins

Jean Erdman left the Punahou School in 1933 to attend Miss Hall's School in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Demonstrating independence from her family yet loyalty to her friend Beba, Erdman stated, "I took myself there" (Erdman, 1980, p. 2). Once in New England, Erdman found the boarding school to be quite strict in academics and comportment. The puritanical attitude of the New Englanders proved to be a striking contrast to Erdman's free-spirited upbringing in Hawaii.

At school, Erdman faced the stark realization that her native Hawaiian dances were not appreciated. Additionally, she learned no form of dance was offered in the regular or after-school curriculum. For her peers, Jean Erdman demonstrated the hula of her homeland; the schoolgirls were fascinated by the movement of the hips. When Miss Hall caught wind of the demonstration, Jean was severely reprimanded for unladylike conduct (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 240). Dancing at Miss Hall's School was not permitted "except under special circumstances with permission" (Erdman, 1980, p. 2). In social settings involving dancing with a partner, Jean complained that teenagers "could not hold partners close at the prom (Erdman, 1980, p. 3).

During the school's winter holiday break, Erdman and a few friends went to Lake Placid. Jean had wanted to learn to ski but ended up with both appendicitis and pneumonia. During her illness, she was visited by her older sister Da. If there was an

upside to the difficult first year in the continental U.S., it was that Jean appreciated learning good study habits (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 240).

Jean graduated from Miss Hall's School in 1934. The administrators of the school wanted Jean to attend Vassar. Her eldest sister, Lou, had graduated from there, but Da had chosen to attend the newly opened experimental school Sarah Lawrence College (SLC) in Bronxville, New York. Jean wanted to major in the performing arts and that preference weighed strongly in her decision to attend the small college. After a summer at home in Hawaii, Jean followed Da. Erdman was fascinated by what she was told about SLC (Erdman, 1980), as she related,

> If you had something going inside you that motivated you for your work, it was the ideal place, especially for the arts. I learned in boarding school how important those were to me, because it was the first time in my life that [I was] prevented from practicing them to the fullest. (Erdman, 1980, p. 11)

It seemed something inside young Erdman was stirring and reacting to the new environments in which she found herself. Perhaps she was awakening the ancestral and childhood consciousness "of what the world was like before we [she] learned to see it" (Marton, 1986, p. 40).[49]

Guardians and Dragons on the Journey

Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York, had been founded in 1928 under the non-traditional principles and beliefs that a young woman was an adult and

[49] The quotation expresses a quintessential view of phenomenology that is intended to explain how a person may gain "different understandings of reality" (Marton, 1986, p. 3).

should be able to make her own decisions about courses and programs of study. The general aim of what became an experimental college was to guide students toward a broad liberality of knowledge and connect academic subject matter to relevant interests and meaningful life experiences. By 1933, approximately 300 young women attended the school; it had just awarded its first B.A. degree ("The History of Sarah Lawrence College," 2017, Timeline: 1930s). Social formality was evident on the campus. Professors were addressed by proper title or rank, and students were formally addressed using the title "Miss" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 232).

The college was located in a quaint rural village connected by train to New York City, just 45 minutes from the city center. The good transportation system afforded the coeds various opportunities and benefits of an exciting and worldly city. Artists and professors could work and live in the city if they desired. In 1934, both Joseph Campbell, as faculty, and Jean Erdman, as a freshman student, began their association with Sarah Lawrence College. She, at age 18, was an eager freshman; he, age 30, was a handsome and sociable professor.

Under the leadership of President Constance Warren, Sarah Lawrence College had hired faculty who were self-reflective about their own education and life experiences. Along with Joseph Campbell, who had taken an unusual life course to gain his broad and deep education, faculty included painter Kurt Roesch, a refugee from Naziism (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 234). Although the enrollment for most SLC classes was capped at twelve students, Campbell's classes were large and popular with the women.

According to the history of Sarah Lawrence College, the school had received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to designate special courses to encourage

freshmen to make discoveries in various disciplines across the curriculum ("Guide to Exploratory Courses," 2004). Fortunately for Jean Erdman, Sarah Lawrence offered dance, drama, and singing. Within the first year, Erdman immersed herself in both theatrical activities and dance as well as her academic studies. She would have a tough choice to make when it came to narrowing her interests to a single major.

As stated by Larsen and Larsen (2002) in their biography of Joseph Campbell, Erdman fed her interests in other academic areas as well. She demonstrated an affinity for comparative religion and, specifically, non-western religions (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 240). Additionally, she began to study Irish culture and theatre. She developed a strong appreciation for art history and aesthetics, a course that had been taught by faculty member René D'Harnoncourt (1901-1968), who would later go on to become the Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

According to archival files from the Esther Raushenbush Library at Sarah Lawrence College freshman Erdman quickly involved herself in college activities, including becoming president of her class and playing roles in dramatic enterprises, such as the moth in *The World We Live In* by Josef and Karel Capek (*Theatre Program; Programs 1929-49*, 1929 – 1949). In another play, she took the role of William Shakespeare himself. Jean was very serious about the Shakespeare part and announced to her professors that she would be taking time off from classes to prepare for the performance (Erdman, 1980, p. 21)! This production and others were presented by The Dramatics Activity under the direction of Mary Virginia Heinlein. As stated by Erdman (1980), "We did *Lysistrata* for one thing, and she [Heinlein] would invite professional directors to come and work with us" (p. 21).

In the play *Noah's Ark*, she was a primitive dancer and worked herself into an improvisational frenzy every night of the play (Erdman, 1980, p. 22). Erdman was well suited to the part: "Since my background had been Duncan dance, where everything had been improvised and you really knew how to get into it, no problem" (Erdman, 1980, p. 22). It was the SLC dance teacher, Marian Knighton, who suggested that improvements could be made to Erdman's totemistic performance if she gave her dance structure and then fully developed each of the segments within the structure.

Marian Knighton taught the college girls how to dance by using a non-emotive, physical education approach to the classes. Apparently, Knighton had training from the Graham dancer Bird Larson and perhaps from Mary Wigman (Erdman, 1980, p. 12) when Wigman toured the U.S. in 1930. Knighton was very open to Jean's questions about dance, and Jean regularly met with her to confer (Erdman, 1980, p. 5). Once a month, Martha Graham visited the campus and taught technique herself. On a weekly basis, Graham's assistant Bonnie Bird taught dance classes.

In Erdman's first dance class with Martha Graham, she felt she had a stroke of luck: She was immediately noticed because of what she was wearing. In those times, a dancer did not wear tights but usually wore a simple black cotton leotard with a zipper up the back. But Erdman had a problem with her leotard, as later recorded for the Jean Erdman Video Project:

> But mine was wet. It hadn't dried… I had just washed it. So I ran to a friend who was the only person I knew who had a second leotard of her own and it was a

> beautiful, shiney [*sic*] rayon jersey. Long sleeves. Electric blue. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 9)[50]

After the class, Martha Graham asked the regular teacher, Marian Knighton, about the girl in blue.

Years later in an interview, Erdman recalled the first time she saw Martha Graham in person:

> I'll never forget it. I had not seen her dance but she appeared in a white, silk, pongee wrap-around skirt with a little bolero… and this black hair, down. And she had one pin and kept pinning the hair back… And then she had a little white bathing suit on underneath. No tights, … Bare feet and a kimono. She was wearing a kimono and I wondered how come she knew about Japanese kimonos? I grew up in kimonos because of having so many Japanese people out there in Hawaii. But I didn't know how *she* knew about kimonos. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 pp. 7-8)[51]

In the same interview, Erdman went on describe her earliest memories of Miss Graham:

> There are certain things that are universal. For instance the second position plie—and she [Martha Graham] went all the way down to the ground. I had never heard of a plie, I didn't know of a second position, I didn't know what was universal.

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[50] Erdman's story appears in the transcript of an interview conducted by Linda Small in 1978 for the Jean Erdman Video Project.

[51] Erdman made this statement in 1978 in an interview by Linda Small for the Jean Erdman Video Project.

> But I could recognize movement because I had seen it happen in all the other dances that I had grown up with. (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 8)

Miss Graham's classes were always accompanied by musician Louis Horst (1884-1964), and from him Erdman received rigorous training in music for dance. Erdman was challenged by intense dance composition studies through exercises and structures in pre-classic and modern forms. Horst helped Erdman recognize the value of having original music composed for the dance so the accompaniment did not detract from nor diminish the dance itself.

Following the freshman academic year, Jean Erdman returned to Hawaii to spend the summer teaching in a studio and to learn more of the traditional practices of ancient Hawaiian hula from the great *kapuna*, Mary Kawena Pūku'i (1895 – 1986). Pūku'i's ancestry was of the royal line, and she was recognized as a direct descendant of the fire goddess Pele (Mary Kawena Pūku'i, n.d.). According to Martha Beckwith (1980), an authority on Hawaiian mythology, which is integral to ancient hula, "[t]hose who learn the dances are supposed to be possessed by the spirit of the Pele goddess of the dance. An error in the step shows that the patroness has rejected the dancer" (p. 180). Erdman was intimately familiar with the precise rituals, traditions, rules, and prohibitions associated with the ancient dance forms. These she knew to be in close association with the numerous Hawaiian nature deities. At age 18, Erdman met with Pūku'i about a special project to preserve and reintroduce specific *mele* of *hula kahiko*. With Pūku'i, Erdman recorded the vocalizations of sacred poetic texts typical of the *hula ʹāla ʹapapa* domain (Stillman, 1998, pp. 63, 70).

Erdman's hula studies enriched her personal understandings of cultural dance styles. The studies were complementary to her growing knowledge of Japanese dance and Chinese classical dance theatre, forms she had come to appreciate as a child. Young Erdman was beginning to see the diverse aesthetics of the world's peoples as related to basic expressions of the human spirit (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18(2:2):4). In later years, the early training in various traditional dance styles, along with her understanding of mythologies and indigenous beliefs, would prompt Erdman to think about ideas rising from a collective unconscious.

Jean Erdman returned to Sarah Lawrence College at the start of the sophomore year. She began studying art history and aesthetics with Professor D'Harnoncourt. The time became a defining point for Erdman's interests and future career as she began to think about dance as a career and about making dances on her own. She desired to work independently and to take charge of the aesthetic decisions for her work; she did not want to work under the thumb of a theatre director (Erdman, 1980, p. 6). By working as an independent artist, she felt she could be in charge of personal artistic and business decisions. By the end of the academic year, Erdman, nicknamed "Johnnie," had identified herself as a capable student leader in numerous endeavors. See Figure 4.1, "Jean Marion Erdman, 1936."

Marian Knighton knew Jean was serious in the pursuit of dance. Knighton encouraged Erdman to attend the Bennington College Summer School of the Dance in Bennington, Vermont. For 1937, Erdman was selected as a general student and Fellow in the program. The summer session was targeted to dancers seeking training in the modern dance form. Jean Erdman's approach to dance training and composition rapidly expanded

with her participation in the sessions. Her beginning studies with Martha Graham aided Erdman's development at Bennington. Erdman was excited by the opportunities to study with Graham, an artist who made a great impression on her young mind. Graham was also gaining recognition in wide circles; she was the first dancer to appear at the White House, with an invitation extended by President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt.

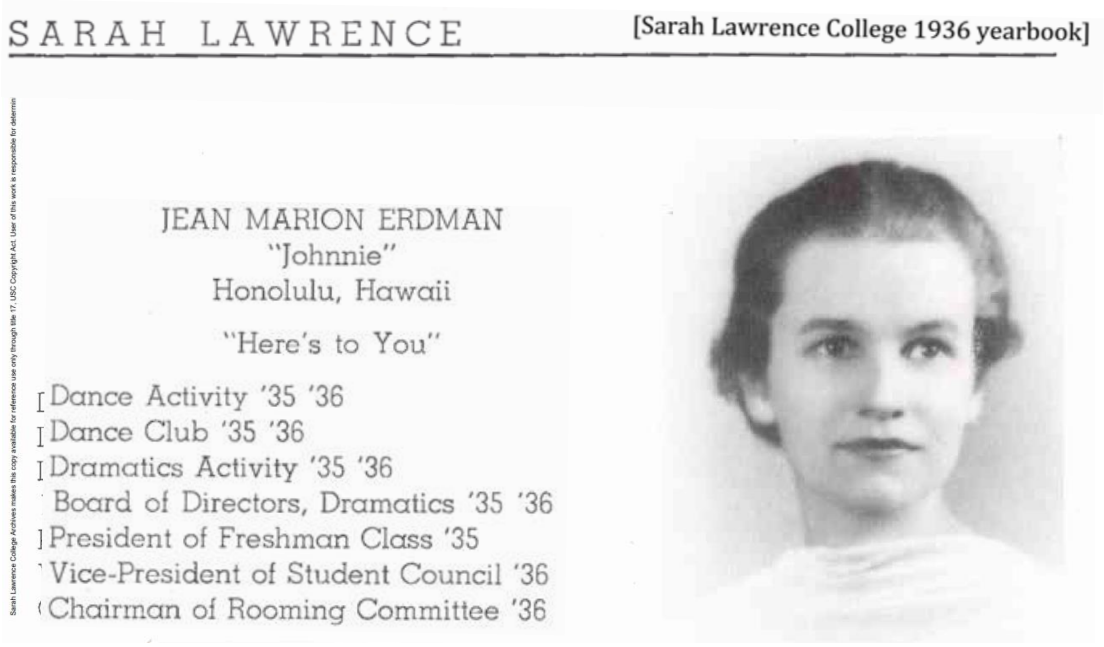

Figure 4.1. Jean Marion Erdman, 1936. *Sarah Lawrence College 1936 yearbook.* Courtesy of College Archives: Collections, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York.

The Bennington School of the Dance first opened in the summer of 1934, a strange time for the start of a new artistic and business endeavor given that the U.S. was sinking into a deep economic depression. The president of Bennington College, Robert D. Leigh (1890 – 1961), made the difficult decision to implement his vision for the dance. He employed two powerful organizers to make it happen. Both were graduates of the physical education program of the University of Wisconsin and former students of the pioneer dance educator, Margaret H'Doubler (1889 – 1982). One organizer and teacher,

Martha Hill (1900 – 1995), had performed for a brief stint with the Martha Graham concert group. She had also taught at Teachers College, Columbia University, and subsequently instructed dance at New York University beginning in 1930. Likewise, Mary Jo Shelley (1902 – 1976) had been on the faculty at Teachers College; in the mid-1930s she accepted a position at the University of Chicago. The two women were exceptionally competent educators and artists who teamed up to bring world-wide recognition to American modern dance and the small college in Vermont.

The summer school setting was the lush, cool mountains of the Vermont countryside. Low white farm buildings framed the green-lawned college Commons, and it was there that dancing often took place. The intent of the summer dance school fell in alignment with the vision of Bennington, much like that of Sarah Lawrence College, which used an experimental approach to the education of women. Challenging studies strengthened the convictions of women students who sought a quality education.

Bennington College stressed the importance of forming a personal and well-informed point of view. Thus, the new American dance was to develop at Bennington. Unlike conservatory training in classical dance studies, attendees at Bennington would find themselves analyzing the human psyche, society, and human movement to deliver their revolutionary spirit and dance ideas in abstract terms and images. The new dance movement paralleled the development of modern art.

