

BASIL LANGTON

Easter 2001

Deirdre

Deidre - here are notes I took during our conversation about Beatrice. Please correct my mistakes.

I also enclose a few questions about yourself.

If you feel like answering them it might add to your story, and save us going through the complicated process of recording another phone conversation.

I enclose a SASE for you to reply sometime.

How wonderful that with her death, our memories of Beatrice bubble to the surface as if she was alive.

Which of course she is.

love

b

* Basil
Laneton

QUESTIONS

Deirdre du Prey (de la Kuff)
DEIDRE DU PREY

* Where were you born and when? I was born in Vancouver
B.C.

* Who was your father and your mother? My father, Ernest Alfred
Hurst, was a Yorkshire man
in the construction
business. He had been
very successful in South
Africa but nearly
succeeded to try to do it over.
My mother was English & Scottish.
She was born in a very musical family -
of English & Scottish descent. Well-known
in church music composition.

Is your sister Phyliss older or younger?

* After you joined the School of Dance Mime, why did you and
Beatrice go to America in 1935? Was it by chance that you
saw a performance of "The Inspector General" with
Chekhov?

* Why did you and Beatrice drive across America in a station
wagon while Chekhov was learning English?

* When Beatrice gave her Academy Award speech she only
acknowledged Ellen Van Volkenberg as her teacher. She
didn't mention Chekhov. Why was Ellen Van Volkenberg
so important to Beatrice Straight?

NOTES RE DEIDRE DU PREY

by Basil Langton

NOTES TAKEN talking to Deidre Hurst-du Prey about her relationship with Beatrice.

* Deidre was a student at The Cornish School, founded by Nellie Cornish, in the early 30's - on the faculty was Mark Tobey, Louise Soelberg, and the German dancer ^{Laura} Deja, who Martha Graham, as a visiting teacher, had recommend to take over the modern dance department. Deja was a task-master and antagonized Deidre who quit the school.

* Morris Browne and his then wife Ellen VanVolkenberg, joined the school, and a relationship began with Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst who had established their estate at Dartington Hall in England.

* Beatrice at age eighteen went as a summer student ~~at~~ to Cornish. She was very shy. Didn't want to be a socialite, but an actress.

* B then went alone to England, where her mother wanted her to establish The School of Dance Mime at Dartington.

* Deidre having quit the Cornish School, was at loose ends. She thought of going to England, where she had relatives.

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* Nellie Cornish suggested she write to Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst to be student at the School of Dance Mime. She was accepted and became a resident at Dartington Hall.

*She then became, as she has said, part of "the magic circle of Beatrice Straight". She did office work for her and when asked by Beatrice who she should invite as a student, Deidre said, "You have too many women. You need a man. I know a man in Canada you should invite." Thus I received the cable from Beatrice Straight that changed my life.

* In 1935, Beatrice and Deidre went to New York. The School of Dance Mime was still active. *although the ~~the school~~ was active at Dartington*

* In New York they saw a performance of "The Inspector General" by a Russian company produced by Sol Hurok, and were overwhelmed by the performance of the leading actor Michael Chekhov.

* Though The School of Dance Mime was still active at Dartington, Beatrice decided that Chekhov should take over the school.

* Beatrice called her parents, and Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst came to New York to interview Michael Chekhov.

They liked him and agreed that he should take over the

School of Dance Mime at Dartington, and establish the
Michael Chekhov School of acting.

* But Chekhov didn't speak English. While B and D went ^{to the schools} across America in a station wagon ^{He went to a Russian} community in Connecticut and learned English very quickly.

* When B and D returned to New York ^{after visiting numerous states} in 1936 Chekhov and ^{his wife} his wife went with them to Dartington, and he instantly fell in love with ^{this} beautiful environment and The School of Dance Mime became the Michael Chekhov School of Acting.

* Beatrice now had an invitation from Uday Shankar to visit him in India. They had met when his dance company performed in England, and he had fallen in love with Beatrice, and she with him.

* B and D went to India for several months, ^{although} but Leonard Elmhirst strongly disapproved of her relationship with Shankar. ^{B + D traveled all time with the}

* B and D left India, traveled to Bali, and back to Dartington to study with Michael Chekhov.

* Shankar tried to establish a school of dance in the Himalayas, and D's sister Phyliss helped organize it. But the school was too remote, and soon closed.

* Deidre is now sending all her collection of material concerning Chekhov and his teaching to Dartington for their archives.

This had been Chekhov's wish.
