



Martha Hill (1900-1995)  
Educator, Administrator, Artistic Director  
and visionary as dance as a performing art.

MARTHA HILL DANCE FUND LIMITED  
WAS ESTABLISHED TO HONOR,  
PERPETUATE, ANDREW AND MARTHA HILL'S  
COMMITMENT TO DANCE, EDUCATION  
AND PERFORMANCE INTERNATIONALLY.

The MHDF Young Professional Award- which includes a \$1,000 honorarium -was presented by J.R.Glover, Director of Education at Jacob's Pillow, to Christian Griggs-Drane. We keep close watch on our young professional winners and Christian reports he is on track to graduate, Cum Laude, from Butler University with a BFA in dance. He will return this summer to the Ballet Program at Jacob's Pillow and has already signed a contract with Grand Rapids Ballet under the direction of Patricia Barker!

## Letter from the President

The January 2014 Dance on Camera at Lincoln Center World Premiere of our long awaited documentary was a resounding success! The MHDF Board extends many thanks to all who attended the festival premiere at Lincoln Center and/or the December 2013 Gala at the School of Visual Arts Theater in Chelsea. The critic's words speak for themselves:

*"Miss Hill: Making Dance Matter is a treasure trove of images and revealing stories, lovingly assembled. It made me miss her all over again."*

Deborah Jowitt--artsjournal.com

*"Where it excels is in the superb rhythm of its editing and the canny telling of its dynamic story; they are in perfect balance, along with the sheer momentum of the dance footage itself and the information on how Modern Dance came to be."* apollo'sgirl.wordpress.com

*"More than a biography, though, Miss Hill sheds light on the artistic movement that Hill both belonged to and helped to create, as she found her niche not onstage but in less-visible roles: dance educator, administrator, advocate."*

Siobhan Burke--The New York Times

*"For the most part, Miss Hill: Making Dance Matter is a ringing endorsement for the future of dance."*

Celia Ipotis--eyeonthearts.org

Our annual gala took shape as a private first full screening for our invited donors and guests. Attendees were greeted with an assortment of delightful hors d'oeuvres and wine prior to the screening and festive dessert and champagne following the event. As we marked this historic moment of the completion of the documentary, the board chose to recognize and honor our founding board members: Carolyn Adams, Irwin Denis, Hudas Liff, David K. Manion, Janet Soares, Ethel Winter, Carl Wolz and Hortense Libenthal Zera.

Being presented as the opening night film at Dance on Camera Festival (which is co-produced by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and Dance Film Association) is an amazing accolade that the project will always carry. The evening sold out several weeks before the one screening and that night there was an extended line to get last minute rush tickets at the door! Following the credits, the Film Society of Lincoln Center put together a panel for a brief discussion and Q & A which included Janet Soares, Daniel Lewis, Heather Watts, Dennis Nahat, Greg Vander Veer and myself. A lovely reception with lively conversation followed in the gallery.

We now embark on the film festival circuit and have been accepted and already screened at Sarasota Film Festival (Sarasota, FL) and BBC Art Screen (Glasgow, UK). Up-coming festivals include, but are not limited to: Berkshire International Film Festival (Great Barrington, MA), Dance Camera West (Los Angeles, CA) and Vancouver International Film Festival (Vancouver, Canada). We plan to create additional screenings in venues adjacent to the festivals whenever possible.

Continued on Page 4



J.R.Glover and Christian Griggs-Drane at Gala 2013

Photo: Peter SchAAF

MHDF Board Member Elizabeth McPherson Interviews the Creative Team for  
*Miss Hill, Making Dance Matter*

Interviewees:

Greg Vander Veer: Director

Peter Buntaine: Cinematographer

Elisa Da Prato: Film Editor and Production Manager

**Elizabeth McPherson: What drew you to the project originally?**

**Greg Vander Veer:** I was really intrigued by the paradox of Martha Hill's importance and obscurity. She had so much influence on an entire art form, yet very little was known about her by the outside world or even most people within dance. The possibility of exploring her life story through film and bringing that story to a larger audience was very exciting to me.

**Elisa Da Prato:** Greg and I were finishing up our short film *Keep Dancing*, and he asked me if I would like to work on this new film. I was super excited about the idea of going further with movement and story-telling, and of course Martha Hill's story is very inspirational.

