

Gay Delanghe, Dance

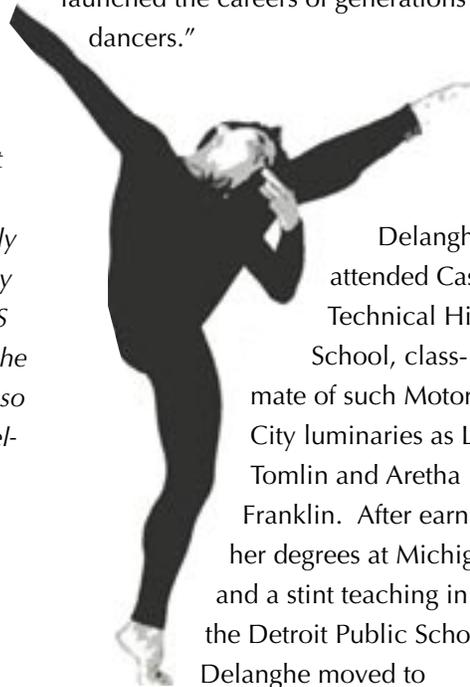
Gay Delanghe, who joined the dance faculty at the School of Music in 1974, retired from teaching this spring. As teacher to generations of dancers, her students, current and former, are grappling with the news. Katie Trevino, BDA '89, recently wrote M@M that she is "tremendously saddened to hear that the FABULOUS Gay Delanghe is planning to retire. She was a major inspiration to me and to so many others and an absolutely marvelous teacher—one of a kind. I hate to think of the school without her there, but I wish her all the very best for a wonderful retirement."

To some, it would seem, Gay Delanghe and the Department of Dance are one in the same.

Affectionately known by friends and fellow dancers as 'Legs Delanghe'—any photo will show you why—Gay has the longest tenure as a dance faculty member of anyone, surpassing even the longevity of such dance department icons as Esther Pease and Liz Bergmann. Gay chaired the department from 1995 to 2001.

To honor Delanghe, the department dedicated its 2005-06 season to her: "Her beautiful works are filled with invention, wit, and vitality, and are at turns ironic, sardonic, and thought provoking. A master of her craft, Gay always brings a keen sense of design and musicality to her works. ... In addition to her choreography and her spectacular dancing, Gay has made enormous contributions over the years to the development of a thriving Department of Dance at Michigan and has

launched the careers of generations of dancers."



Delanghe attended Cass Technical High School, classmate of such Motor City luminaries as Lily Tomlin and Aretha Franklin. After earning her degrees at Michigan and a stint teaching in the Detroit Public Schools, Delanghe moved to New York City where

she worked as principal dancer with seminal choreographers Yvonne Rainer and Lucas Hoving. During her decade in New York, she presented her own work on Dance Uptown and with other dance companies around the city while teaching full time at Barnard College and summers for the American Dance Festival in New London, CT. She also taught at the University of Quebec and the Centre Formation Professional de Danse in Poitiers, France.

"Gay has been central to the development of dance on this campus," says Jessica Fogel. "She hired many of the current senior faculty, including myself, Bill DeYoung, Peter Sparling, and Stephen Rush. She was a superb performer, a great technician, and supremely expressive. She has been a master teacher to dozens and dozens of dancers and, I daresay, has carved some of them out of stone. Her sense of humor is keen in all aspects of her work."

Beginning in 1979, and for years thereafter, Delanghe ran the modern dance program at Interlochen where she taught, choreographed, and produced the season-ending concerts. Sparling, who attended Interlochen as a junior high school student, remembers his first glimpse of his future colleague at a faculty dance concert in the camp's Kresge Auditorium.

"If there was ever an example of *indelible*," Sparling recalls, "it was the impression burned into my memory of a creature with a shock of bowl-shaped red hair, infinitely long legs, and dagger feet as she bounded across the stage and hovered in mid-air. That particular alchemy of zany wit, daredevil physicality, and grace communicated something to me from across that vast expanse that I'll never forget. Little did I know that seven years later I'd be visiting the U-M campus on a break from my life as an aspiring dancer in New York City to watch her teach a class in Barbour Gym, or that 13 years later she'd be recruiting me for a teaching position on the U-M dance faculty."

