



September 2019 Her Story ENewsletter

Dancers

The arts, including dance, are an important part of our culture. Women have innovated in dance theory, founded whole new schools of dance and thrilled us with their beauty and grace. Who can forget Ginger Rogers who did everything Fred Astaire did, except backwards and in high heels? Or the beautiful ballet of Maria Tallchief? In this month's ENewsletter we profile two women who brought the art of dance to new levels: Ruth St. Denis and Judith Jamison.



Ruth St. Denis

Ruth St. Denis began acting and dancing in vaudeville and musical comedies when she was in her teens. In 1906, she premiered her first dance work in New York City; she incorporated Asian art and dance into her performance. In 1915, after a European tour, Denis co-founded (with her then husband and dance partner) the first major professional dance school, Denishawn. Denis developed many major dance innovations that continue to influence almost every aspect of American dance today.

Her choreographic innovations included music visualization; this is a technique where dancers have movements that correspond to the volume and movement of the music, in addition to its rhythm. She also developed what she called synchoric orchestration, where dancers have one-on-one assignments to interpret musical instruments of the orchestra. The "first lady of American dance" Denis taught Martha Graham and other pioneers in the dance profession. She brought to American dance the incorporation of meaning and the inclusion of ideas using themes. Her use of Asian art and dance forms led to modern dance, which used movements other than those from classic ballet. Many current dance companies use her solos in their dance programs.



Judith Jamison

Trained in classical ballet as well as in modern dance, **Judith Jamison**, in 1964, was invited by Agnes DeMille to dance in a ballet that DeMille was choreographing for the American Ballet Theatre. After that, Jamison was hired by the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater and quickly rose to become recognized as an international star. Over the next 15 years, she danced as a guest artist with ballet companies all over the world. She then established her own company.

In 1989, Jamison became the first black woman to head a major dance company when she assumed the role of Artistic Director for the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. She served in this role for 21 years during which she led the troupe to new heights, including two engagements in South Africa and a 50-city tour to celebrate the company's 50th anniversary. Jamison has received many honors and awards recognizing her accomplishments including an Emmy, the Kennedy Center Honors, and a National Medal of Arts. In 2015, she became the 50th inductee into the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance.

Ruth St. Denis and Judith Jamison are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us all. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

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