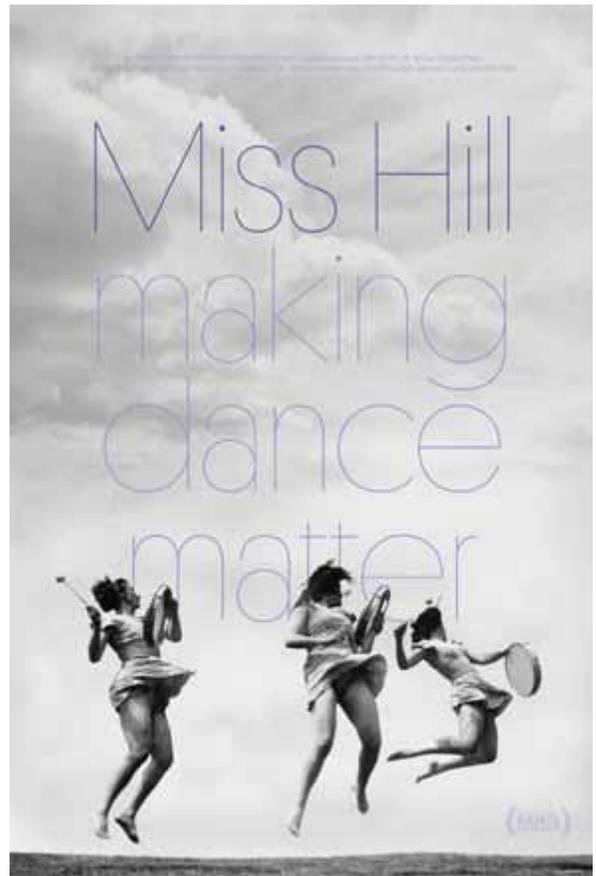
**Peter Buntaine:** I was invited by Greg to join the project early on, during pre-production. I was excited about getting to meet many dancers and choreographers and then interpreting these artists' work into a filmic medium.

**EM: What was your working process like?**

**GV:** With Peter, I definitely gave direction on what shots I wanted, but he brought his own aesthetic style and eye to every shoot. Most shoots we had two cameras and I was operating one of them, so I could get the shots I wanted while allowing Peter the freedom to find other great moments. We ended up with a nice balance of what I was picturing in my mind, and the potential that he saw with each image.

Elisa edited my first film, *Keep Dancing*, so we had established a style in that movie that we were interested in continuing and expanding upon in *Miss Hill*. I would outline the story and scene verbally for her and then she would edit the scene as I looked on-- sometimes thrilled, sometimes exasperated. Then we would have intense discussions and keep making the necessary changes until the scene worked. Elisa brings a multitude of ideas and creativity to the editing room. It ends up being an intensely collaborative process where the final result is a nice balance between our two different aesthetic styles and visions.

**PB:** The role of cinematographer is different on every film and is defined by the relationship to the director. In this case, Greg would often shoot with an additional camera, so I was allowed a great deal of independence and freedom in exploring location and dances photographically. For the interviews we collaborated closely and thought of them as exercises in portraiture.



Poster design: Carl Williamson; photo: Thomas Bouchard

**ED:** I came to *Miss Hill* as editor and production manager. I managed aspects of the production, but really my main role was editor. Greg and I had already established a voice with *Keep Dancing* of a highly moving, collage type film, which combines various footage to create larger threads of movement and build narrative arcs, as well as bringing out qualities of our characters. It's not just about showing the dance, which is most certainly beautiful, but using the dance itself as an element in the edit to create a highly moving experience.

The process was highly satisfying as I got to sift through virtually every generation of recorded media and combine them at will. The process is highly musical, and gestural. When cutting the dance, I would sit and carefully go through the movements, pulling slices of movements that felt compelling, and then assembling them. For the most part, Greg and I agreed on which dances were the strongest for what we were trying to portray. With the interviews, it was a little different, as you cannot be as abstract, and must put coherent sentences together that give information, without becoming too informational and still retaining a pleasing rhythm.

