

# DOROTHY OLIVER "DOT" MILLS

(August 11, 1926 - January 28, 2005)

July 1999 - Lafayette, Louisiana



I first became aware of Marc Breaux because Dorothy Mills stopped by my office one day, sat down and began to tell me a story of a handsome and talented young man she knew that had gone on to have a successful career in the theatre and entertainment industry. A few days later I mentioned the discussion to Dr. Paulette Hebert, an Assistant Dean in the College of the Arts and was surprised to find out she was related to Marc Breaux. It is indeed a small world.

Dorothy (Olivier) Mills, a native of Lafayette, Louisiana and a 1946 graduate of Southwestern Louisiana Institute (SLI) was the first dance major at the university under the tutelage of Miss Evelyn Elizabeth Lockman. Dorothy established the Children's Dance Guild in 1960 in Lafayette and in December of 1998, she established the Evelyn Elizabeth Lockman Endowed Scholarship in Dance.

Energy abounds in Dorothy, and her passion for dance is evident in her voice and gestures. Perhaps it was such energy, passion and encouragement from Dorothy that provided Marc Breaux with the inner confidence to pursue his dreams. The interview took place in July of 1999 at her home. A large comfortable home surrounded by massive oak and cypress trees on the bank of the bayou. It was a rainy afternoon with an excellent dessert in waiting.

---

ST: Describe Evelyn Lockman (former Dance professor at SLI), her style, and why she made such an impression upon you.

DM: Well, I had danced since I was about five years old and when I got to SLI, I saw that they had a dance department. They were doing things I had never seen before. I wanted to participate in it. I was very interested in different things. The way she taught and presented movement just grabbed me. It was new and different. Here we were dancing barefoot and it was just wonderful! It showed me that somehow or other this was a way I could express myself. Miss Lockman was developing a major (she had been under the P.E. Department). She wanted so bad to get out of P.E. and put dance into Liberal Arts. She had just received the OK and she asked me if I wanted to major in dance? How wonderful, to be the first one! Of course, I asked the folks and they said, "Well, you can take all the dance classes you want and get all the credits you want but you still have to get something to be able to live and pay your way." Miss Lockman took us to communities like Eunice and Rayne to perform. She knew to go slowly, presenting the new with the familiar, when introducing modern dance to the community. She was very wise. Good P.R., and she carried herself beautifully and dressed nicely. She had my heart and soul and gave me

the passion to continue with contemporary dance. She would bring in guest artists (Ted Shawn came here and others). She was very open to new experiences for us. Dance was included in the Camellia Pageants every year at SLI and all students involved in dance had to perform. She left at the end of the 1947 school year and I graduated in 1946. I was really inspired by the freedom and creativity in movement that Evelyn introduced to me.

ST: It's my understanding that Evelyn danced in some of the university concerts?

DM: Yes. And she was a beautiful example. Watching her, the young dancer saw what they might be able to accomplish if they worked hard. I'll never forget her. I owe her and think Marc would feel the same way. Her type of dance (modern) was the first that Lafayette had seen. She also incorporated almost every other form of dance into her training and concerts. She believed you should experience every form of dance and then choose the one you like. She wasn't excluding anything.

ST: In December of 1998 you made a sizable contribution to USL to establish the Evelyn Elizabeth Lockman Endowed Scholarship in Dance. Why did you do this and what are your hopes for the students that receive the scholarship?

DM: I established the scholarship out of gratitude for what she had given me. I hope future students of dance will be able to experience creative movement as I did. I also hope they will be able to take advantage of these scholarships. I was going down memory lane before you arrived and came across letters from students who had received scholarships through the Children's Dance Guild. Many of these dance students at SLI and USL had the opportunity to teach with the Guild and gained teaching experience.

ST: You are the one responsible for starting the Children's Dance Guild. How did that vision evolve?

DM: Well, I had seven children. It was impossible for me to afford a regular dance school for my children. I wanted to see all children, including mine, experience the joy of movement in a class format whereby the focus is not necessarily on a recital but more on the experience of creating movement. How does a washing machine move? Can you make a letter out of your body? It's delightful to watch these children be so creative before they become inhibited. In addition, I believe that children learn by doing. Adults learn by doing. I utilized everything I had learned from Evelyn Lockman and Muriel Moreland, Professor of Dance, while observing her with children. I taught many language concepts using movement. When I was teaching the concept of "upside down" one of my supervisors caught me standing on my head. Another time the principal walked in and I was crawling under the table to demonstrate "under". We really had to get down to basics working with such young children in the schools. Movement opens the doors to many language skills.

ST: Describe when and how you first met Marc Breaux.

DM: I think it may have been in high school or perhaps grammar school because he didn't live that far from where I lived. Lafayette was a very small community and everybody knew everybody. I remember that all the girls wanted to dance with Marc. That was a time when people danced for entertainment. Those were the days when you asked your partner for the special dance. I was at SLI during the war years. Most of the local boys had left but we still had

dances in the men's gym. Also, at the Townhouse Country Club we'd get the gang together, so to speak, and dance and have a great time.

ST: Marc had mentioned that "the gang" would meet and dance at your mother's house.

DM: We'd get together on a Friday or Saturday night. Not too many mothers opened their homes. My mother was very particular about everything being just so and extra clean. Everyone knew the rules. If you wanted to come inside you had to leave your shoes on the porch. We had beautiful oak floors that shined. We'd be in our socks and everyone would dance all night. We danced waltzes, jitterbug, boogie-woogie, rumba, conga, anything new. We'd get the conga line going all through the house - the den, the kitchen, the living room and sometimes on the porch.

ST: When you and Marc weren't dancing, what would you do for fun?

DM: We weren't alone very much. We'd do things together as a group. We'd play ping-pong, badminton, ride bikes, we'd go walking, and swimming.

ST: One particular newspaper article from the 1970's describes you as Marc's girlfriend. Is there any truth to that?

DM: Well...maybe a little. But nothing hot and heavy, so to speak. When he came back from the service he looked so handsome in that white Ensign's uniform. I can remember smooching with him on the sofa in my mother's den, hoping she wouldn't come in. So, we liked each other pretty much.

ST: Did you notice any change in Marc after he returned from the war?

DM: He had matured and was worldlier. But he had that same love of movement and dance.

ST: In an article written by Earl Wilson, a Broadway columnist in 1954, it states: "Marc's a dancer . . . because of Dot Olivier of Lafayette." It's obvious that you made an impression on Marc.

DM: Well, I did encourage him. I do remember sitting in the car in front of Burke Hall saying, "Come here Marc. I've got to tell you something." (He had just returned from the war.) "You've got to go to the dance department. You've got to meet Miss Lockman. You'll love it." And somehow or other he went and took her classes and danced in a couple of SLI dance concerts and then went to New York in the summer of 1947.

ST: Why did you encourage him?

DM: I knew he could do it. I knew he had it. He had the special passion, love, and rhythm for dance. We never really discussed it. But there was something. I could sense and feel Marc's abilities. I had the similar feeling with Cissy Whipp (currently an adjunct instructor of Dance at the University of Louisiana - Lafayette) when she was eight years old. You could tell she had a gift.

ST: Three words or phrases that describe Marc Breaux.

DM: I remember his personality. He was open-minded, rhythmic, so talented, and he had inner confidence.

ST: Describe what you feel when you hear music that inspires you to dance?

DM: I can't sit still. Music can make me feel all sort of emotions and stirrings. Even today, a song will be on the radio and every-once-in-a-while I'll start dancing in the house and move until I can't breathe. It's something I was probably born with. I was blessed to have a teacher like Evelyn who was open to all forms of dance and movement!

\*\*\*