The Bennington project offered broad studies in dance taught by the four most renowned modern dance masters in America—Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman. This group, although working independently from one another, were known as the Big Four. According to press materials from the Bennington

College Archives, the first Summer School of the Dance passed all expectations for success, not only with the students in attendance but also with long-traveled visitors who were clamoring for a taste of modern dance. The Graham production of *Panorama* sold out more than a week in advance and stirred the national consciousness. The euphoric feeling of the experiment was captured in a 1935 article in the *New York Times* (Martin, 1935, Section L, p. 13).[52]

The tiny Vermont town could barely accommodate the visitors who came to see the dancing. An article about the Bennington Festival published by *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on August 23, 1936, stated as follows:

> Until three years ago there was no modern dance school in America. There were private studios…But there was no school where different methods and opposing points of view might be studied and a thorough grounding in all aspects of the modern dance be acquired… Today, at last, a school exists where the young dancer can obtain a well-rounded and comprehensive view of the modern dance. (Mishnun, 1936, p. 52)

When Jean Erdman attended the summer school for the first time, Bennington was on the verge of coming of age. Each of the Big Four became identified for establishing a unique training technique. Many new dances were premiered during the Bennington summers and came to be identified as masterworks of the 20th century. Jean Erdman was part of several such important productions, particularly under the tutelage of

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[52] *Panorama* featured several American themes, including religious fanaticism, the demonstration of Southern States' imperialism, and the awakening of American social consciousness.

Martha Graham. She intensely studied with each of the four masters, took classes again with Louis Horst, and performed with numerous gifted young artists. The opportunities offered to Erdman led the young dancer to think about finding a way to use the body fully by tapping into more diverse expressions.

Erdman took all information from the masters through her perceptive body and into her mind. The experiences at Bennington provided a critical dance awakening for Erdman. As several years of Bennington experiences progressed, Erdman was synthesizing her own dance theories and philosophies to later be applied in teaching, choreography, and performance. Ultimately, Erdman would reject the strict adherence to the specific technique of a master and seek a more primal and universal approach to dance.

The year 1937 was memorable in Jean Erdman's life. At Sarah Lawrence College, she took her first course under her future husband, Joseph Campbell. In the biography of Campbell written by Stephen and Robin Larsen (2002), the following story tells how Erdman and Campbell came to know each other.

At the start of Erdman's junior year, she was visiting another Sarah Lawrence student, Theone Linderman, who was from Honolulu. When looking through Theone's scrapbook of photos, Jean noticed a picture of Campbell in skimpy track shorts, with ukulele in hand (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, pp. 241-242). The photo had been taken following his graduation from Columbia University in 1925 and an illustrious win in an AAU championship track meet in California. Campbell had run on a Columbia four-man team that included Olympian sprinter Jackson Scholtz (1897 – 1986). Following the

meet, Campbell celebrated with a trip to Hawaii where he would also socialize with friends.

Larsen and Larsen (2002) subsequently tell how Jean took the scrapbook photo and gave it to a girlfriend who had Campbell as an academic advisor. The friend had a conference with the professor and the photo ended up on Campbell's desk. He inquired about the source; "Jean Erdman" was the response (Larsen & Larsen, p. 242). From then on, Erdman was on Campbell's radar, but the student tried to avoid the professor:

> I studiously avoided taking any course with Joseph Campbell, because everybody in the college wanted to study with him, especially the freshmen class…I thought they had wrong reasons for studying with somebody. But I'm not sure I was already smitten and I didn't know it. (p. 242)

Meet the Professor (and Future Husband)

At Sarah Lawrence, Erdman was adamant about studying aesthetics and philosophy as it related to the dance (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 242). Since D'Harnoncourt had left the school to pursue other work, Erdman had run out of possible instructors in the subjects that attracted her. Only Professor Campbell had the expertise.

In Campbell's biography, Larsen and Larsen (2002) continue the story of the couple's famous meeting: Erdman ran into Campbell at the library and requested a conference to enlist his guidance. At the first conference, Erdman indicated she wanted to study aesthetics. In a slip of the tongue, Erdman's unconscious emotions must have surfaced. She clumsily blurted out, "I want to study Pluto." He said, "'Pluto'? You mean 'Plato'!... you remember what Pluto did? He abducted Persephone to the underworld" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 242).

Campbell suggested that Erdman attend his course on the literature of Thomas Mann and confer each week, which she did. She learned not only about Mann, but also about Arthur Schopenhauer, Immanuel Kant, and other philosophers (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 242). As a result of her interests, Jean discovered, "I was the envy of the entire campus…I suppose it was pretty obvious that there was more there than just studying" (p. 243).

Jean was asked to join Graham's dance group before she completed a degree at Sarah Lawrence College: "I never finished school because of it" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p.10).[53] At the end of the junior year, Erdman left Sarah Lawrence College for good. In the final conference of her junior year, Campbell and Erdman discussed Plato's thoughts on the question of love, and Jean had the epiphany that Campbell was enchanted with her (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 243).

As conveyed in the authorized biography of Campbell, it seems Campbell wanted to deny the feelings he had for Erdman, yet he knew he could not let her go (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 243). With ulterior motive, he gave her a copy of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*; the two volumes amounted to more than 800 pages! The book is a philosophical view of history and offers a point of view beyond the Eurocentric, epoch-marked perspective, a view embracing a more fluid cultural perspective on human history. Campbell assumed Erdman would need help to understand the subject matter.

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[53] The source is the transcript of an interview of Erdman in 1978 conducted by Linda Small for the Jean Erdman Video Project.

For this to happen, he would initiate further correspondence with the young lady as she traveled (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 243).

Following Erdman's departure from SLC, she stored her belongings with her mother, who was staying at a New York hotel (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 244). She briefly resided at an aunt's house on Gay Street in the city (p. 245), then went to join the Martha Graham students and professional dancers at the Bennington School of the Dance in Vermont. The summer was to be followed by a one-year trip around the world in the company of her parents and younger sister Bargie in celebration of her father's retirement from the ministry. Erdman had her own mission: observing indigenous ethnic dances in their authentic settings. The day Erdman was to depart from SLC, Campbell broke school rules by inviting himself to help her pack. He subsequently invited her to tea and later to a night club in the city where they both drank milk (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, pp. 244-245).

Erdman attended the 1937 Bennington summer session as an apprentice dancer in the general program and as a Fellow of the Anna Sokolow (1910-2000) dance group. Starting in late June of 1937 and extending for six weeks, Erdman rehearsed a piece created by the distinguished choreographer. Sokolow was the daughter of Russian immigrants who were known to be socialists. Sokolow's early dance training had included taking classes from Martha Graham and Louis Horst at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. Although Sokolow was noted for being a soloist, she later extended her choreography to groups and became known for promoting gender equality through dance. She joined the New Dance Group, which afforded her opportunities to create and perform pieces strong in dynamics, usually with a political bent. Sokolow's

political actions identified her with the radical dance movement of the day. She also became a founding member of the famed Actor's Studio in New York.

The summer session as a Bennington apprentice afforded Erdman the opportunity to view the premiere of one of Hanya Holm's most famous dances, *Trend*. The dance left a lasting impression on Erdman. To Sali Ann Kriegsman (1981), author of *Modern Dance in America: The Bennington Years*, Erdman conveyed her impressions of *Trend* (pp. 165-166). To her, the dancers appeared as a moving social organism in the cycle of life. They made visible the divine through the union of many beings.

Erdman's studies with each of the Big Four masters enabled her to analyze and discern the individual styles and modern dance techniques. Dancer groups associated with each pioneer—Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, or Charles Weidman—retained loyalty to the master. Naturally for the time, Erdman remained true to the Graham camp, with its trademark emphasis on contracting muscles to create dynamic attacks. These actions injected drama into a dance. Graham also used a codified technique that gave her dancing an identifiable aesthetic.

Weidman had a comedic and inventive bent to his choreography. Humphrey's dynamic was one of lightness and particularly emphasized swing actions of the whole body and limbs. Like Humphrey's, Holm's work was kinder to the body than Graham's approach. Freedom was visible through flow of action, especially in the upper half of the body. Holm's dancing had a sense of airiness, with dancers appearing to rebound with ease. The nature of Holm's choreography came from inner motivations and impulses that informed the choices of movement for a dance. This aspect proved to be a strong influence on Erdman's development from dancer to choreographer.

During the weeks in Vermont, Erdman wrote to Joseph Campbell about rehearsals and her excitement in reading Spengler. The young Erdman demonstrated maturity in her understanding of Spengler's *Decline of the West* and compared aspects of the work to theories by Irish author James Joyce (1882 – 1941). Campbell and his sister, Alice, were staying at their own summer residence, a cabin in Woodstock, New York. Knowing that it would be a drive of only a few hours, Erdman took the opportunity to invite Campbell to see her dance (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, pp. 245-246). Campbell accepted the invitation and later recalled his reaction to the Bennington experience: "I was beholding a revelation of the Mankind of the Future. … there was man, unshelled and glorious, in the full agony of life" (Campbell, 2017, p. 3).[54]

For the Bennington Festival Series, Jean Erdman danced in an August 12th program that featured the work of Sokolow and two up-and-coming choreographers, Esther Junger and José Limon. Musician Alex North composed the pieces for Sokolow's section of the program, *Façade—Esposizione Italiana*, a dance created in response to fascism in Italy. Erdman danced with nine other Fellows in the production.[55] (See Appendix B.)

Lost at Sea

Martha Graham aspired to have Jean Erdman as a permanent member of her professional group of twelve young women, but Erdman had already made plans to go on

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[54] As he states in one of his essays in *The Ecstasy of Being: Mythology and Dance* (2017), Campbell recalled and recorded his response to the Bennington performances in 1944.

[55] One of Erdman's fellow dancers was Betty Bloomer, who in 1948 married Gerald Ford and later became the First Lady of the United States (1974-1977).

her family's world tour: "I asked Martha's permission if I could go on this trip… She said, 'Come back to me when you get back.' Jean Erdman was startled and appreciative because Graham was not known for her patience" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:10).[56]

With Erdman's departure on the long cruise imminent, Campbell realized he was absolutely smitten with the young dancer. It seems the physical and intellectual capacities of the two were well suited for each other from the start. Not only did they have share interests in literature, myth, comparative religions, and psychology, but they were also similarly appreciative of arts and aesthetics.

Campbell took great interest in sculpture and abstract painting. He had played piano as a youngster and saxophone in a jazz band while attending Columbia University. Having identified as an athlete in swimming, football, and, in particular, running, he understood as Jean did the training needed to push the body to peak performance. Their physical natures seemed well matched to each other.

At the conclusion of the Bennington summer session, Erdman returned to her family and friends in Hawaii. Because her older sisters were now married, they would not be accompanying the rest of the family on the world journey. Erdman received a letter from Campbell just as she was about to start the trip. In September of 1937 from his cabin in Woodstock, Campbell wrote, "The aggravating thing about you, Jean, is that you are simply the darling of my entire nervous system" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 251).

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[56] The source is a transcript of excerpts from a master class at Sarah Lawrence College in 1987, collected as part of the Jean Erdman Dance Video Project.

In Jean's return correspondence, she revealed she ached for Joe, too. She also shared her discontent for the provincial way of life. She spoke of her feelings about the usual goings-on in the family and presented her point of view:

> Finally I was able to feel like a member of the family again—but the strange thing about it is that I know it is only to last while I'm here—that I do not want to stay and continue to be one of them; that the most important thing in life for me is to dance… I believe in myself and shall continue to until my own experience should prove otherwise… I have no illusions about what I am headed for. I know there will be endless labor—and I'm not afraid.
>
> The one thing of which I am sure is that I want my life to have a certain spiritual quality—I want my soul clarified…because all of my dreams and aspirations pull me toward that magic realm, and because I found you there. (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 251)

The correspondence between the couple remained a steady connection until they were to meet again. Joe sometimes talked in his usual professor-like style, sometimes as a lover, and at other times as a spiritual and mythological guide. Throughout the period, the couple drew closer to one another and were sometimes distracted by overwhelming emotions, their memories together, and the possibilities for a longer-term relationship.

Joe kept track of the schedule and ports of call of the Erdman family. Following the ship's schedule, at each port of call he had letters waiting for Jean. Through correspondence, Joe prompted Jean's choreographic mind and inspired her intellect to think on new levels. According to his biographers, "Campbell began to articulate a mythological morphology that assigned the archetypal powers to a symbolic domain in

the visible (and mythological) universe" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 255). As the Larsens explain, Campbell referred to the underworld as the Chthonic realm, the world of the hero as the Telluric realm, and the more light-filled spiritual realm as the Ethereal. Campbell suggested that Erdman try various dance experiments with the categories and qualities of movement representing each of the realms. Though geographically distant, the couple refined their aesthetic together through these mutual efforts (p. 256). In his personal work, Joe was crafting his now famous schematic representation of the hero's journey, and Jean discussed and helped to refine his concepts.

While Jean and family were on the way to Australia and New Zealand, Campbell wrote to his beloved, "I wish that I could be rid of my cold and in New Zealand for a minute or two to breathe my soul into your delicate nostrils and to nibble your soul from the lips that I faint to recall" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 258). Jean hurriedly replied to her love. Through her writing she shared her distress upon seeing the decimation of indigenous Maori culture by British colonialists. In Indonesia, the situation was quite the opposite. Erdman was absolutely taken by the pure poetry of the intact, traditional dances that remained.

Jean was in awe of the richness and refined qualities of Balinese dance. To Joe she conveyed its subtleties as best she could. Balinese dance was in complete contrast to the modern dance Erdman knew of from New York and Vermont. Balinese dance would later serve as inspiration for Erdman's original dance *Creature on a Journey* (1943).

In reference to Joe's earlier notes, Jean observed the Indonesian traditional dance as representing a unity of the realms Chthonic, Telluric, and Ethereal (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, pp. 255-256). The dances were of both narrative and mythological form, while

others were more abstract, yet each embodied varying emotional states. From the well-trained dancing children of the villages to royal dancers adorned with jewels, each performer studiously and reverently used fine and complex gestures of face and hands to convey meaning. After seeing miles and miles of ocean, Jean was renewed by the beauty and wonder of the Balinese experience. She remarked,

> Although I still feel like a small and weak vessel being tossed about by great waves in a sea of emotions, I know that I can think, that I can see this earth by seeing its forms—the man-made ones & the nature-made ones. And the knowledge gives me strength and a new vigor. I have been as far away from you as possible—And I *can* see the polyphony of our life still, my gentle teacher. My fleet-footed hero… . (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 261)

From Bali to Java and other parts of the Indonesian archipelago the family went; finally, they sailed to India. Campbell sparked Erdman's enthusiasm for the visit. The Larsen biographers reveal that Campbell had written a love note in Sanskrit for which Erdman had to find a translator. Joe's words complimented Jean's beauty and charms, and ended, "The celestial grace which you possess [was] never seen among higher-spirits, nor even deities" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 262).

While in India, Jean was captivated by the black carved rock shrines and massive depictions of the gods. As the trip continued, Campbell and Erdman simultaneously read the *Dance of Shiva* (1918) by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877- 1947) (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 265), a mythic, mythologist, and pioneering Indian art historian. Campbell continued his correspondence in the vein of Hindu beliefs extolling love: "I burn my corpse before you, and you give me movement; abdicate my ego to the beat of

Brahma's drum. Shiva's drum. Kali's drum—Jean's heart" (Larsen & Larsen, p. 266, quoting Campbell).

While the Erdman family was in the Middle East, Jean took note of the ancient art and architecture of both Egypt and Palestine. From there the family went on to Europe, and in each place she sought out the dance of the culture. Jean's experience in Vienna was both frightening and memorable as Nazi symbolism was everywhere; she commented, "Swastikas in the concert hall, in the theatres, on the coat sleeves…" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 267). After a trip to London, the family set their sights on the port of New York.