Bill DeYoung, Chair of the Dance Department, was working in Los Angeles in 1984, as a guest artist at UCLA and choreographing in the entertainment industry, when he got a notion to seek out a full-time position on a dance faculty. Michigan, in fact, had three openings at the time. From the vantage point of Los Angeles, Michigan must have seemed like it was in the middle of nowhere. But Bill put in an application for the opening just the same and left the rest to fate.

"I was in New York," he said, "auditioning dancers for The Yard. Gay tracked me down by phone. 'Listen,' she said, 'just come through Ann Arbor on your way back to Los Angeles. We'll put you up, we'll pay for your flight.' So I agreed."

One of the first people Gay introduced to Bill was Paul Boylan, then dean of the school. Over a drink in the hotel bar at The Campus Inn, Boylan told the young applicant that if he came to Michigan, the School would want him to continue with his professional career. During the visit, Bill was invited to teach a class to see the caliber of the students enrolled in the program. He was given a tour of the Power Center.

Then Gay played her trump card. Two other dancers were considering positions at Michigan as well: Peter Sparling and Jessica Fogel. By the time Bill returned to LA, he was sold. He joined the faculty—along with his two long-time colleagues Jessica and Peter—the following fall. The department soon took off.

"We felt like we were in on the ground floor," Bill said. "It truly was a life-changing serendipity that we all came at the same time. And we all ended up making lives for ourselves here in Ann Arbor. Gay pursued the three of us with a fierce tenacity—she had sifted through well over 300 applications for the openings—and ended up changing all of our lives and the direction of the department. We are forever grateful to her for her persistence. Gay was always a profound advocate for dance at Michigan and through astute crafting

brought together a core faculty that has made the department what it is today."

In 1984, shortly after the new hires arrived, Ann Arbor Dance Works was formed. "Jessica Fogel, Bill DeYoung, and I joined up together, with Gay as the willing co-conspirator, to found Ann Arbor Dance Works (AADW), our faculty performance and choreography collective," says Sparling. "She provided a flinty wisdom and matter-of-fact reality check for our earnest endeavors."

"Ann Arbor Dance Works was a force," says DeYoung. "We toured regularly, four or five times a year, in New York and elsewhere. We all performed in each other's dances." One particularly memorable experience was at Hunter College in New York City where AADW performed Delanghe's *Dancin' Fats*. The notice in *The New York Times* said it all.

"Gay Delanghe's recent *Dancin' Fats*, a bright inventive piece for six dancers and six chairs, captured some of the low-down humor of the three songs by Fats Waller to which the dance was set. Miss Delanghe herself performed with a seasoned authority and wit suggestive of Lotte Lenya that made one long to see her do a solo to the music . . ."

"She had the best feet in the business," DeYoung said. "When she pointed her toes, the line of her leg was perfectly straight; you could feel the energy going through her leg right on into infinity. Her personality came through in her work. She had a keen attention to detail but also an intentional irony that

revealed layers and layers of meaning beneath the surface of the piece."

Gay Delanghe and Peter Sparling shared the stage at the Detroit Institute of Arts for the 1989 Michigan Artists Award from the Arts Foundation of Michigan. Gay was bestowed a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Michigan Dance Council at the National Dance Education Organization's meetings at Michigan State in October 2004.

"Her fan club is enormous," says Sparling. "Her retirement will only heighten the Delanghe legend and her legacy will line up to pay tribute to a fine teacher, an honest and generous mentor, and a real trailblazer. Her devotion to the U-M Department of Dance is without equal, and she continues to be a role model for young women who emulate her strength, persistence, and defiance in the face of all odds."

The Department of Dance is planning an informal evening to celebrate Gay on Saturday, May 20, 2006, at the University Club in the Michigan Union from 6:00-11:00 p.m. Join us for hors d'oeuvres and an evening of informal performance and remembrance. If you plan to attend, contact Geri Fields, 734-647-2035 (gfields@umich.edu), by May 15. A new endowment named for Gay is being created to ensure the perpetuity of her vision at the University of Michigan. To make a donation or to find out more about the scholarship, contact Ameer Simmons, 734-763-0632 (aksim@umich.edu).