



Joan Peters in Alvin Ailey's Blues Suite / with Kelvin Rotardier in the background / teaching some time later.

## *Newsletter DECEMBER 2022*

### *Joan Peters*

I was talking with Delores Browne not too long ago and she asked if I'd heard that Joan had passed – just a few days earlier, 16 November it turned out to be. No, but I remembered Joan with great respect and admiration! Even though we were not close and I had only taken her class a couple of times, she had been an institution at The Ailey School. She taught the Dunham class in Studio 1 at 1515 Broadway in NYC, and had a long career. Having danced with Syvilla Fort, Talley Beatty and Alvin Ailey, she was now one of the staples of training at Ailey's. Joan seemed to be a very nice unassuming person (which I understand she was) until class began. Then it was down to business. She was very clear and thorough, and the stamina that was required! She would say (and it echoes in my mind) “and hold, and hold, and hold, and hold ...” (for an interminable time it seemed, all the time beating the tempo with her stick. After a few years the stick broke through the surface of the marley flooring!!

After talking with Miss Browne, I googled ‘Joan Peters dancer Ailey’, then “Joan Peters dancer, and found out a lot about her. She took her first lessons at 5 years old, and at 11 years old was teaching, she absorbed it all so well! Her inspiration was Katherine Dunham, but much of her studies at Katherine Dunham School of Theater Dance was with Syvilla Fort. As a child teaching the Dunham technique to other children and adults, she wasn't happy at first. Some children teased her saying it funny watching the teacher's mommy bring her in to teach class, and adults would go into shock when they saw this little girl up there. But Syvilla Fort came in from time to time say, ‘Give her a chance.’ ”

In addition to dancing with so many important people in our history, I learned that she has modeled extensively. And has taught at the Harkness House of Ballet Arts (long ago I was a summer scholarship student there!), and Alvin Ailey's former program for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The one thing she claimed that she could not live without was “My teaching staff” (referred to as The Stick or a cane by different folks). She is famous for having her handcrafted staff to keep the beat. She started using the staff when she was just a kid teaching some of her first classes at The Dunham School. There were a number of drummers, and being so new at teaching, Joan didn't want to have to keep stopping class. The only way to keep all those drummers together was to have a set beat and they would play from that.

Be sure to google the name – **Joan Peters dancer** to find out more about her!



A few pix of André R. George (1963-1996), BDC actual founder.

## December

This is the month of the holiday season, but first we reflect on **World AIDS Day** Because of cruelty, ignorance and carelessness, HIV/AIDS is still a plague on humanity .. On a lighter note, we celebrate **Founder's Day** André was born on 6 December .. **Hanukkah** a Jewish Festival of light .. **Solstice** the longest night of our calendar year .. **Christmas** the appointed birthday of Christ .. **Kwanzaa** an African American celebration of seven principles .. I am sure there are many others. Reflect, celebrate, enjoy!

## EOY

It is now the end of the year, and we will be infected with **End-Of-Year** giving frenzy! Please remember to include Beckles Dancing Company on your list. The "pressure" is now on!!

## BDC Donald McKayle project

Beckles Dancing Company is still **auditioning** dancers on **Fri, 9 Dec at SDCC at 6:00 pm sharp** and raising funds for our spring series, which will include a work by **Donald McKayle**. It will be danced with poetry by another great African, **Langston Hughes!** The production is slated for **14+15 April 2023**.

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*Thank you!*



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