Month after month, Jean and Joe had rededicated themselves to each other through correspondence. Those messages had been filled not only with love, but also Joe's philosophies, mythological stories, teaching lessons, and ponderings about dance and art. Jean responded to Joe's notes and wrote of her own musings. Throughout the eight-month journey, the couple's relationship deepened. Joe and Jean described their bond as *Sahaja*, a Buddhist yoga concept of enlightenment through self-realization. The term also describes an awakening to the pervasive power of divine love and intelligence. Indeed, this was an adventure to be pursued! For love on the level of *Sahaja* results when the ego is stunned and the feeling sublime. About it, Campbell confides,

> two are one, the walls of separateness are completely surpassed, and the embrace yields not pleasure but fulfillment, not children but self-realization, not the satisfaction of desire but the experience of eternity, not passion and possession but power and control. (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 265)

Within a couple of days after the Queen Mary arrived in the port of New York, Joe Campbell invited Jean Erdman to dinner at the Hawaiian Room, located in the Lexington Hotel. Their evening was filled with dancing. Jean recalled, "After the dancing we sat down to our drinks of milk, and Joe said, 'Well, when are we going to get married?'" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 268). The two quickly discussed plans to get married in Honolulu after Jean had the opportunity to perform a bit in the company of Martha Graham.

According to a story told to the Campbell biographers by Jean, when it came to waiting for marriage, the Reverend Erdman was uncomfortable with leaving his daughter in the hands of an experienced man (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 269). His reply to the news of marriage was, "I am here now" (p. 269), meaning the ceremony should commence. Thus, Jean and Joe were married in a ceremony that took place on May 5, 1938, at 5:00 pm in the New York apartment of Jean's uncle, who lived on 65th Street on the East Side. The apartment was large enough to accommodate a number of guests, and this is where the two families met for the first time.

Chapter 5: Transformations

A Glimpse of the Mountaintop

The couple took a honeymoon at Joe's primitive cabin at The Maverick, an artist colony in Woodstock. The post-nuptial trip only lasted the weekend, and by Monday morning both were back at work—he at Sarah Lawrence and she for her first full day dancing in the company of Martha Graham. The company was, once again, preparing for a Bennington summer. For the time being, the couple made their home at the Madison Square Hotel.

Before the wedding, Joe Campbell had thought long and hard about the conditions of a marital relationship and its suitability for himself. In his writings, he described it in scholarly terms. He considered marriage as a symbol of the longing for unity, "a sign or token that brings two things, or brings a number of things, together." He goes on to say that "[a] true symbol is always a token that restores, one way or another, some kind of broken unit" (Campbell, 2017, p. 27). Thus, a marriage makes whole again the fractionalized pieces of each person with hope of a transcendent experience and feeling of love.

By June, several significant events had transpired. Jean's father was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of California in recognition of his lifetime achievements in ministerial service. Joe was working with collaborator Henry Morton Robinson (1898-1961) on the important task of writing *A Skeleton's Key to* Finnegans Wake. This complex work would emerge in 1944 from sixteen years of labor and become

a guide for understanding James Joyce's literary and monomythic masterpiece. Campbell was also editing Swami Nikhilananda's translations of the Hindu Vedic text, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (1942). The books became some of the most important works of the 20th century. For Jean, July 2, 1938, marked the start of the fifth session of the Bennington College Summer School of Dance. With Joe working at The Maverick, he periodically dropped his pen for a jaunt to Bennington to visit his love, Jean.

Drowning in the Unknown

Erdman had understood that she would be in Martha Graham's auxiliary group for the summer. Graham planned to draw from auxiliary dancers as she prepared a new work. But Erdman was surprised to learn, once at Bennington, that she would also be dancing in the repertoire of the regular company (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 pp. 10-11).[57] In an interview about this period in Erdman's life, she revealed that the girls in Graham's group were mainly working girls from the factories in New York, who viewed Erdman with some suspicion because she had been to college (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 30).

Dancer Jane Dudley finally broke the ice by speaking to Erdman, and soon Jean was befriended by Marjorie Mazia. These incidents helped make Jean more at home with the group (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 31). Erdman felt the attitude of the dancers; they had such power in their physical and emotional strength: "I was terribly in awe by all their abilities" (p. 31). Erdman entered the group at a time when noted

[57] The source here is part of the Jean Erdman Video Project, being the transcript of an interview of Erdman conducted by Linda Small in 1978.

luminaries had already shown their substance. The performers included Dorothy Bird, Ethel Butler, her former teacher Bonnie Bird, May O'Donnell, Sophie Maslow, Jane Dudley and Marjorie Mazia (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12. pp. 30-31).[58]

As it turned out, Erdman's summer dance schedule was particularly grueling; she learned the repertoire in ten days. No one had thought of the impact it would have on her body (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 18:12 p. 10). Erdman described the workout:

> Nine to twelve, auxiliary group; twelve to one-thirty, class; one thirty, company; three-thirty, auxiliary group; five o'clock, company. And I never stopped…I was so exhausted that I used to come up to my room after lunch and throw myself on the bed… so my head hung over the edge and my feet over the other, just to stretch my spine… And I'd fall sound asleep in two seconds and wake up five minutes later and someone would say, "Come to rehearsal." I was a wreck. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 18:12 p. 11.)

Jean sought rest in any way she could, including in the middle of a ten-minute jumping sequence in Graham's *Celebration*: "there was a point when I could stand still for four counts" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 12). By this time, she began viewing the Graham technique in a new light. Since her lengthy world trip, she noticed the similarity of Graham's arm positions to that of traditional Balinese dance. At one point she exclaimed to Martha, "Do you know they hold their arms the right way!" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:10 p. 2).[59]

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[58] Again, this information comes from the transcript of an interview of Erdman conducted by Linda Small in 1978 as part of the Jean Erdman Video Project,

[59] This anecdote is reported in the transcript of excerpts from a 1987 master class at Sarah Lawrence College.

The new dance that Graham was working on that summer was *American Document*. It premiered at the Vermont State Armory on August 6, 1938. The content and accompaniment drew from important documents in American history. For the first time, speech was included in a Graham dance. Graham intended for the piece to evoke a patriotic spirit against the reigning political terrors of Europe (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 191). It was also the first time that Graham brought a male into the group—Erick Hawkins. Like Erdman, he was slated as an apprentice. The inclusion of Hawkins in the company did not sit well with the female members of the performing company.

Up to that point, Graham had always played the principal role in a dance and could sometimes be perceived as androgynous; as Erdman stated, "In other words, she has the strength of the masculine, and the delicacy and sensitivity of the feminine" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1930 – 2001, 18:12 p. 13).[60] But with the entrance of Hawkins, Erdman observed, "She [Graham] was now the woman, he the man" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 13). Moreover, Erick Hawkins was asked to teach ballet to the Graham dancers and "We all resented it" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 15). Now instead of only dancing barefoot, Martha Graham wanted the dancers to wear shoes in performance. In ballet class with Hawkins, the dancers were taught how to work on "turn-out" from the hips. It was a foreign feeling for most of the company members. It seemed Graham had compromised her unique style to earn the affection of Hawkins.

In Graham's *American Lyric*, Erdman danced in a trio alongside well-known soloists in the company, Sophie Maslow and Jane Dudley. For this piece based on New

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[60] Erdman made this observation in her 1978 interview by Linda Small.

England heritage, Graham rehearsed the dancers in "Act of Judgement—Act of Piety—American Primitives—American Provincials… And then *Primitive Mysteries*… And I literally saw stars," said Erdman (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 12).

Primitive Mysteries felt very ritualistic and "Dionysiac" to Erdman (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 31). The young dancer reflected, "If I hadn't had the opportunity to learn those dances I never would have experienced that old style because it was right with *American Document*, as soon as Erick Hawkins came into the company, her [Graham's] style changed…" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 13). The difficulty and intenseness of the Graham style had been what made it so exciting to dance in her group. Extraordinary effort went into every contraction, leap, and stretch. "There was women's lib right there… We were the whole thing" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 32).

Erdman also observed how Graham kindly treated a soloist, in contrast to her treatment of group dancers, of whom her criticisms could be severe. The point of such lessons was that the personal ego needed to be sacrificed to the work:

> And when you're part of the group she always demonstrated every movement she wanted the company to take on… you had to breathe together…And by keeping with the rhythm, and of course, Louis Horst with a cigar here and his eye half closed could still see if anybody was even a little bit off, got us to be exactly together…she would be very critical—even insulting—so as to drive people into a fury to get their adrenal going…I saw the results she was getting (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 17).

While rehearsing with Graham and observing the evolving choreography and group dynamics, Jean Erdman was busy taking other classes. In a modern forms composition course with pianist Louis Horst, Erdman composed a brief dance, *Baby Ben Says Da-Da*. It was a surrealistic piece about a clock and the solo was performed for the Bennington group.

Prior to Erick Hawkins's arrival, Graham had been dead set against having boyfriends and husbands at Bennington when work needed to be done (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 26). However, Hawkins and Joseph Campbell joined the Bennington scene the same season. Offstage, Graham had the reputation of being a terror and she did not mix well in social company, but according to Erdman, "I had a very nice personal relationship with her I think because when I started to dance with her was the moment I got married. And it was also the moment when Erick came into the company. And, of course, her relationship to him grew and I suppose there was a little echoing…" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 23). Campbell came to Bennington to stay with his wife and to observe dance-making; he was fascinated by the processes of the various pioneers and the work ethic required of the dancers. Graham, in turn, had a deep appreciation for Campbell's thoughtful scholarship. In the book *Blood Memory*, Graham (1991) acknowledged Campbell's mythological inspirations and his "profound influence" (p. 163); she remained friends with Erdman and Campbell over the rest of her years (p. 164).

Jean and Joe finished out the summer in Hawaii, and all the Erdman and Dillingham relatives turned out to meet him. For the newlyweds, the euphoric and paradisiacal environment of the islands was cut short by the news of World War II in

Europe. By mid-fall, the couple settled into a two-and-a-half room apartment on Waverly Place in Greenwich Village, New York. They resided at Waverly Place for the remainder of their days together.

The couple agreed they would not have "earthly children" (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 269); instead, they vowed to devote themselves to each other, creativity, and art. Teaching would be a fruitful extension of their vocations. Everyday Joe would share his writings with Jean, and she would comment (p. 269). In return, he often provided ideas for choreographic material, viewed Jean's rehearsals, and sometimes would accompany her on performance trips.

That fall, Erdman's first performance with Graham beyond Bennington was with groups of left-wing artists at Carnegie Hall. It was a benefit for the Communist paper *The New Masses*. The concert addressed the chaos of world political affairs. Erdman's participation in the performance almost came back to haunt her in the years of the McCarthy era. In decades that followed, modern dancers learned to remain silent about their participation in political dances for fear of jail or having their careers jeopardized. Erdman would say about this performance, "Don't tell anybody" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 28).

Erdman's first full company concert was in Boston, in what was actually the second full tour for Graham's group. While on tour, the performers traveled by train in their own railroad car (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 23). In February of 1939, the company appeared in a political performance for the benefit and relief of Spain's suffering refugees, the 2nd Annual Dance for Spain (see concert program at *2nd*

Annual Dance for Spain, 1939). In late spring, the group also performed at the New York World's Fair.

In 1939, as a trial for one year, the sixth session of the Bennington Summer School of the Dance moved to Mills College in Oakland, California, motivated by a desire to attract more attendees from the West coast of the U.S. Although the session seemed less intense than previous summers, one dancer cast his lot with Graham's company and relocated to the East coast as a result of the experience (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 84): Merce Cunningham joined the company of Martha Graham, and he became fast friends with Jean Erdman. Cunningham was an exceptional jumper and Graham encouraged him in that direction by sending him to ballet school (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 34).

Jean Erdman spent the summer teaching in Hawaii. Even though Japanese boats were roaming the Pacific, there seemed to be no stopping Erdman from advancing her interests in dance, including teaching. She taught with good success and instilled much enthusiasm in the students of Honolulu's Kulamanu Studios (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 4:1).[61] The enrollment for her classes there included two scholarship students along with her sister Marjorie. She took in 40 per cent of the profits from the enrollment income of $225 (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 4:1).[62]

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[61] In a letter written on Kulamanu stationary and dated August 27, 1939, Mrs. Edward Campbell (no relation to Joseph Campbell), who was apparently the regular dance teacher, wrote to Mrs. Marion Dillingham, reporting Erdman's success with her students.

[62] The source is an itemized account with the Kulamanu Studios dated August 4, 1939.

As war broke out in Europe, Graham's group worked on a new project, the creation of *Every Soul is a Circus*. Premiering in New York at the St. James Theatre in December 1939, it was viewed as a very theatrical and satirical piece taking place in the arena of one woman's mind. With Graham as the centerpiece, Erdman played her alter ego in the role of the Ideal Spectator. Hawkins played Graham's love interest, and Cunningham played the role of the Acrobat in his first professional performance. Erdman stated,

> She [Martha Graham] felt confident that I could do it…and I found that a very exciting time because she gave me the script. She told me exactly what words to say and when in relation to what she was doing…but she didn't tell me what movements to make…I was fitting myself into what I felt was appropriate… (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 21)

Graham worked on the dance bit by bit without a run-through of the parts until Erdman fell into a fit of tears, a curious event to those in the studio, including Graham herself. For Erdman, however, it was necessary to comprehend the sequencing and to find continuity in the work. Thus, Erdman gave a heartfelt reason for the outburst: "If we don't have a run-through I'm not going to be able to do this…She listened to me then…," and the troupe started having run-throughs of the repertory (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 22).

Swimming Again

When the dancers returned to Vermont for the summer of 1940, they encountered an expansion of the school's name to Bennington School of the Arts. The dance school had proven to be such a remarkable success that the college leadership sought to involve

artists from other fields. Within the Dance Division, Martha Graham worked on new pieces and a reconstruction of the New York performance of *Every Soul is a Circus*. In August, she premiered *El Penitente* and presented *Circus*. This summer also featured the premier of Graham's *Letter to the World*, a dance based on the life and poetry of Emily Dickinson. Jean Erdman had a small part in the performance. The dance proved to be a complete failure with the newspaper critics.

Simultaneously, Erdman had begun to evolve her own creative work. With Louis Horst as her composer, she completed a three-minute dance that was the foundation for what would later become a dance trademark of Erdman's career, *Transformations of Medusa*. Erdman required another couple of years to develop the full piece, which was ultimately realized in three sections.

In a recorded conversation with Nancy Allison in 1988, Erdman related the origins of the dance. Erdman had wanted to investigate the two-dimensional styles of ancient vase paintings. She was "fascinated by the style, fascinated by the possibility of it. But what I wanted to do was find out why the style was necessary" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:8 p. 1). Her dance idea started while in Woodstock with Joe. She had considered the changing states of being and developed a movement phrase from that idea. The aesthetic element expressed the nature of the theme (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:8 p. 2).

After the summer of 1940, at the age of 23, Jean Erdman began to explore ideas for creating a teaching program. She enlisted Sarah Lawrence College's President Constance Warren as an advocate for the idea. On November 4, Warren approached the Board of Trustees with her plea that SLC establish a School of Modern Dance in

Westchester County, arguing that such an endeavor would be of value to both the college and the local community. According to a memo dated November 15, 1940, from Mary Milligan, secretary to the SLC board, to Jean Erdman and Mrs. Pettus Kaufman, Warren successfully made the case that two SLC and Bennington summer dance alumnae should lead the initiative, Jean Erdman and Claire Straus (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 6:1).

Erdman had prepared a dossier for the SLC president to make the case for a Saturday program to the Board of Trustees. In the papers, Erdman clearly explained her teaching philosophy and approach for addressing the education of both children and adults. Using Erdman's carefully prepared words, Warren acknowledged the dancers' knowledge of human growth and development: "Children will be taught to strengthen their bodies by repeating rhythmically in various patterns such as the natural movements as grown out of their own abilities." The program was described as using activities such as singing games, dance-drama, and folk dances, and emphasizing the beginnings of "expression through form" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 6:1).[63]

Jean Erdman's papers provided the instructional approach she planned to use for training adults (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 6:1). Erdman informed the president that adults would be carefully monitored to ensure the safety of the participants. The teaching emphasis would be on stretching, strengthening, and coordination. Various teaching devices were to be used in the presentation of choreographic problems and

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[63] The documents Erdman prepared for President Warren and the Board of Trustees are dated 1940 and collected in a single folder found in box 6, folder 1 of the *Jean Erdman Papers*.

technique. In the papers to Warren, Erdman indicated the numerous purposes of workshop programs, such as to "awaken the kinesthetic sense," "free bodies for movement," and "discover form as a means of expression and the joy that comes from formalized group activity" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 6:1). Erdman was aware that a sequenced approach was necessary for successful learning and that the teaching should start at the level of the participants' general knowledge and skills. Outside letters were presented to the Trustees that indicated much interest in the program.