We saw the film as a new living document of all this wonderful documentation of modern dance over the years. Hopefully, the impact of Martha Hill's legacy comes across by literally seeing a century of media dance before your eyes.

**EM: Do you have any favorite moments to share about the filming or editing?**

**ED:** Getting my hands on all that archival footage was tremendously exciting. I loved scouring for textures in the material itself (static, film grain, and so on), studying the manner and style from all these different generations of people, and of course all the dance.

**GV:** We went to some interesting places including Bennington College, American Dance Festival in North Carolina and Martha Hill's childhood home-- East Palestine, Ohio. East Palestine is still a very small, sleepy town, and we drew a lot of attention just walking around with a camera. No one knew who Martha Hill was, but they were very excited that she was from East Palestine, and that we were making a film about her! We met this wonderful elderly couple who run the historical society. They spent a whole day figuring out where Martha Hill lived and even found some photographs of her in old newspapers.

**PB:** Some of my favorite memories of making the film are getting sunburned on a roof at Bennington College and driving through rural Ohio!

**EM: What were some of the challenges you faced in making the film?**

**GV:** The biggest challenge we faced was telling the story of someone who was behind the scenes and for the most part out of the limelight. There was little existing film material to work with and never any footage where she just poured her heart out. Because of that, we focused our energies on telling the bigger story about how her life fit into the evolution of dance in the United States.

**ED:** The choices of what personal information to present was quite difficult as well as finding the best way to structure the film so as to do justice to the breadth of Hill's work.

**PB:** A big challenge for me was trying to view locations that meant something to Martha Hill through her eyes, as she would have seen them sometimes 100 years earlier.

**EM: What are you most proud of in the film?**

**PB:** I am most proud of how well my footage integrates with the archival footage, at times serving to punctuate it and bring the film into the present tense, which is the best thing that can happen in a film that is comprised mainly of historical media. Some of my favorite instances of this are sequences shot on 16mm that most people may assume is archival footage. I am also proud of both the quality and quantity of the interviews.

**GV:** I am most proud of our use of archival footage. We worked very hard at finding material, and then Elisa did a great job rhythmically editing everything so that it does not feel like a typical presentation. My idea was always that the film would feel like a dance through Miss Hill's life and career, and I think at times in the film, we really achieve that.

**ED:** I am deeply proud of the film, particularly of how the distinctive styles of Peter, Greg, and myself are woven together to present a very lovely and unique document. Florent Ghy's music as well of course.

**PB:** I never expected to have this much knowledge about Miss Hill or the history of modern dance!

**ED:** This process of deconstructing dance has had an immense impact on me. Aside from a new appreciation of modern dance (particularly José Limón), working with this material for the last 3+ years, has brought a newfound appreciation of movement itself. While my editing, and filmmaking work has always been highly musical, working with dance has brought another dimension of rhythm to all my work. Also, and this may sound strange, but I wear leotards now all the time! And I even took a ballet class at Mark Morris back in the fall. It has been an absolute pleasure and life changing project and experience.

**GV:** I was most surprised to learn that although Miss Hill passed away some 20 years before, there is still a huge community of people who feel committed to her and thus committed to helping us make the film. Everything we did was supported by those people whom Martha Hill had supported, and it made our job infinitely easier and more gratifying. Thanks to all of you!!!



Photo: Tony Powell

Vernon Scott, Elisa Da Prato, Greg Vander Veer and Peter Buntaine at the Dance on Camera Festival premiere, Lincoln Center, January 2014

**PLEASE NOTE THAT NO GALA WAS HELD AND NO AWARDS WERE GIVEN IN 2010 DUE TO FUND-RAISING EFFORTS FOR THE DOCUMENTARY**  
**Lifetime Achievement Award** 2012 Gemze De Lappe and Yuriko Kikuchi, 2011 Daniel Lewis, 2009 Beverly Blossom, 2008 Ethel Winter, 2007 Pearl Lang, 2006 Mary Anthony, 2005 Ruth Grauert, 2004 Donald McKayle and Doris Rudko, 2003 Francis Mason, 2002 Doris Hering and May O'Donnell, 2001 Alfredo Corvino **Mid-Career Award** 2012 Dian Dong & H.T. Chen, 2009 Virginia Johnson, 2008 Janet Panetta, 2007 David Dorfman, 2006 Doug Elkins **Young Professional Award** 2013 Christian Griggs-Drane, 2012 Lissa Nicole Smith, 2011 Patricia Carby, 2009 Jacqueline Green, 2008 Lilli-Anne Tai, 2007 Levi Marsman, 2006 Katie Dorn, 2005 Christopher Vo, 2004 Mollie Mae McGregor **Student Choice Award** 2012 Kazuko Hirabayashi **Special Citation** 2009 Hortense Zera **Carl Wolz Award** 2003 Mira Kim

