

Josephine and Hermene Schwarz

(Hermene 1902-1986
Josephine 1908- 2004)

By June Koch Price

Within the current "elderly" family circle most are familiar with the creative endeavors of Hermene and Josephine Schwarz. With the applause and support of their parents, Hannah and Joe Schwarz, these sisters devoted their lives to developing dance and the artistic expression of dance, not only in their community of Dayton Ohio, but across the nation.



Joe and Hannah Schwarz with Jo. Milton and Hermene at the Window. Gus Schwarz not yet born.

Hannah, to the Art Institute which was only a few blocks from their home. It was from Hannah that the girls had their first lessons in appreciating the quality of many arts and artistic endeavors.

The recent video (1998) by Global Village Communications documents their careers. This hour-long film uses ballet film clips and family photos, commentaries by former students, and an insightful interview with Josephine to tell the history of these two talented women.

In this video Jo begins by telling her earliest memory of dance when as a child of four she would dance on the lawn at the

Soldier's Home in Dayton. She also mentions the children's frequent visits with their mother,

Josephine was eight when she began ballet lessons to help her recover from an illness, and was so absorbed in this expressive craft that she gathered ten neighborhood children together. While Hermene accompanied her on the piano, she passed her knowledge on to her young students. By charging them ten cents a lesson, Jo earned enough to continue taking classes of her own.



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At sixteen Jo went to Chicago for lessons in Modern Dance and was considered a talented performer. Soon after Jo graduated from high school, she and Hermene opened the Schwarz School of the Dance. They continued studying, when money and time were available, with the great dancers of the world. Jo traveled to Austria to study modern dance. She also studied and performed with the School of American Ballet in New York led by George Balanchine. Jo was well on her way to achieving her heart's desire, when tragedy struck.

In 1937 Jo spent the summer working at a girls camp. She was to give a performance for the children and their parents but the indoor stage was too small. Jo suggested they roll the piano

out to the tennis court for her demonstration. While doing a “leap into the sky” Jo fell and twisted her knee so badly that she could no longer perform the strenuous work of a performer and began a temporary role as an “armchair choreographer” while Hermene led the classes. It was a devastating low point in her life.

Hermene taught not only the children at the Schwarz School, but worked with African American students at the Linden Center. Hermene's good taste in costuming, design, and color and Jo's dance training, choreographic skills, and renewed determination led the sisters to form the Dayton Ballet Company from these resources. It was the second regional ballet company to be formed in the country. A few years later they formed the Dayton Theater Dance Group, which became the Dayton Civic Ballet in 1953.

Jo's creative choreography later led to the establishment of Choreography Conferences across the country. It received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, and Jo for a time participated as a member of their panel. She retired from active participation in these organizations at 72 to care for Hermene until her death at 84 in 1986.

Jo was “showered with ovations” for her contribution to American dance at a celebration to honor the Dayton Ballet on its 50th Anniversary, and Josephine's 80th birthday. Jo has been honored with the Ohioana Library Association Pegasus Award and in 1991 was given the distinction of being named as one of Ohio's Women of the Year.

Josephine continued to work after her retirement, however, preparing her papers for their resting place in the archives of Wright State University.

“... Growing never ceases,” Josephine wrote in the final lines of her script *I Watched Myself Grow Up* ‘Awareness, Indecision, Rebellion, Loneliness and Identification mark each phase of life...’

Josephine, now 94, is resting at an Assisted Living Home in Boulder Colorado, weary perhaps, but still Aware - and smiling.

The video: “*How Can We Know The Dancer From the Dance*”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnQg-DXg4J0&t=582s>

[Ed. Note: My Cousin Jo passed away in 2004. In the final years of her life she was the source of much of the family history that I have been able to share on this website. June Koch's account above is brief because she, as I, knew that the story of Josephine and Hermene was well documented by other sources. One source is the video referred to above with a YouTube link that was current at this writing. Other sources are included in 'Lindeman Links to Other Websites'.

William Rosenthal-February 2025]