On November 14, the plan for a Saturday dance school was approved by the Board of Trustees for a trial period of eight weeks (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 6:1).[64] The trustees were clear that the dance teachers had to carry their own insurance and that the college dance department was responsible for supervising the program. This enterprising effort thus began Jean Erdman's first true business endeavor in teaching.

In the winter months of 1941, Erdman taught in Westchester County and danced with the Graham group. Come July, the company was again at Bennington College for the summer. By this time, the Bennington dance experiment had been successfully running for eight years. Martha Graham premiered the new work *Punch and the Judy* at the College Theatre starting on August 10. The dance was a domestic scene that combined comedy with tragedy. Interestingly, five men performed in the dance. Jean Erdman, Sophie Maslow, and Jane Dudley performed the parts of the Three Fates who directed the characters of the dance (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 221).

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[64] The stipulations were stated in a memo dated November 15, 1940, from Mary Milligan, the secretary to the SLC Board of Trustees, to Mrs. Joseph Campbell and Mrs. Pettus Kaufman.

On another creative front, Martha Graham could not let the earlier work *Letter to the World* stand as a failure. The poetry of Emily Dickinson was key to the theme of the 45-minute piece about Dickinson's love for a man she could not marry. Graham reworked the piece to show again in January 1941 and yet again in April following further revisions. The newer rendition emphasized love and the death of love as a cycle of life rather than as a linear narrative. She carefully selected lines from Dickinson's poetry to demonstrate specific relationships of the poetry to the dance and its characters. Graham removed the central person previously played by the actress Margaret Meredith and replaced her with Jean Erdman, who made the part interactive and integral with the rest of the characters.

In the transcript of an undated speech, dancer Jane Dudley (1921-2001), who also performed in *Letter*, indicated, "For the first time Martha found in Jean someone who moved exquisitely and also could speak the poetry. I know that Jean worked many hours on voice production" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:11 p. 2).[65] Dudley observed, "Jean was the one working closest to Martha during the rehearsals… It was one of Graham's greatest works and she [Jean] was personally, deeply involved in it" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:11 p. 7).

The cast for the production featured Martha Graham in the part of Emily Dickinson, the One Who Dances. Erdman was Graham's alter ego in the role of One Who Speaks. Hawkins played Dickinson's love interest and the Ancestress was played by Dudley. Other noted roles included Merce Cunningham in the puckish part of March,

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[65] The transcript of Dudley's speech indicates that she delivered it at the "first benefit."

Ethel Butler as the Young Girl, and Nina Fonaroff as the Fairy Queen. Pearl Lack [Lang] played a role as one of the children while, depending on the show, numerous other dancers swung in and out of children's roles. At the opening of the dance Erdman and Graham faced each other and spoke:

> I'm nobody! Who are you?
>
> Are you nobody, too?
>
> Then there's a pair of us – don't tell!
>
> [They'd banish us, you know.] (Dickinson, 1891, Poem 1.1, p. 21)

According to Dudley, in a memorable part of the dance, "Jean gathered her powers, and banished me from the stage by saying 'By the bird – the butterfly and the bee. Amen'" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:11 p. 4). Dudley stated the dance "was the beginning of a whole new place in Martha's artistic development" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:11 p. 5). From this point, Graham went on to create numerous dances derived from the mythological cycle, such as *Herodiade* (1944), *Cave of the Heart* (1946), and *Errand into the Maze* (1947). Sadly for Jean Erdman, her father did not have the opportunity to see the full realization of his daughter's dance career with Martha Graham for he passed in late April.

The summer of 1941 marked the production of a special Bennington concert produced by Hawkins, Dudley, and Erdman. In *Modern Dance in America: The Bennington Years*, dance historian Sali Ann Kriegsman (1981) recorded the concert as taking place on July 19 (p. 216). The piece, *In Time of Armament*, was choreographed by Hawkins and featured himself with Erdman in a very romantic duet. Kriegsman (1981)

stated this was the first major public appearance by Erdman beyond the company of Graham (p. 216).

As reported by Larsen and Larsen (2002), while Jean was dancing in Bennington, her husband was staying at the summer home of Swami Nikhilananda in the Adirondacks, just 80 miles away. As Campbell conducted research and pondered how God was beyond human concepts and categories, he alternated visiting Bennington with editing Nikhilananda's translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which took him almost to the point of exhaustion (p. 284).

It was also in 1941 that the Humphrey-Weidman Company shared some of their greatest dances; Weidman taught workshops on the masterworks *Lynch Town* and *The Shakers* (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 105). However, after this Bennington session the war restricted work and the company ceased touring. Instead, the duo established their own school, The Studio Theatre, located at West 16th Street in New York City (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 105). This studio made it affordable for struggling dancers to still produce their works while avoiding the extravagant rental costs for major theatres. The company finally dissolved in 1945 (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 107). The financial crisis likewise took a toll on the Bennington Summer School enterprise; only Martha Graham could continue to attend. Hanya Holm departed to work in Colorado Springs (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 107).

At the beginning of December 1941, Erdman was on tour with Martha Graham and company to Cuba. The U.S. was under the threat of war and there was suspicion their ship might be detected by German submarines. During the trip, Pearl Harbor was bombed. In an interview conducted by Theresa Bowers for the Oral History Research Office of Columbia University, Erdman (1980) stated, "[W]e were terrified. Martha

Graham was terrified particularly to cross the water because she thought we were going to be torpedoed" (p. 74). In spite of the disastrous world event, the dance tour was well-received.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, communication to and from Hawaii became difficult for Jean's family. According to Campbell's authorized biographers, the Erdmans and Dillinghams learned to cope on the islands (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 301). On February 16, Campbell registered for the draft (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 305). Fortunately for Jean and Joe, at the end of March the Selective Service announced the U.S. would only be drafting men under age 38; Joe was just over the limit (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 308).

Years later, in her interview for Columbia University's oral history project, Erdman (1980) admitted being "dewy-eyed" about learning from the modern dance masters during this period in her life. However, she was thinking about the future of her own career when she suffered a knee injury. Sidelined from dancing while her knee healed, she started doing her own research and discussed her thoughts with her husband. She created outlines for the direction of her life; these notes she kept long into the late phase of her career (Erdman, 1980, pp. 72-23).

For the Bennington program presented on August 1, 1942, Erdman and Cunningham together created three duets and each dancer performed solos. The costumes for the duets were created by Charlotte Trowbridge. The program opened with the duet *Seeds of Brightness,* with music by Norman Lloyd. Later in the program, the duo

performed *Credo in US*.[66] The duet *Credo in US (A Suburban Idyll)* was based on a script presented to Jean by Merce, but he chose to be anonymous in the credits (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 34).[67] As remembered by Erdman,

> So we pretended that it was a translation from a French magazine…And his [Cunningham's] name was Shadow and my name was Ghoul's Rage. It was a drama for which John [Cage] played the music in which he involved radio and piano and tin cans that Xenia [Kashevaroff Cage] played. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 - 2001, 18:12)[68]

This was the first time John Cage created music for dance. Erdman later reflected on *Credo in US,* the creative product of Cage, Cunningham, and herself:

> It was a satire on our own backgrounds…So that life was empty and people who were couples in that kind of life, suburban life, couldn't possibly have anything real. We were marching a sort of promenade with a high release… a Graham image… so there was this kind of façade, you see. (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 38)

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[66] The title of this dance has been recorded with various spellings, including *Credo in Us* and *Credo in U.S.*

[67] Erdman related Cunningham's role in her 1978 interview by Linda Small for the Jean Erdman Video Project.

[68] At the time of this production John Cage was married to Xenia Kashaveroff. The paths of Cunningham and Cage had crossed a few years earlier when the dancer was a student at the Cornish School of the Arts in Seattle and the musician was an accompanist for Bonnie Bird's classes. A few years after this concert, John and Xenia divorced as his romantic involvement with Merce Cunningham deepened.

For the third duet, *Ad Lib*, Merce drew from his love for rhythm as a tap dancer and Jean drew from her love of jazz; they came up with a blues motif from which they improvised (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 36). Contrary to the prevailing creed of modern dance and all they had been taught by Louis Horst, the two improvised on the theme: "In those days improvisation was not to be mentioned. It was a word you used only in a derogatory sense. Only German dancers did that. And Isadora Duncan" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 36).

By the time of this concert in 1942, Erdman's solo *The Transformations of Medusa* had developed into three sections, also with costumes by Trowbridge and music by Horst. The original choreography became Section I, known as the "Temple Virgin." Section II was titled "Lady of the Wild Things." Finally, Section III was labeled "Queen of the Gorgons." Erdman had followed her original inclination that was conceived while at the Maverick, that of exploring the states of being and transformations of the mortal Gorgon, Medusa.[69] The choreography, with Erdman playing the part of Medusa, introduces the dancer in an apparent state of innocence, but Medusa is raped by the god Poseidon and her rage transforms her into an agent of vengeance. Each section of the dance has a different rhythmic meter, which is complementary to Medusa's state of being.

It was also during the Bennington season that Erdman had the idea for a new dance, *Forever and Sunsmell.* John Cage was to write the music for it. According to

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[69] This version of the story of Medusa follows the ancient Roman tale by Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC - 18 AD).

Nancy Allison (2017), dancer and editor of *The Ecstasy of Being*, the dance score was commissioned by Campbell (p. 201, n. 4). At the time, John Cage and his wife Xenia (Kashevaroff) were as poor as church mice; they lacked work and had no place to stay. Cage's agreement to compose for the dance was made in exchange for the couple's use of the Campbells' apartment in Greenwich Village. [70]

Following the season at Bennington, Erdman took her own artistic retreat. She went to Nantucket to create *Forever and Sunsmell* to an e e cummings poem of the same name. Erdman later confided to Nancy Allison in a recorded conversation: "Nobody else dared go [to Nantucket] because they thought German submarines were going to be there in the waters" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:9 p. 2). Erdman choreographed the dance in an old hayloft while people were working in a laundry downstairs (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 - 2001, 18:9 p. 2). Both the dance and the music reflected the two contrasting psychological states and feelings presented in the poetry, distinguished by the dance dynamics of free versus bound flow (Campbell, 2017, p. 162). In the performance, as a singer presented the text, words were interjected by Erdman.

In October at The Studio Theatre in New York, Erdman and Cunningham presented a program similar to their debut in August at Bennington. As stated by Erdman

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[70] Xenia was a good percussion player and frequently played in performances with John. Serendipitously, Joe Campbell had known Xenia prior to meeting Jean, having met her through marine biologist Ed Ricketts while sailing along the Northwest Passage of Alaska (Campbell, 2019, p. 199, n. 5). From 1942 onward, Xenia sometimes designed or worked on costumes or dance décor with Erdman, and she occasionally appeared in films with the Campbells' friend, avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren.

in an interview by Linda Small for a New York Public Library Oral History Project in 1978,

> I'll never forget the performance we did in New York…of course, everybody in the Graham company came to see it and Sophie Maslow came back[stage] and she was always one to take things seriously and tell you the truth. And she said, "That jazz piece was unusual." I said, "yes, and we improvised it." "You improvised in a performance?" I just melted down into the ground because…it's against all the rules of Louis' training. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 pp. 37-38).

During 1942, Pearl Lack [Lang] joined the Martha Graham Dance Company. Graham's group continued touring with repertory that primarily included *El Penitente*, *Punch and the Judy*, *Letter to the World*, and *Every Soul is a Circus*. On their return to Bennington that summer, the season ran from July 6 until August 15. Graham concentrated on revising *American Document*. By this time, few males attended the summer school; many of the male dancers were in wartime service (Kriegsman, 1981, p. 117). Because of the lack of major productions by other major artists, the opportunity arose for Jean Erdman, Merce Cunningham, and Nina Fonaroff to make their choreographic debuts in a joint concert of their own, "A Program of Dances."

For Erdman and Cunningham, preparing short performance pieces had been a successful enterprise so far, but the duo's work remained connected to the Bennington endeavors. Soon however, their collaboration was to venture further afield. According to Jean Erdman, she, Joe, Merce, and John Cage were good friends and would frequently socialize together (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 35). On New Year's Eve

1942, the small group was traveling from party to party across Greenwich Village. Campbell was trying to convince Erdman to break from Graham and begin a solo career. As Cunningham's mentor, Cage was trying to persuade Merce to do the same. Finally, John blurted out, "You and Merce should do a concert together," and John Cage then made the opportunity possible by arranging a performance date with the Chicago Arts Club (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 36).

By this time Erdman had been working on a new dance, *Creature on a Journey,* but did not yet have accompaniment for it. Cage saw the dance and suggested a piece already composed by Lou Harrison. The music was light and comical, and had been influenced by the traditional dances of Bali. As a solo dancer, Erdman portrayed a colorful bird-like creature who darted here and there on an undetermined journey.

At 9:00 p.m. on Sunday February 14, 1943, Erdman and Cunningham performed a full show for the Arts Club of Chicago ("Program: The Arts Club of Chicago, 1943," 2021). They performed the three duets previously arranged. Erdman performed the solos *Forever and Sunsmell*, *Creature on a Journey*, and *The Transformations of Medusa*, with the first section of the dance renamed, for this show, "Maid of the Secret Isle." Cunningham once again performed his solo *Totem Ancestor* plus new works *Shimmera* and *In the Name of the Holocaust*. The title of the second was a witty allusion to a line in *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce (Cunningham, 1943/2021).

Thrown Up from the Belly of a Whale!

Of the two performing artists, Erdman was first to emerge from under the wing of Martha Graham, having realized she needed to explore dance more fully on her own. Of course, she had been a tremendous talent to Martha Graham, but in 1943 gave notice to

Graham that she would be leaving the company. She left on good terms and the Campbells and Graham remained friends. The personalities and work of Graham, Hawkins, Erdman, and Cunningham were slowly being teased apart.

Erdman later reflected, "I had identified so with Martha's art that I didn't know what I had to say" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 35). Erdman's body and mind were in a period of discernment. She was filled with curiosity that put her on a quest to find alternate teaching methodologies and improve training techniques that would serve as a universal foundation for creating choreography.

Erdman wanted to find her personal artistic voice; until this point she had been faithful to the ways of her teachers. Among the Jean Erdman archival papers, personal scratch notes addressed this topic (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:8). Erdman affirmed a total commitment to a career in dance. She was prepared to "have deep humility before the achievements of the artists in the field—recognizing the necessity for total dedication as a way of life." But she was not content with the limited and rigid ways in which she had been taught: "something would not be digested and had to be thrown up!!" Her thoughts extended to the source of ideas advocated by her pioneering teachers of modern dance: "Moderns derive from Orientalist form alright—but in revolt!" She observed that the spirit was of New England but enlightened by Asiatic influences. She noted, "In a certain sense one is what one identifies with." These same tensions she acknowledged within herself:

> The child of Hawaii is part Oriental part Polynesian part New Englander. Those parts do not always harmonize. If held to equally they create a three-way tension.

> The Oriental and Polynesian somewhat coalesce by standing opposed to the New England Puritan feeling. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 - 2001, 7:8)

Erdman had something to say that could not be said with words alone. In 1943, she began her association with the New Dance Group, where she began to develop ideas for choreography and technique (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:8).[71] She remained with the group until early 1949, when she realized her own philosophy and aesthetic were developing in contrast to the group's work. For the time, Erdman taught hula and Spanish dance there. She, Pearl Primus (1919-1994), and Hadassah (Spira Epstein) (1909-1992) jointly headed the Ethnic Division of the New Dance Group. They also took classes from one another to enrich themselves (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 43).