## IN MEMORIAM



Horty, circa 1942

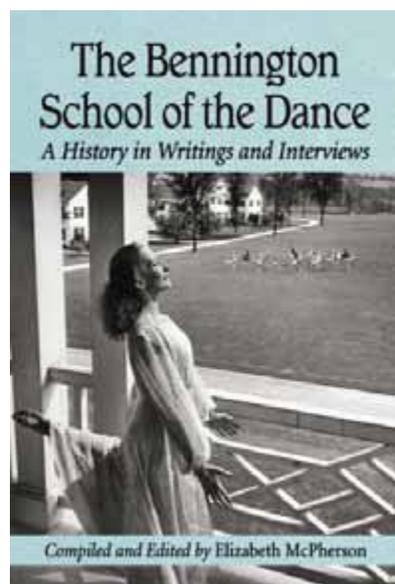
Hortense Lieberthal Zera passed away on March 2, 2014 at the age of 97. She was the impetus for the creation of the Martha Hill Dance Fund and served on the board from its beginnings until this year. A native of Brooklyn, Mrs. Zera graduated from New York University in 1936 with a degree in Health and Physical Education, having focused her studies in Dance under the direction of Martha Hill. She assisted Hill and Bessie Schönberg at the Bennington School of the Dance from 1937 to 1941, and conducted her own classes in 1942. Zera was a faculty member at The New Dance Group, and taught dance, sports, and health education in the New York City public high schools until retirement. She often expressed her joy and pride at being part of the early modern dance movement. In an interview with Elizabeth McPherson in 2008 she recalled:

*"I have often thought about how lucky I was. I was a Brooklyn girl and all the sudden I was up in Vermont having breakfast with Martha Hill, José Limón, Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey, Louis Horst, Sophie Maslow, Jane Dudley, Norman and Ruthie Lloyd – all these wonderful people. It was social. It was friendly. It was relaxing. Nobody thought "Oh my God" because of the immensity of the situation. Well, I may have thought so, but not really because I had a good feeling with them always. They weren't full of bologna. It was easy. No great egos. Just all these wonderful people. A joy to know. And they were at the top of their business too. I loved it. Those were wonderful years, wonderful, wonderful. I was so privileged."*

In her later years, Ms. Zera enjoyed painting at the Fabrizio Studio, and was also a talented sculptor. (She is the creator of the beautiful Martha Hill statuette that is the symbol of our MHDF Lifetime Achievement Award.) Predeceased by her beloved husband Max, she leaves behind her daughters Helene and Barbara Abramson (Bernard), and her adored grandchildren Louis and Galia Abramson.

Elizabeth McPherson

## OUT NOW



Available from online booksellers such as Amazon.com. Price: \$21.66 kindle version and \$42.75 print version.

Continued from Page 1, Letter from the President

Our own board member Beth McPherson's proposal was accepted by the National Dance Education Organization and there will be a panel on "Collaboration" with excerpts shown during the next conference in Chicago. Also, if you are planning a trip to Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival this summer, don't miss the screening of *Miss Hill* on August 3rd at 4:30pm in Blake's Barn.

Finally, once we have exhausted the film festival circuit and secured a commercial run in New York City – we will have also signed a sales agent, a distributor and DVD sales can begin in full tilt. A few advanced copies are sold at festivals, but the beautifully designed boxed set is in the works for general public sales in a few months. Please watch our website for details!

We have worked diligently for years to complete the project and remain grateful to all for supporting and believing we could and would complete *Miss Hill*.

Making dance matter,  
Vernon Scott  
President of the MHDF Board

### MHDF BOARD

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