The New Dance Group was originally founded in 1932 as the Workers Dance League by students at Hanya Holm's studio (then the Mary Wigman School) (Graff, 1999). The founders were fierce and independent women who set the studios ablaze with early feminism. The leftist organization advocated that dance be used to advance improvements in social, economic, gender, and racial equity. Members desired to create a vehicle to make that happen. Using the motto, "Dance Is a Weapon in the Revolutionary Struggle" (Graff, 1999, p. 7), they made dance affordable and accessible to dancers and any member of the public. The New Dance Group held high standards for dance as concert art while also taking a populist approach to dance. One year from its founding, the membership totaled 300 (Graff, 1999, p. 56).

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[71] The source is Erdman's undated draft of a letter replying to Katharine Wolfe.

Author Ellen Graff explained the success of The New Dance Group in her book, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (1999). The Group's school offered excellent but very affordable training for both professionals and the poor, work-class residents of New York, who were mostly factory workers. In the midst of the Great Depression, three hours of instruction cost just ten cents, which included dance technical instruction in modern and various cultural/ethic traditions, improvisation, and choreography (p. 55).

Anyone could take a dance class and anyone could make a dance (Graff, 1999, p. 57). The ideas advanced by New Dance Group members were attractive to dancers with various techniques beyond the Holms camp. Several Graham dancers were found among its ranks, including Erdman, Dudley, Sokolow, and Maslow; yet the New Dance Group avoided the elitism associated with the Graham Company (p. 55). The collective afforded opportunities for dancers to work with and choreograph for one another while developing newly trained dancers (p. 56).

The New Dance Group sponsored festivals to show original choreography to the public. Many dancers of New York City rose to professional renown through the ranks of the New Dance Group studios. In just the last twenty years, individuals and the group itself were inducted into the National Museum of Dance Hall of Fame (Hall of Fame, 2021).[72] In 2000, the New Dance Group was recognized by the Library of Congress as

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[72] The National Museum of Dance inducted the whole of the New Dance Group into its Hall of Fame in 2006 in honor of the group's four decades of activity. The only other inductees that year were Arthur and Katherine Murray. Directly related to the mentorship or activities of Jean Erdman are also other inductees, including Anna Sokolow, 1998; Jose Limon, 1997; Merce Cunningham 1993; Hanya Holm, 1988; John Martin, 1988;

one of "America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures: The First 100" ("Library of Congress," 2020).

Dances created by members of the Group were mostly political in nature, but Erdman's association afforded her the opportunity to try her own dance ideas. Erdman had been working on an inclusive approach to training in dance that, unlike Graham's, Holm's, or Humphrey's, did not advance an "Erdman" movement vocabulary *per se*. Rather, the training cultivated a point of view for choreographers.

The approach called for a dancer to analyze and then create "movement into pulse and shape" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 46). Within those categories, choices could be made to create a style, and according to Erdman, "for that time you explored that realm" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 46). Erdman concluded, "style comes from the material of the dance, the theme of the dance, and the choreographer's spiritual disposition"; it is the way "energy is used to connect movement and the way you connect the dynamic rhythm of what it is that creates a style" (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 - 2001, 18:10 p. 1).[73]

Finding the Shore

Several major factors fed Erdman's inspirations for choreography and an open approach to technique. These included developments in art, psychology, cultural awareness, and knowledge in areas of religion and comparative mythology. Relative to

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Isadora Duncan, 1987; Martha Graham, 1987; Doris Humphrey, 1987; Charles Weidman, 1987 (Hall of Fame, 2021).

[73] The source for these quotations is the transcript of a master class held at Sarah Lawrence in April 1987.

art, Erdman's early years coincided with the development of surrealism, a time of broken, distorted, and dismantled dream-like depictions, such as found on the canvases of Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso. The abstract depictions fascinated Erdman.

Regarding psychology, Erdman's husband had known psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung since 1932. Erdman became fascinated with studies in this area, too. Jung (1875-1961) was famous for advanced studies in interactive systems within the human unconscious. He examined memories, behaviors, and emotions.

Both Jean Erdman and Joe Campbell were deeply interested in Jung's theories related to the masks people wear: the Persona in the conscious realm that subdues the primitive urges to show one's public and exaggerated self. In the individual, the Persona coexists with the unconscious darker traits of the Shadow that ego refuses to acknowledge and from which sin and guilt emerge, the Anima/Animus archetypes within the Shadow that are identified with gender, and the Self that embraces all facets of who the person is now, including their human past, and potentially what they could be. The Self is the archetype of the unconscious that reaches toward self-realization; striving toward self-realization is widely recognized as important in education today. With full integration of the conscious and unconscious, Jung believed a person could reach the fullest expressions of individual self and character.

Naturally, with her husband having expertise in comparative religions and mythology, Erdman also became grounded in the mythic view of dance. As Campbell said, "Now mythology is not history (the rehearsal of literal fact), but vision (a pictorial symbolization of the backgrounds of existence)" (Campbell, 2017, p. 22). Certainly, dance had the power to display images expressive of written myth.

Erdman was so busy with performing, teaching, and taking classes, that it could have stunted her creative development. Instead, Erdman was preparing herself for a major transition in her career. She entered a period of prolific dance-making that subsequently bore rich fruit and led to the establishment of her own dance company.

Erdman created *Dawn Song* (1945), a solo dance with an original score by Doris Halpern.[74] *Changing Moment* (1945), a trio work, was made with accompaniment by Lou Harrison, a very competent composer of scores for the dance. What would become another rather well-known work, *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle*, also appeared on stage in the same year. Again, John Cage created the music score to Erdman's dance. The feeling of the dance, with its focus on inner facets of the feminine nature, and the accompaniment, with the fascinating sounds of a multi-timbre gamelan, came together in a stunning piece.

Erdman described the inspiration for the dance in an interview conducted by Nancy Allison in 1988:

> I was fascinated with this feminine principle, and by that time I had been reading in Jane Harrison about the Greeks and the Cretans…I was fascinated with this idea of the female just by herself, the female without the male, to get what was there, what was the quality... the Cretan civilization was a wonderful example because it was matriarchal with the goddess as the supreme deity. (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:8 p. 4)

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[74] In 1952, Erdman adopted a new score by Alan Hovhaness.

Erdman pointed out that the dance is not a story about the Cretans; rather, it is based on the idea of the goddess. The dance appears in a place of mystical enchantment as it explores the various phases of a woman's life, "the young one and the mothering aspect, and then this woman of experience who is not a mother—she has both negative and positive qualities" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:8 p. 4). The actions of the dancers "are speaking about an inner life…and that's still the same. IF the dance mean's [*sic*] anything today, it's because it's touching an area that is organic to women" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:8 p. 6).

Erdman looked forward to seeing her family and visiting Hawaii immediately after the war. There she would stay through the winter months. She was also eager to continue serious studies in various dance traditions that were available to her in the islands (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 41). She continued to study ancient sacred hula from *kuma hula* (hula master) Mary Kawena Pūku'i. In the familiar surroundings adorned with sacred flowers of the *ohia lehua* blossoms, Jean could dedicate herself to honoring Laka, goddess of the hula. Joe joined Jean for the journey. Using his musical talents and skills, he learned the drum parts to the *mele* and wrote them down (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 41).

While in Hawaii, Erdman continued her studies in Japanese performance (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 42). According to Campbell (2017), Jean Erdman's first experiences had been with the *odori*, one of the oldest traditional styles in the world (p. 162), She first learned it at the Honolulu Hisamatsu School. The form developed simultaneously with the classical dance and theatre form of kabuki. In the

highly stylized *odori*, the dancer acts as an intermediary between the gods and ancestral spirits. It combines serious drama interspersed with interludes of comic relief.

Subsequently, Erdman learned the Noh style of Japanese dramatic arts. Noh theatre presents great spectacle, masks, mystery, and stately elegance without grandiosity (Pellecchia, 2011, p. 18). In Noh, the combinations of words, music, visual images, stage design, and dance are highly stylized. The style elements are harmonized to denote both aesthetic and ethical significations by way of plots that often take viewers into dream-like or supernatural worlds (p. 10). In the encounter with the art form, a viewer must use a "conscious and unconscious deciphering operation" to elevate the mind from ignorance to enlightenment (p.15). Noh artists are known for unselfish dedication to the art over individualism because the attention is on the aesthetic qualities that are also ethically relevant (p. 17). This similar effect was often noticeable in Erdman's dances. Through the experiences with Noh, it is likely Erdman observed the elemental ideas of humankind colored with its authentic local inflection.

Back at their New York apartment, Erdman and Campbell shared their breakfast ritual. Joe read his newest writings to Jean and conducted analysis of their dreams from the night before (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 344). Erdman continued to establish herself as a significant artist of the post-pioneer period of modern dance. She continued studies in ballet with the American Ballet Theatre and began studying Yang T'ai Chi Chuan with master Chao-Li Chi (1927-2010) (Campbell, 2017, p. 162).

By this time Cunningham had also left the Graham company. Erdman and Cunningham were each developing their separate careers but remained close friends. Cunningham was evolving an impersonal approach to dance-making the way John Cage

had done for music. The careers of both dancers continued to gain momentum and notoriety. According to dance critic William S. Poster (1957), writing for *The Hudson Review*,

> The career of Jean Erdman, while it runs closely parallel to that of Cunningham, has actually followed a very different line of development…. [T]he most salient quality of Miss Erdman's development has been equivalence between her work and her ability. From the very outset, her art has been coherent, economical in the highest degree and consummate in a field in which the opposite qualities are almost the invariant rule… Miss Erdman, like Cunningham is a dancer first of all, endowed with the ability to create in terms of corporeal motion and impelled to do so. (p. 433)

The New York Public Library also recognized the genius and talents of Jean Erdman. In a letter addressed to Erdman, the library directors stated that Alvin Baumann, assistant in charge of the Dance Collection in the Music Division, was inviting her to send photographs, newspaper clippings, and programs to be included in a new exhibit on modern dance of 1945 (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 5:1).[75] The exhibit was scheduled to open October 1. Erdman was to be featured in a section on young dancers of the field.

In 1946, Erdman premiered three dances: *Ophelia*, *Passage*, and *People and Ghosts*. According to Campbell (2017), the solo *Ophelia* would become Erdman's

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[75] The letter, dated September 11, 1945, was from Director Franklin R. Hopper and J.R. Fall, chief of the Acquisitions Division.

signature piece (p. 167). Harkening to the scheme of the monomyth, *Ophelia* was the tragic representation of dismemberment that occurred because of the character's inability to successfully cross the threshold of an important journey.

Some years after the premiere, dance critic William Poster (1957) again wrote of Erdman in *The Hudson Review*, designating *Ophelia* "one of the indisputable classics of modern dance" (p. 434):

> "Ophelia" alone, gives one the sense of being a planned step in the history of art, focusing the critical attention of the spectator on the dancer as she moves on a long plane of reference to the past and future, inscribing the graph of her dance on the coordinates of literature, history and psychology. Every movement appears to have been scrutinized for originality and validity as it reveals a feminine figure being acted upon by powerful, conflicting forces, internal and external, which slowly twist and derange it till the dance closes upon a remarkable final image of static, maimed paralysis. (Poster, 1957, p. 435)

On Erdman's concert programs, *Passage* created an opposite effect in feeling and dynamics. Together the dances represented the necessary polarities of existence, such as light and dark, the conscious and unconscious, resurrection and death.[76] Similar to *Ophelia*, *Passage* was a solo dance, but in contrast it depicted the rewarding satisfaction that results from the completion of a monomyth cycle. The emphasis in both dances was

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[76] The dualities of existence are presented in numerous religious faiths and mythologies. For example, in Christianity, the common representation of duality is the pairing of heaven and hell. In Hinduism, the god Shiva has the powers of both creation and destruction. In Celtic mythology, the triple goddess Samhain brings together the living and the dead in the festival of Samhain.

on the possibilities and potentialities of transformation, the underlying theme that is the foundation of the monomyth cycle.

Campbell's influence became apparent in the Erdman dances. Erdman had discovered a fascination with addressing the monomyth cycle, in whole or in part, through her choreography. Evidence was seen beginning with the first major dance created by Erdman, *The Transformations of Medusa*, where the dancing figure appeared to pass through various states of being from innocence to rage and vengeance.

Erdman's second work, *Forever and Sunsmell*, set the opposite tone, one of awe, hope, and transcendence from earthly matters. The dance, combined with the poetry of e e cummings and the music of John Cage, seemed to call viewers beyond human perception to a resurrected state of being fully alive. According to Campbell's monomyth, it is a state indicative of the climax of a hero's journey.

When subsequent Erdman dances are examined, the evidence of the monomyth remains, through *Creature on a Journey*, *Ophelia*, *Passage*, *Hamadryad*, and so forth. The dances, along with their accompanying feelings, states of being, and symbolic images, intentionally and timelessly relate to the universal inner journeys of every individual. Using the monomyth cycle as a model for her methodology, Erdman was able to take a dance viewer beyond the world of words.

In a small notebook, Erdman's reflections revealed she learned how rhythms and impulses, tenseness, and shape of the body made visible to the outside what a person was like on the inside (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 15:1),[77] In the notes, Erdman

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[77] One informative note by Erdman is dated August 19, 1947.

described the studies as being psychological and having physical qualities with potential to trigger emotions derived from the archetypes; these connections she inflected to an aesthetic end. She indicated choreographers may give the impulses of the body or the images of the mind specific attention and manipulate them, permitting associations with the collective unconscious through a metaphor, symbol, or archaic association.

As similarly stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable, the Self is the same for ever" (Johnson, 2008, 2:22-24). Erdman (1995) offered some insight into her creative process:

> I was always interested in how the symbolic language of dance could express the seemingly inexpressible. Joe and I often talked about how an artist might work so as to create properly structured aesthetic statements that reveal the realm of experience, antecedent to words.

People and Ghosts (1946) was a masked dance of three parts, each with contrasting time signatures. The dance resonated well with her cast of dancers, who toyed with Erdman's theme and returned the gift of her dance in the form of a quick thank-you poem signed by the company:

> The Ghost was laid!
> For the Puritan maid
> Whose hymns of God and original sin
> Had turned to Freud and extended limb.
>
> Last night came a slap -!
> With a crash and a roar

The grave broke ‘ope

The Ghost was ‘ore.

Then acid sprayed from the gentle hand

And identified glory covered the land.

We love thee darling

We’re thanking thee

The fist is clenched

The group is free!

Twelve dancers, including Merce Cunningham, signed their names to this expression of gratitude (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 3(1:1):12).[78]

During the mid-1940s, Campbell was working on an extensive set of volumes that would come to be known as *The Masks of God*. Additionally, he was about to finish the book *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, a publication that would make him famous. He was also writing for the Bollingen Foundation. At this same time, a bohemian friend of the Campbells, avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren, was taking a more prominent place in the working worlds of both Erdman and Campbell.

Deren originated choreocinema, an artful form that synthesized elements of mythology, psychology and dance. Deren had become entranced by traditional Voudoun

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[78] The signatories and their probable last names are Jane [Dudley], Sophie [Maslow], Margie [Straighter? Mazia?], Ethel [Butler], Elizabeth [Sherbon], Nina [Fonaroff], Pearl [Primus], Dave [Campbell or Wilkins], David [Wilkins or Zellmer], Merce [Cunningham], Sasha [Cohen], and Nick [?].

ceremonies and extensively researched the form in Haiti from a cinematic perspective. She was particularly trying to understand divine possession. Campbell encouraged Deren to produce *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*. This was to be the first book in a series by publishers Thames & Hudson, which would examine both mythology and the arts (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p. 351).

Erdman was working with Deren on a film, *Medusa*, a long-term project that would be left unfinished. In Jean Erdman's archived papers, descriptions are found of Deren's various projects, including the films *At Land* (1944) and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945-46). Deren's films make the case that ritual can also be art (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 3:1). The three personalities—Deren, Erdman, and Campbell—understood and were able to outwardly demonstrate art as a vision of the inward life.

Back at the New Dance Group studios, the collective wanted Erdman to teach Graham technique, but she refused. Since Erdman had been developing an inclusive approach to training the body and making choreography, she chose not to endorse a rigid method of technique. As a result, the group decided that Erdman should teach only fundamental classes.

Simultaneously, Erdman evolved a new modern, comedic piece, *Sea Deep: A Dreamy Drama*. From Erdman's records, there is evidence the dance was presented in one of the New Dance Group performances of 1947 (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 49). The dance included Jean, three other women, and one man. Elizabeth Sherbon, Margaret Straighter, and Natanya Neumann performed in the presentation along with Mark Ryder as the male lead. The configuration of five performers was one that

Erdman later used as she developed dances for her own company: "I choreographed a whole repertory for that kind of group" (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 18:12 p. 49).

Tensions continued to manifest between Erdman and the New Dance Group. The group had dictated what she could teach and preferred that subject matter for choreography speak to matters of the human condition in current times. Erdman saw a widening separation between her professional goals and those of the New Dance Group. In what appears to be a hand-written draft letter, circa late 1948, "To the Board of Directors of the New Dance Group," Erdman resigned (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 4:16).

A member of the New Dance Group responded to Erdman's letter and seemed to offer her consolation. Erdman shared the unsettling feeling of stepping over a new threshold of life into the unknown:

> Thank you for your very nice long letter to me… All I know is that at certain times in one's life, one has to do drastic things. I had to leave home and my family and all things they think are important. I had to leave Martha Graham at a time when I was most in her "favor" and would have been given beautiful parts to do. Now, I have to leave the New Dance Group on the brink of its new era… . I came to realize fully that what I have to do is to teach in my own studio and work totally under my own name rather than the name of a group. (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 4:16)

A Quest Fulfilled

Jean Erdman chose a direction for teaching, technique, and choreography that was new in the history of the art form. Instead of making protest dances within the confines of

the New Dance Group, she sought spiritual practices that would release the ego to bring about compassion in the world. Erdman remained true and committed to her personal vision and future career. In 1948, she opened her own dance school in New York City. In the same year, she gave a full concert at the 92nd Street Y and choreographed three new dances.

Throughout the creative process for each new dance, she carefully documented all her choreographies, either through her own notes or with assistance from the dancers. Erdman created *El Pélerinage*, a solo with costume design by Roxanne Marden and the music of Erik Satie. Erdman's *Jazz Maze* proved she was fully adept at composing a group piece using variations in pathways and dynamics to establish audience focus and for contrasting relationships (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 3:17).[79] The piece featured eight performers who were the top names in New York, including male dancers Robert Cohan, Stuart Hodes, Donald McKayle, and Norman Maxon, and female dancers Billie Kirpich, Helen McGehee, Natanya Neumann, and Elizabeth Sherbon. *Jazz Maze* was set to music by Gregory Tucker with costumes by William Korff.

Hamadryad stands out among the dances of 1948. Erdman's title refers to tree spirits from Greek myth who have the ability to freely interact with both gods and mortals. *Hamadryad* is danced as a solo to the flute accompaniment of *Syrinx* by Claude Debussy; the pulse of the breath and body parts set the tone and energy for the dance. The light and fluid movements are not necessarily intended to match the waxing and waning

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[79] In a folder labeled "Dance Compositions to 1962," the piece was listed in the repertoire of group works available for touring.

sounds of the flute music, but the movement flows smoothly and is playful with it. The images, feeling of the dance, and sounds order themselves in joyful interplay with each other. The image of the tree nymph personifies life-giving power and exudes the feeling of bliss, a state of being so often addressed in the writings of Joe Campbell. It is in this dance that Erdman appears to reach the inward truth and nature of herself, *tat tvam asi*.[80]

The story of the dance, as told by Erdman's protégé Nancy Allison, was that Erdman formed the idea for the dance at the artist colony of The Maverick in Woodstock, New York. Erdman had been walking through the woods and heard someone rehearsing the music: she was thus inspired to create the alluring nature dance ("The Dryad Project," 2020). Today portions of the dance can be viewed in another form, through the collaboration of Allison, dancer Miki Orihara, and filmmaker Paul Allman, who transport the viewer from the rehearsal of the dance in a Manhattan studio to the setting that inspired it ("*Hamadryad* Trailer," 2020).

By summer of 1948, Erdman was working on new large group choreographies that she would realize the following year. Also, she was offered an invitation to contribute her dance expertise and writing skills to a new book by Walter Sorrells, *The Dance Has Many Faces,* not to be published until 1951 (*Jean Erdman Papers,* 1939 – 2001, 6:11).[81] In October she performed a concert for the Needle Trades Union in their Dance Recital Series and was planning a concert at the Hunter College Playhouse in

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[80] The Sanskrit phrase *tat tvam asi*, which can be translated as "thou art that," alludes to a substantive work by Joseph Campbell (2001): *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor,* New World Library for the Joseph Campbell Foundation.

[81] The letter of invitation is dated May 31, 1948.

January. From there she would travel with two of her company members on a tour of Pennsylvania, followed by the premiere of a new group work and dance workshop at the Teresa Kaufman Theatre (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:4).[82]

Since the Bennington summers had come to an end, Jean Erdman was busy negotiating arrangements for the next summer's teaching and performance opportunity; this time it would be for five weeks at the University of Colorado, Boulder (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:4). Erdman thought about the offer in relation to how it would ready her dancers and repertory for the company's fall season in New York. She also was able to negotiate living quarters to include her husband (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:4).[83] Erdman, at her 136 Waverly Place residence, received confirmation of the contract offer from Colorado by Western Union telegram (*Jean Erdman Papers*, 1939 – 2001, 7:4).

Coming full course on the mythological journey of her early years, Jean Erdman trusted her adventurous and courageous spirit, and proceeded full speed ahead. She was not afraid to step over the threshold to new adventures and, in fact, welcomed them. On the horizon were extensive journeys that would soon take her solo performances to both Japan and India, where she would be welcomed with open arms.

Erdman appreciated the guidance given to her by mentors, most especially her husband and Martha Graham. She had fought adversities to keep true to her inward

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[82] This information comes from a letter dated November 11, 1948, by Erdman in response to an invitation to teach in Colorado. The invitation was extended by Claire Small, professor and head of the Physical Education Department for Women at the University.

[83] An undated letter to Clair Small is the source of this information.

vision. It was from these phenomenal experiences that Erdman brought forth the gift of dance to share with audiences large and small. Her dances drew from the range of human movement possibilities to aesthetically express that which cannot be communicated through words alone. Through her life and work she evoked enlightenment, joy, and a way of seeing the world that was totally original for dance.

Erdman's journey did not end in 1948, and further transformations lay ahead. But Erdman's explorations of the early years took her to the places she was meant to go and to the accomplishment of tasks she was fated to undertake. From the discoveries thus made in the early years of training and dance-making, she would begin to weave larger tapestries of significant dance dramas for the concert stage.

Jean Marion Erdman gave light to the psychological and transcendental nature of dance as art. In the pursuit, she made sacrifices for her career and for the love of her life, Joe Campbell. In the face of obstacles, she remained patient and kind to others. She was resolute to awaken the mind and to learn from the intuitive inner vision. Her destiny was to search and communicate the universal meaning of movement drawn from the full experience of her life. As she stated for the *Dance Observer* in May of 1949, "The dance controls in its own terms the whole range of the human experience… It breaks the shackles, this, of the rigid human form and expresses for no benefit the things that we require to make us know wholeness" (Erdman, 1949, p. 66).

Part Three: From Biography to New Ventures

Chapter 6: Launch of a New Adventure

Conclusions

This study presents a biography of the early life and career of dancer Jean Erdman Campbell, from the ancestry of her maternal and paternal lines through the year 1948, at which point a major transition occurred in the trajectory of the subject's professional career. Extensive qualitative data from literature, archival collections, and various historical documents were collected and subsequently used to formulate multiple perspectives on the subject's life. The data was studied to both chronicle Erdman's life events and provide clues to the subject's thoughts, interests, beliefs, and behaviors in the development of her career.

The investigation and account of Jean Erdman Campbell was written for the purpose of underscoring the significance of her life to American dance and the theatre arts, including her philosophies and approaches to choreography, performance, and teaching. The biographical investigation and research methods employed in this study were designed to build a comprehensive story, thereby making it possible for readers to understand how Erdman became an important dance figure of the 20th century.

Significant attention was given to how Erdman's work stood with respect to the theories of Joseph Campbell, yet the study also set the dancer's accomplishments uniquely apart from his work. From this point alone, it can be concluded that Erdman successfully translated, synthesized, and embodied Campbell's theories into a form of significant artful consequence. She was the first choreographer to apply monomyth

theory to any dance genre. Whereas Campbell mostly held to the position that the goddess or feminine role was separate yet essential to the role of the hero in the monomyth, Erdman forthrightly demonstrated that a woman's quest was similar to and equally transformative as one undertaken by a hero. Indeed, this study took the biographical position that, like Campbell's hero on his journey, Erdman was actively engaged in psycho-spiritual quests of exploration, overcame ordeals in the world of the unknown, and finally, experienced a "death" to old illusions and ways. Each awakening by the heroine represents rebirth into a new life phase. In the case of Erdman's actual life, understandings acquired in her life's journey were given form in new dances. Each choreography by Erdman was a gift that she returned to the world and through which she made visible the inner nature of women.

Early in the writing process, a problem for the biographer appeared, that of identifying the target audience for the readership of this material. The field of professional dancers and dance students who might be attracted to this research was estimated to be rather small. On the other hand, the disciplines and topics addressed by Erdman's life and dances are expansive. This author sacrificed some in-depth technical discussions of dance for the sake of making the content more accessible to a broader readership. Possibly, the biographer has made the subject matter too broad. The results will not be known until long after the paper has been disseminated and feedback is acquired.

The researcher encountered several difficulties in the investigation and preparation of the manuscript. First and foremost was the difficulty of accessing archival collections containing essential information on Erdman's ancestry and life. Important

archival collections ranged in geographical locations from New York City and Bronxville, New York, to Bennington, Vermont, and the Pacifica Graduate Institute in California. Additionally, it was necessary for the author to re-read substantive literature, including most books and lectures written by Joseph Campbell. Other specific research and literature was accessed in the specific disciplines that informed Erdman's thinking and dance-making, particularly in the fields of history, psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, and religion.

While collecting thousands of pages of notes on the subject, the author wrestled with the organization and structure of the study. The decision was made to identify dominant repeating themes; these provided evidence of the disposition and direction of the subject's life. Biographical methods were employed that were chronological, dialogical, and mythical in approach. The chronological development is evident in the writing of the biography itself as it presents a logical sequencing to Erdman's life story.

The dialogical aspect was presented in Chapter 2, where major themes of Erdman's life and work were delineated and discussed. Erdman was a lifelong student of cultural and sacred traditions as they related to dance. Additionally, she was attuned to the influences of America's modern dance pioneers and post-pioneers, especially Martha Graham. During the early years of her career, Erdman evolved her own approach to dance-making. Notably, she brought dance beyond the singular point of view of a lone choreographer by fusing alternate and multicultural perspectives into her work.

From the Big Four of modern dance, cautions had been set about improvisation as a dance-making tool and its role in performance. Up to the early part of the 20th century, improvisation on the concert stage had been considered neither valid nor disciplined. This

position had been strongly advocated by musician Louis Horst. Erdman and Cunningham cracked that mold for dance composition. In *Dance Observer,* critic George Beiswanger (1942) commented on the duo's artistry, "The concert was so influential that it gave indication of the future direction of dance" (p. 120). It was Erdman who went forward striking a balance of utilizing both well-structured and improvisatory composition methods in the choreographic and performance aspects of the field.

Other themes emerged from Erdman's studies in aesthetics, psychology, mythology, and religions. She interpreted various theories from those disciplines to enhance the communicative potency of her dance expressions. Erdman was specifically influenced by the expansive knowledge of her scholarly husband and the schema of the monomyth cycle in the mythic approach to dance. The concept of the monomyth fired Erdman's creative imagination. From first experiments in choreography and throughout her career, she regularly and specifically translated myth into dance, while inflecting it to an aesthetic end.

What else was learned about the subject? How did Erdman identify as an artist apart from Graham and other choreographers on the American modern dance scene?

Erdman evolved advanced notions about dancer vocabulary and the communicative power of the art of dance by two primary means: First, she conducted in-depth studies of a variety of traditional cultural styles, especially Hawaiian and Japanese dance, and secondly, she expanded the dance training concepts of the various pioneering masters of the first part of the 20th century. While Graham evolved a personal technique that made it possible for her to craft powerful images and messages for the stage, Erdman disavowed the limited training of a personal technique. She aimed for her dances to be

universally understood; therefore, each dance created by Erdman was rendered and experienced through a style specifically created for a singular dance.

Erdman considered a theme for the dance, considered her disposition to it, and subsequently selected the movement vocabulary and dynamics from the unlimited abundance of available movement choices. Whereas both Graham and Erdman referenced myth in their works, the content of a dance seemed mostly personal to Graham's often turbulent inner nature, which played out on the stage. For Graham, a mythological dance was sometimes a literal interpretation of a specific myth. Graham's focus would often be centered on the intensity of a character, feeling, or dramatic action.

For Erdman, a dance was not personal *per se*; it belonged to everyone and could be felt and experienced in individual ways. As with artists since the beginning of time, both Erdman and Graham sought to reveal the inner landscape of the soul (Graham, 1991, p. 4); neither was interested in dance as a notion of pretty posturing. Both artists were about energetic modernism, not sentimentality (Erdman, 1949a, p. 48). Erdman was frequently able to elevate audience thoughts to a spiritual level, giving insights into the psyche with emphasis on transcendent experiences or through identification with the transformation of a heroine. It was women who were the heroines of her choreography.

Whereas Martha Graham was the most influential choreographer to Erdman's dance training, it was Joseph Campbell who was the most influential to her choreographic ideas and career. Erdman was Jo Campbell's life partner. They had numerous interdisciplinary interests in common. Campbell had been Erdman's mentor and teacher. He had guided the young woman in the formation of her intellectual philosophies and aesthetic choices. Campbell was a great aficionado of music, dance, sculpture, painting,

and all the modern arts. He appreciated and studied the meaning, metaphors, and values of modernism. He was a literary giant in his fields of interest, which were vast. Campbell shared his scholarly writings with Erdman daily, and their conversations informed ideas for her original creations. While Campbell's thoughts on myth, spirituality, transcendence, and aesthetics were articulated with a pen, Jean Erdman uniquely interpreted and applied such thoughts to original creations for the concert stage.

Erdman balanced and reformulated the various perspectives learned from teachers, dancers and non-dancers alike. From the psychological studies of Carl Jung, Erdman recognized the importance of dance expressions originating as totemistic and taboo. Each concept, as an approach to dance, has an important role to play in the well-rounded training of young dancers today. Erdman also utilized Jung's archetypes of the unconscious to trigger a dance viewer's emotions at the primary human level. From these ideas, Erdman dances often evoked a dream-like aesthetic that appeared to transcend earthly space and time. She took dance into the realms of the abstract, yet she retained the ability to reach audience minds and hearts.

Geographic place and family history featured strongly in the formation of Erdman's identity. At first, her identity seemed comprised of many contradictions; Erdman experienced internal tensions as a result. Born in Hawaii, she identified as Polynesian and Asian. These feelings were in stark contrast to the personal characteristics she recognized as being of staunch New England descent. The maternal side of the family held great wealth and fame in the world; the Dillingham family members were noted for their entrepreneurship and business savvy. On Erdman's paternal side were many strong Christian evangelists who dedicated their lives to serving the poor. Each side of the

family was strong in mission, work ethic, and the spirit of adventure. Erdman was compassionate to all people, from strangers to closest friends. She experienced traumatic events and crises of both historical and personal proportions, from fires, war, and immigrant laborers fighting for their jobs, to the tragedy of losing her only brother at a young age.

With difficulty, Jean Erdman sorted out the values important to life and claimed for herself a career in dance. She remained true to this mission and vision that she evolved from the time of adolescence. She emerged from having mere interests in the theatrical arts to a mature artist who capably embarked on a solo career in dance. Her husband, a relatively poor college professor, recognized Erdman's exceptional intellect and artistry. He encouraged her to pursue her dreams. For Erdman, dance became a celebration of the energies of life.

Erdman's personal behavior demonstrated the truth about herself: personal convictions were consistent with her actions. Growing up, Erdman had been grounded in the deep Christian faith of her family and held particular reverence for the cultural practices of Hawaiian polytheism. As a young adult, she had become entranced by Eastern forms of religion. She did not adhere to a specific religious dogma. Instead, she enlightened herself through studies in various religions and spiritual practices, and felt a particular affinity for Buddhism. With a mind inclined toward exploration and growth, she focused on how each faith or practice had potential to open the mind and heart in compassion with others. Her awakened mind, personal agency, and bodhisattva-like qualities were cultivated by probing the deep mysteries of life.

One can never completely define nor fully explain the mystical interior sense of another human being. The sense of oneself can only be found within. Erdman was a rare woman who reflected and discerned the truth about her identity and remained faithful to it. From the Indian *Upanishads*, Campbell often used a phrase that captured the essence of this integrity: *tat tvam asi* ("thou art that") (Campbell, 2001, p. 20). It was this biographer's privilege to examine Erdman's life and to consider her inward consciousness through clues left by her actions and extensive archival records.

For this author, the examination of each theme contributed to building a multi-dimensional and complex configuration of Erdman's life in narrative form. To structure the biographical narrative, this author discerned parallels between the stages of Erdman's life and the schema of Campbell's monomyth. Phases of Erdman's early life journey were presented as steps along a monomyth cycle. The chapter headings and sub-headings were aligned with a hero[ine]'s quest.

In the process of selecting and interpreting the material for the manuscript, this biographer carefully scrutinized all available facts and information. This study is the beginnings of a full-length book, yet biographical challenges remain: What remains unknown about the subject or what information might be reinterpreted? For readers interested in Jean Erdman, this manuscript and the accompanying reference notes should provide keys for further investigation into her life, art, and leadership in the field of dance.

Implications for This Study

In his book *Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, Campbell (1968) describes four functions of myth. Likewise, Jean Erdman's life example and dances may serve similar

functions. These functions are metaphysical-mystical (p. 609), sociological (p. 621), cosmological (p. 611), and pedagogical. It is pedagogy that offers a way to connect the psychological world to the phenomena and experience of the external world through myth (p. 623). As follows, the four functions also provide a strong rationale for embedding Erdman's work in a contemporary and comprehensive dance education.

Metaphysical and mystical aspects of the mind and body can often be observed in the physical display of a dance. The body is a place where the dualities of physical matter converge with the mind and spirit. When the metaphysical and mystical are well integrated into a dance, the performers often operate and communicate on several planes, each with a unique point of view—of the physical, biological, psychological, sociological, and aesthetic.

An education in dance has potential to awaken the individual sense of awe through viewing dance masterworks and participating in effective dance-making experiences. As Erdman demonstrated, awakening the mystical sense can serve as inspiration for learning about oneself and others. The mystical sense of wonder is found in the imagination, compassion, creativity, reflection, meditation, aesthetics, and other inner powers that move us along a transformational path.

Instruction in the art of dance usually does not specifically address the transformational powers of dance, its mystery, and spiritual nature, such as often found in the sacred dances of various traditions. To this author's point of view, ignoring this area of learning is not professionally responsible because it omits potential areas of student growth and interest, yet the topics are not directly addressed in dance education professional standards for public education. This author advocates the need to safely lead

youngsters to new thresholds of discovery, including moral, ethical, and aesthetic quests that give meaning and relevance to students' own questions and lives. Helping students understand why people dance, a meaning behind a dance, and the examination of non-secular traditional dances can open student minds to the phenomenal range of meanings and movement possibilities beyond the culture in which they live. Erdman's life and work models a successful approach to tapping into this knowledge as an inspiration for dance.

Too often, dance teachers—and therefore their students—busy themselves with repeating phrases of choreographed actions commonly directed by the teacher. This approach to instruction merely perpetuates a facsimile of the teacher. In another common dance education practice, if students make dances mostly from random or selected combinations of elements for the purpose of completing an educational task, then educators also fail because the task has become a "check-the-block" exercise for the student. Neither method necessarily promotes nor draws from the wisdom of the student's inner sense.

In the process of guiding a budding dance-maker through various choreographic processes, the opportunity exists to explore the journey of discovering oneself without necessarily creating dances that are focused on oneself. Listening to the inner self can foster a genuine desire to know, learn, and transform; resultant dances have the potential to invite empathy into a dance classroom. The point is to elicit the passion and bliss of the young artist.

A contrary approach to dance-making is one that generally seeks to conform, impress, and please the ego or the public. This result is obvious in our entertainment

media, where dancers show “tricks” or focus on sensationalism to capture audience attention. If educators do not awaken their students’ curiosity and initiative, students may be destined to become subject to other peoples’ visions and fates instead of becoming masters of their own.

The vision for originality would apply to students using resources for music. Dance should not be subservient to the music accompaniment. Teachers must provide strong direction in methods for the presentation of student dance ideas created with original music. Alternatively, students need assistance when seeking inventive ways to create interesting relationships between dance and existing music. The dance and music collaborations that were fostered by Erdman led her to further explore the interrelationships between dance and other theatrical arts. Such discoveries can strengthen connections across the disciplines for students of dance. Building interdisciplinarity has been a major component identified in today’s educational dance standards.

With Erdman’s dances, we can observe the process and values of dance creations that investigate the realm of the mystical. A dance that evolves from the inner sense becomes particularly effective for dance performance when its meaning reaches beyond the visible presentation of form to spark aesthetic arrest in the minds of dance viewers. Erdman’s methods were successful to this end. Her dances spoke to the universal nature of humankind while simultaneously pointing to a greater source of wonder.

Erdman’s dances were not intended to be didactic or be persuasive; her dances were unlike the dances commonly associated with the New Dance Group. Instead, Erdman’s choreography intended to awaken transcendent thought, logic, and emotion by

using myth and metaphor that spoke to the level of the subconscious. Although both purposes can be powerful, Erdman did not try to manage, control, or sell a point of view. Her work demonstrated a poetic rather than rhetorical approach to choreography. Her dances gave rise to images of the universe and of human nature, a cosmological function for myth as well as for dance. Erdman's dances provided outward form to an inner nature, as if looking through a telescope at both ends.

The sociological function of dance brings members of a society together with the purpose of conferring a sense of belonging. Differing from myth, the communitarian philosophy is not necessarily about maintaining an established order but is inclusive of people and ideas. A sociological function is evident not only in the practice of social and sacred dance traditions, but also through witnessing a dance on the concert stage. For dance participants, witnesses, or creators, a dance experience can provide identity with an event, feeling, idea, or "aha" moment.

The learning of traditional dances can offer security and predictability for individuals through participation in group ritual. In contrast, dance as art is an occasion for communicating original thought, a breaking away from the classical, thereby permitting a route for society to change, transcend, and grow. The experiences of the traditional together with the innovative can provide a healthful mental balance for a society. Erdman was an individual model for this balance. Her choreographies were birthed from the wisdom of ancient cultures and communicated with specific movement vocabulary to produce new artful expressions. As Erdman observed, a single style of technical training can actually inhibit the full potential of a student. She therefore

advocated using early exposure and multiple points of view to substantively shape the training and dance composition mastery of young dancers.

Societies are currently experiencing a distressing period of social isolationism due to conditions of a pandemic. Moreover, many in the younger generations lack a meaningful identity with family or cultural roots, or any deep association with a social group that can provide significant mentorship toward positive, long-term growth. Young people desire to belong to groups, but too often a group is formed for a temporary purpose or goal. Social functions that include occasions of healthful dance are few; dances are no longer about attending for the purpose of establishing concrete relationships but are often sites for the "hook-up" culture. On those occasions, one might observe youngsters expending wild energies with no particular direction, meaning, or intent of making long-term friends. An appearance of a social connection may be visible, but in reality, many young people have not learned to establish significant meaningful relationships beyond a short time frame. Using an example of the popular TikTok dance craze, that purpose is to establish a "following." What results from the experience is a temporary fame or a cult following.

Today, more than ever, youngsters are revering temporary idols and transient stars. When a trend fades away, so does the image that was embraced by its followers. A basketball star, a music icon, or a fashionable dance will each disappear amidst the ever-accelerating trends of today's world. Future generations may feel stranded. Still, youngsters are taught to cling ever more tightly to electronic equipment that provides only an illusion of a real-life experience. In the era of social media, many individuals

have surrendered themselves to projecting an alluring body image rather than prizing the inner and authentic self.

Our younger generations are experiencing chaos, frustration, isolationism, and severe depression. Just watch the content of Facebook, Twitter, or even the television commercials that advertise drugs to treat the misery of the day. Heroes and heroines of myth are needed to guide us in the current age of real-life experiences. When this does not happen and the dance idol or rock star fails us, individuals may head to dance clubs where throbbing bodies pulse to music in a downward spiral of fleeting pleasure.

The performing arts and models like Erdman are needed more than ever. Education has a duty to provide students with substantive grounding in deep matters of thinking, guidance for positive social interactions, and opportunities for personal and group expressions that are meaningful, relevant, and healthy. We can honor and learn from the achievements of others but only when the resources and educational experiences are made available, such as by using this manuscript to build quality educational curricula for dance.

Curriculum designers can use myth and the schematic of the monomyth to foster understandings of self and others. The potential is for artists to be the new myth makers of the current time. Studying Erdman's dances and approaches to dance-making can serve this pedagogical function.

Mythologies evolve through time and reflect the realities of the time in which they evolve. People must find the new myths and engage each other in lived experiences that take them beyond a computer screen. A quality dance education program that

accesses myth and the monomyth cycle can help forge such initiatives. The monomyth allows for personal investiture and active engagement in education.

Understanding the myth cycle and experiencing it through the dance takes us on a quest for the meaning of existence and celebrates important transformations of life. Processes that apply myth require students to go deeper and further in their dance-making abilities. Instead of artificiality in dance actions, tapping into interdisciplinary connections can help students to artfully use metaphor, symbolism, and archetypal images to reach the collective unconscious of viewers. If a student reflects on aspects of a personal journey using various writing techniques such as journaling, then the dance-making process has further potential to be memorable, meaningful, and applicable to future experiences.

Embarking on a hero[ine]'s journey is evolutionary to character and offers the opportunity to live a fully energized life. Dance offers a metaphor for such journeys. Through myth-related dances, a student adds a voice to the chorus of humanity, a special contribution to the single great story of humankind. Creating a mythological dance can be a sacred adventure because each successful journey returns the creator to the known world as a better person or to a state of being more fully integrated and self-actualized. Dance performance replicates the experience and the spirit of that adventure.

The study of Erdman's early life and work has been completed to help us better understand the past and learn from it. Erdman's personal life path and numerous dances have been left to us to enrich, educate, and inspire our own lives. Erdman's pedagogy teaches us that myths are worthwhile for unlocking transcendent meanings in and through dance. Jean Marion Erdman has stirred this author's imagination for what is possible in

dance and education. The story of her life provides us with both roots and wings for new adventure.

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Appendix A

Premieres of Erdman Choreography Through 1948

1938 *Baby Ben Says Da-Da* (solo); composer: Louis Horst; choreographed in Horst's modern forms composition class at Bennington School of the Dance

1942 *Transformations of Medusa* (solo); composer: Louis Horst; performed by Jean Erdman; first developed in Horst's pre-classic compositional forms class. This dance became the most frequently performed of Erdman's career.

1942 *Credo in US* (duet); composer: John Cage; costumer: Charlotte Trowbridge; performed and choreographed with Merce Cunningham

1942 *Forever and Sunsmell* (solo); composer: John Cage; costumer: Edith Gilfond; text by e e cummings; performed by Jean Erdman

1942 *Ad Lib* (duet); composer: Gregory Tucker; costumer: Charlotte Trowbridge; performed and choreographed with Merce Cunningham

1942 *Seeds of Brightness* (duet); composer: Norman Lloyd; costumer: Charlotte Trowbridge; performed and choreographed with Merce Cunningham

1943 *Creature on a Journey* (solo); composer: Lou Harrison; performed by Jean Erdman

1943 *Dawn Song* (solo); original score: Doris Halpern; 1952 score: Alan Hovhaness; performed by Jean Erdman

1945 *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (trio); composer: John Cage; performed by Jean Erdman, Elizabeth Sherbon, and Margaret Robinson

1945 *Changing Moment* (trio); composer: Lou Harrison; performed by Jean Erdman, Helaine Blok, and Elizabeth Sherbon

1946 *Ophelia* (solo); composer: John Cage; costumer: Xenia Cage; performed by Jean Erdman

1946 *Passage* (solo); composer: Otto Janowitz; performed by Jean Erdman

1946 *People and Ghosts* (duet); composer: Bernardo Segall; performed by Elizabeth Sherbon and Natanya Neumann

1947 *Sea Deep: A Dreamy Drama* (quintet); original score: Lionel Nowak; subsequent score: Bernardo Segall; costumer: Roxanne Marden; décor: Xenia Cage; performed by Jean Erdman (Girl), Marc Ryder (Dream Man), and Lili Mann, Natanya Neumann, and Elizabeth Sherbon (Three Graces)

1947 Choreography for the play *The Flies* (large group work); performed by Vassar Experimental Theatre

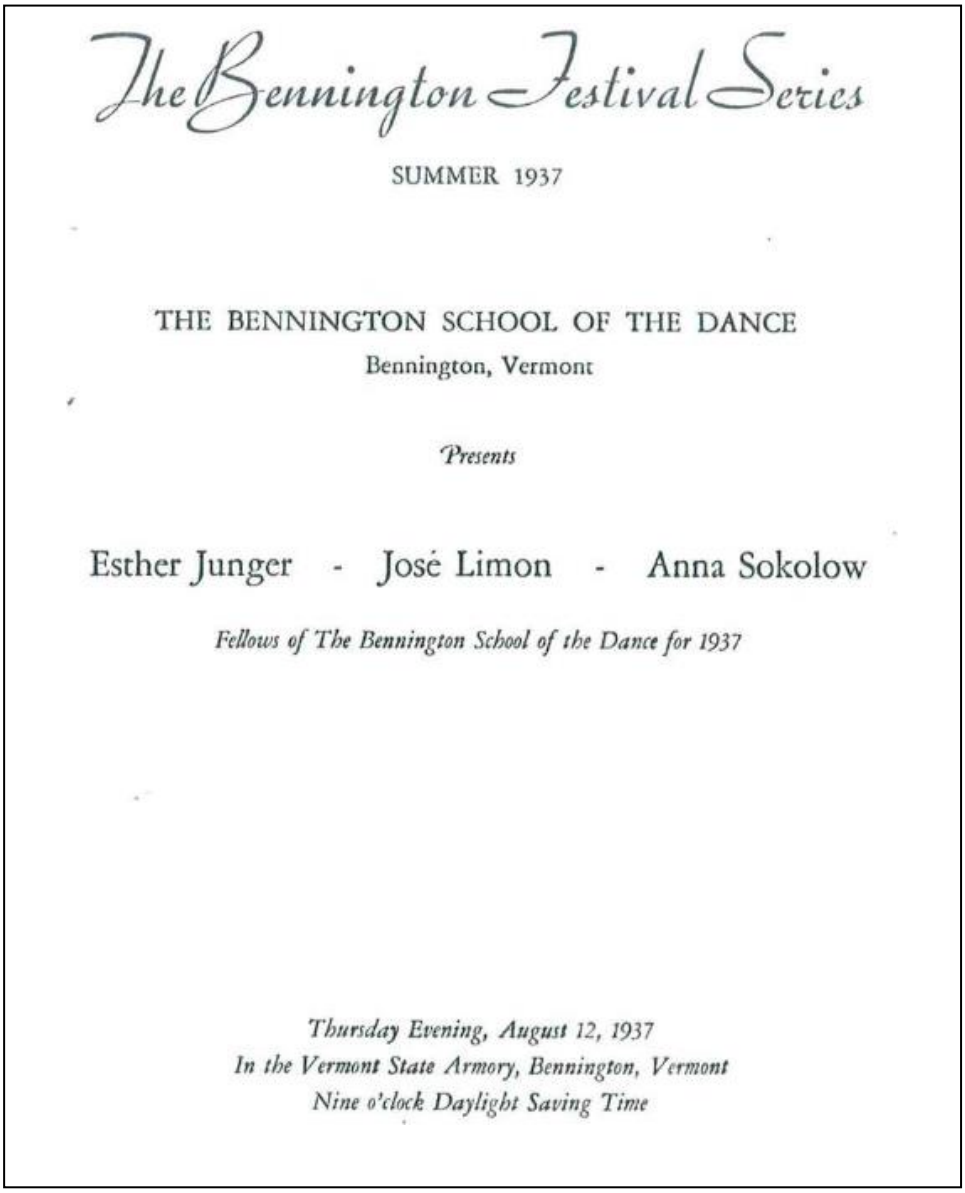
1948 *Hamadryad* (solo); music: *Sphinx* by Claude Debussy; performed by Jean Erdman

1948 *El Pélerinage* (solo); composer: Erik Satie; costumer: Roxanne Marden; performed by Jean Erdman

1948 *Jazz Maze* (octet: four male and four female); composer: Gregory Tucker; costumer: Nicholas Korff; performed by Robert Cohan, Stuart Hodes, Donald McKayle, Norman Maxon, Billie Kirpich, Helen McGehee, Natanya Neumann, and Elizabeth Sherbon

Appendix B

The Bennington School of the Dance Presents



The Bennington Festival Series

SUMMER 1937

THE BENNINGTON SCHOOL OF THE DANCE

Bennington, Vermont

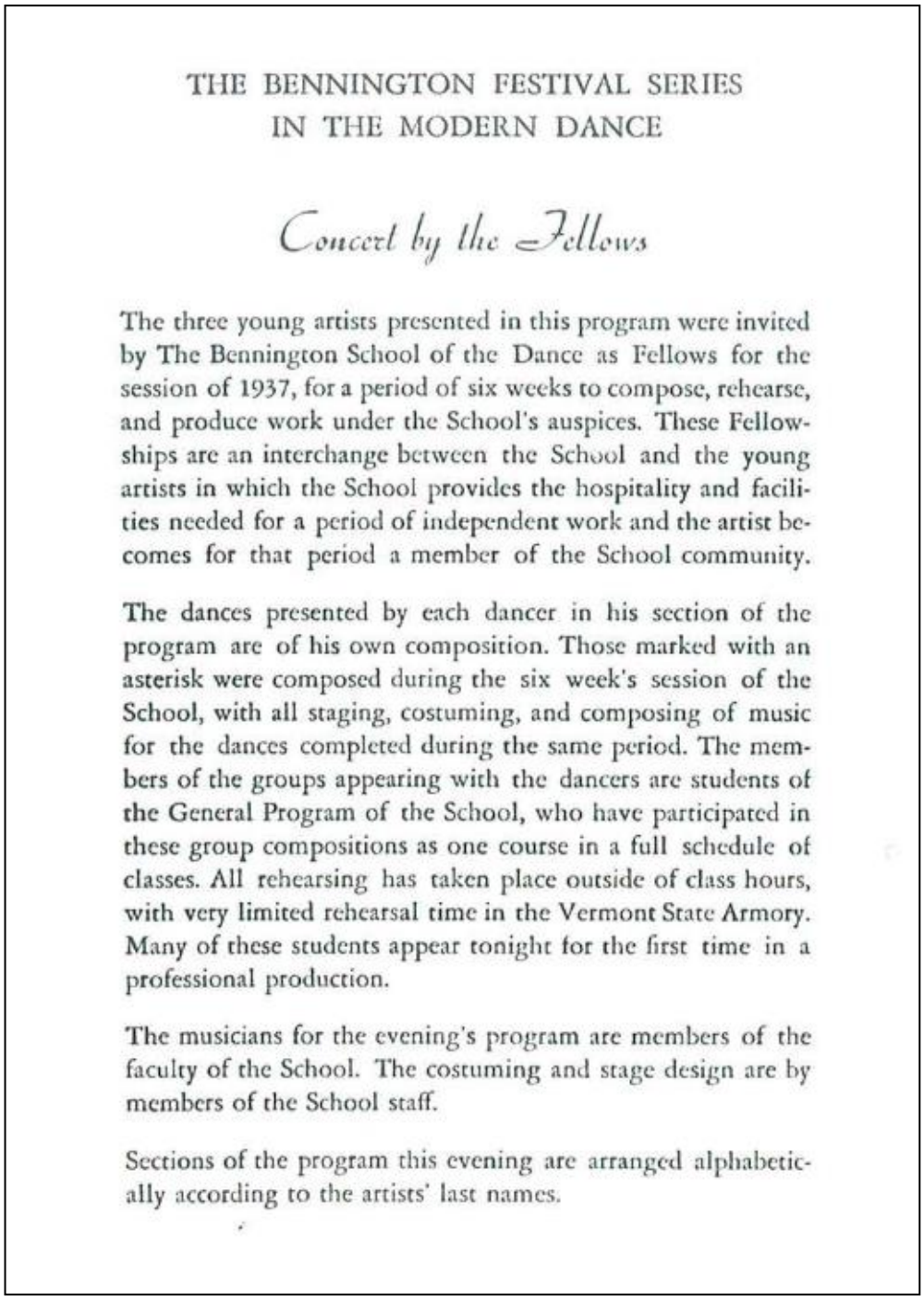
Presents

Esther Junger - José Limon - Anna Sokolow

Fellows of The Bennington School of the Dance for 1937

Thursday Evening, August 12, 1937
In the Vermont State Armory, Bennington, Vermont
Nine o'clock Daylight Saving Time

Figure B.1. The Bennington School of the Dance Presents Esther Junger, José Limon and Anna Sokolow [4-page dance program], August 12, 1937. Page 1. https://crossettlibrary.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/11209/8996/The%20Bennington%20Festival%20Series%20summer%201937%20Junger.limon.sokolow%208.12.1937.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y



THE BENNINGTON FESTIVAL SERIES
IN THE MODERN DANCE

Concert by the Fellows

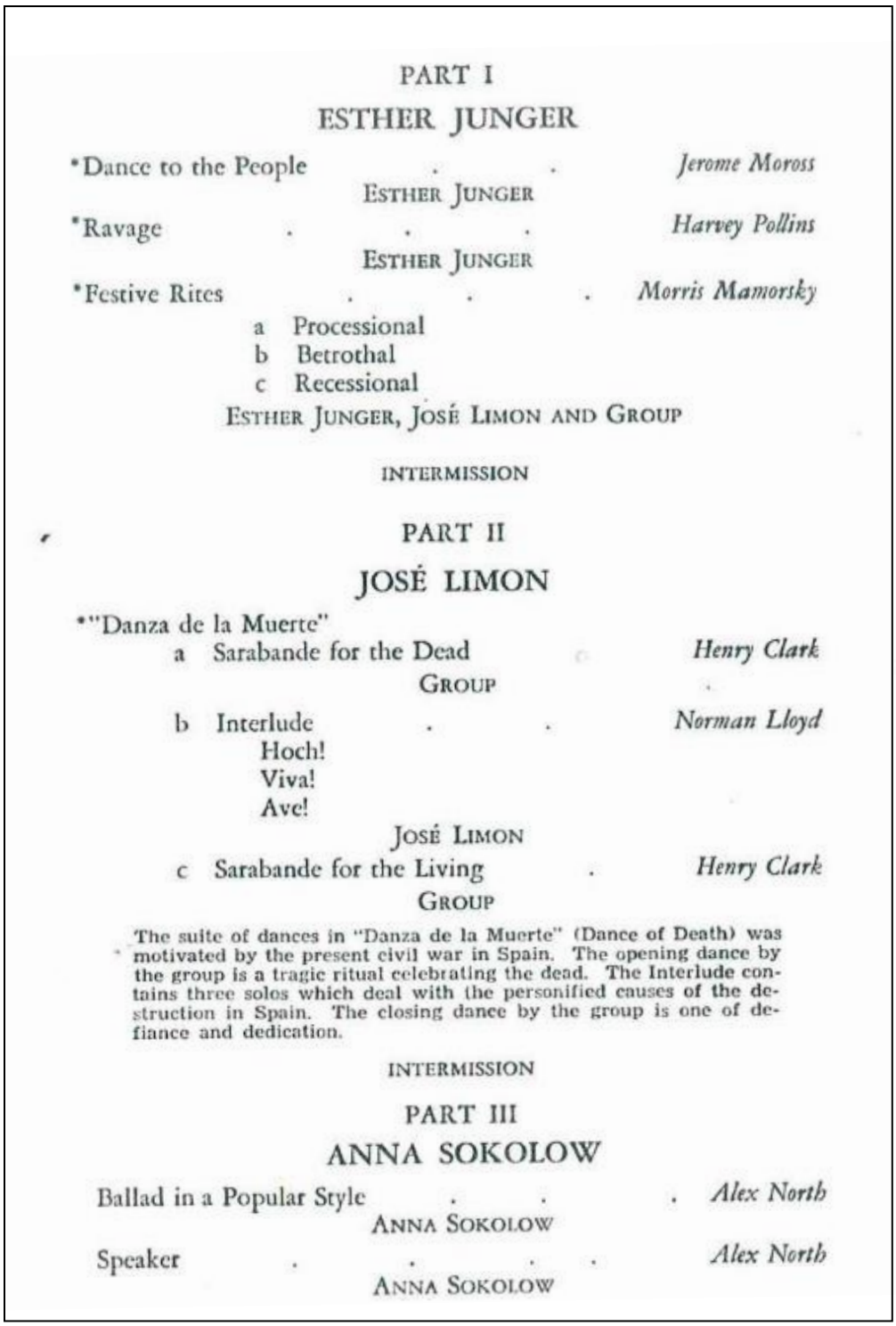
The three young artists presented in this program were invited by The Bennington School of the Dance as Fellows for the session of 1937, for a period of six weeks to compose, rehearse, and produce work under the School's auspices. These Fellowships are an interchange between the School and the young artists in which the School provides the hospitality and facilities needed for a period of independent work and the artist becomes for that period a member of the School community.

The dances presented by each dancer in his section of the program are of his own composition. Those marked with an asterisk were composed during the six week's session of the School, with all staging, costuming, and composing of music for the dances completed during the same period. The members of the groups appearing with the dancers are students of the General Program of the School, who have participated in these group compositions as one course in a full schedule of classes. All rehearsing has taken place outside of class hours, with very limited rehearsal time in the Vermont State Armory. Many of these students appear tonight for the first time in a professional production.

The musicians for the evening's program are members of the faculty of the School. The costuming and stage design are by members of the School staff.

Sections of the program this evening are arranged alphabetically according to the artists' last names.

Figure B.2. The Bennington School of the Dance Presents Esther Junger, José Limon and Anna Sokolow [4-page dance program], August 12, 1937. Page 2. https://crossettlibrary.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/11209/8996/The%20Bennington%20Festival%20Series%20summer%201937%20Junger.limon.sokolow%208.12.1937.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y



PART I

ESTHER JUNGER

*Dance to the People . . . *Jerome Moross*

ESTHER JUNGER

*Ravage . . . . *Harvey Pollins*

ESTHER JUNGER

*Festive Rites . . . . *Morris Mamorsky*

a Processional
b Betrothal
c Recessional

ESTHER JUNGER, JOSÉ LIMON AND GROUP

INTERMISSION

PART II

JOSÉ LIMON

*"Danza de la Muerte"

a Sarabande for the Dead *Henry Clark*

GROUP

b Interlude . . *Norman Lloyd*

Hoch!
Viva!
Ave!

JOSÉ LIMON

c Sarabande for the Living . *Henry Clark*

GROUP

The suite of dances in "Danza de la Muerte" (Dance of Death) was motivated by the present civil war in Spain. The opening dance by the group is a tragic ritual celebrating the dead. The Interlude contains three solos which deal with the personified causes of the destruction in Spain. The closing dance by the group is one of defiance and dedication.

INTERMISSION

PART III

ANNA SOKOLOW

Ballad in a Popular Style . . . . *Alex North*

ANNA SOKOLOW

Speaker . . . . *Alex North*

ANNA SOKOLOW

Figure B.3. The Bennington School of the Dance Presents Esther Junger, José Limon and Anna Sokolow [4-page dance program], August 12, 1937. Page 3. https://crossettlibrary. dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/11209/8996/The%20Bennington%20Festival%20Series%20summer%201937%20Junger.limon.sokolow%208.12.1937.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

*Façade - Esposizione Italiana . . *Alex North*

a Belle Arti
b Giovanezza
c Prix Femina
d Phantasmagoria

Citizen: ANNA SOKOLOW

GROUP

For the public gaze are shown only the finest examples of art, youth and womanhood.

*Opus for Three and Props . . *Shostakovitch*

a With Pole

Choreography by José Limon

b With Hats

Choreography by Esther Junger

ESTHER JUNGER, JOSÉ LIMON AND ANNA SOKOLOW

*Composed during the 1937 session of The Bennington School of the Dance.

DANCERS OF THE GROUPS

Esther Junger's Group: Jean Aubry, Dorothy Barnitz, Sara Jean Cosner, Victoria Kahn, Frances Kronstadt, Eileen Logan, Margaret Ramsay, Rima Rodion, Germaine Steffes, Eva Trofimov.

José Limon's Group: Pauline Chellis, Gertrude Green, Molly Hecht, Emily White, Mary Elizabeth Whitney, Mildred Wile, James Lyons, Alwin Nikolais, Peter Terry, James Welch.

Anna Sokolow's Group: Betty Bloomer, Nina Caiserman, Jean Erdman, Natalie Harris, Hortense Lieberthal, Naomi Lubell, Elizabeth Moore, Pearl Satlien, Margaret Strater, Elizabeth van Barneveld.

Musical Director, Norman Lloyd.

Costumes for dances composed at Bennington, designed by Betty Joiner.

Setting and lighting designed and executed by Gerard Gentile, assisted by Edward Glass.

Accompanists:
For Esther Junger, Morris Mamorsky and Harvey Pollins.
For José Limon, Esther Williamson, Norman Lloyd; Robert McBride, Oboe.
For Anna Sokolow, Ruth Lloyd and Alex North.

Figure B.4. The Bennington School of the Dance Presents Esther Junger, José Limon and Anna Sokolow [4-page dance program], August 12, 1937. Page 4. https://crossettlibrary. dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/11209/8996/The%20Bennington%20Festival%20Series%20summer%201937%20Junger.limon.sokolow%208.12.1937.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y