



The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre in his *Revelations*. Photograph by Mike Humphrey

OBITUARY

Alvin Ailey

ALVIN AILEY, the American dancer and choreographer and founder of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, died in hospital in New York on December 1, aged 58.

Born in Rogers, Texas, on January 5, 1931, he studied with Lester Horton in Los Angeles and probably did more than any other person to spread the Horton technique internationally by the example of such Horton trained dancers, in his company, as Joyce Trisler and James Truitte. Ailey took over the direction of the Los Angeles company for three years after Horton died but in 1954 made his Broadway debut in *House of Flowers*, dancing with Carmen de Lavallade (another Horton product). Thereafter he was to form his own company which toured world wide to great acclaim. It was predominantly but not exclusively composed of black dancers and led in its early years by Ailey himself, a dancer of exceptional power, stage presence and beauty. He early succumbed, however, to a weight problem but was secure in the knowledge that he had a troupe more than strong enough to sustain his absence from the stage.

As early as 1960 he made *Revelations*, danced to gospel songs and spirituals, which became the signature work of the company and closed programmes gloriously, sending audiences home exhilarated by its fervour and its infinite variety. In addition to his own ballets Ailey showed the work of many other American choreographers such as Talley Beatty and Donald McKayle as well as Horton. Quite recently he restored to the stage some of the best work of Katherine Dunham.

In London, where the company first danced in 1964, they enjoyed enormous success but have not been seen here at full strength since the Sadler's Wells season of 1973. Ailey longed to bring the company back but it had outgrown, in numbers, Sadler's Wells and it was never pos-

sible to find suitable dates at the Coliseum.

Ailey's last work in London, ironically, was to stage, at the invitation of Peter Schaufuss, his *Night Creature* (danced to his favourite Duke Ellington music) at the Coliseum in 1984. In 1969 he staged for London Contemporary Dance Theatre, and specifically for that superb dancer William Louther, his *Hermit Songs*.

M.C.

Tim Wengerd

TIM WENGERD, a leading member of the Martha Graham company from 1973 to 1982, as well as concert dancer, choreographer and teacher, died on September 12 at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, of AIDS-related illness. He was forty-four.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 4 1945, Wengerd grew up in Albuquerque and received his early dance training there. In 1966 he graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where he then became a founding member of Repertory Dance Theatre, serving as both dancer and choreographer.

Wengerd joined the Graham company in 1973, became a principal in 1975, and danced with distinction most of the leading male roles in the repertoire, giving even Graham's macho antiheroes a sympathetic humanity and creating roles in a number of ballets. His favourite part was the young bridegroom in *Appalachian Spring*, which he performed on the Dance in America television series.

In 1982, Wengerd left the Graham company to pursue an independent career, dancing, teaching and choreographing in many parts of the world. He worked in Tanzania under the auspices of the American State Department and in Mexico on a Fulbright Fellowship, was an assistant director of the Groupe de Recherche Chorégraphique de L'Opéra de Paris, and a member of the original cast of Martha Clarke's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. From 1985 he performed programmes of his own solo works.

Wengerd brought to dance a rare intelligence, breadth of interest, intensity, and introspection. Possessed of musical sensitivity and

nuanced phrasing, his dancing brilliantly embodied contrasting attributes of air and earth; of power and vulnerability; of strength and flexibility; of breadth and refinement of detail.

MARILYN HUNT

James Slater

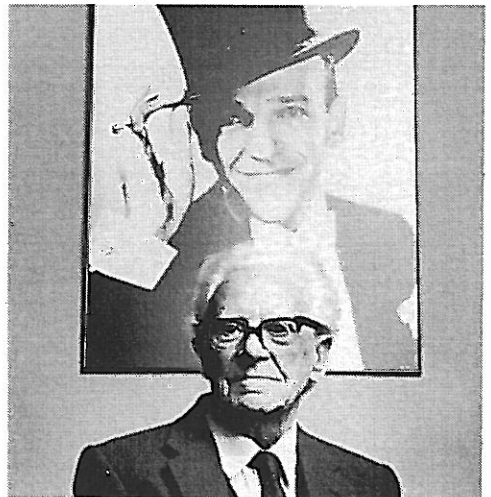
JAMES SLATER, the Australian pianist and conductor for ballet, died in hospital in Melbourne on October 15, 1989. He began his musical training as a chorister in the Anglican Cathedral in Melbourne and on his arrival in London enrolled at the Royal College of Music from which he graduated as ARCM in both piano and organ three years later.

Attracted to ballet as an art form, he began playing for several teachers in London including Dame Ninette de Valois and the late Tamara Karsavina. He spent ten years playing for classes and rehearsals for the Royal Ballet School before joining London Festival Ballet, in the mid-1960s, where he became assistant conductor. He conducted for the Samsova-Prokofsky New London Ballet tour of the USA, Canada and the Dominican Republic when the company starred Dame Margot Fonteyn, whom he worshipped. From 1978 to 1982 he was music director of the Houston Ballet.

He returned to Australia in 1981 as music director and solo pianist for Maina Gielgud's *Steps, Notes and Squeaks* (in which he had appeared in London) and for the 1983-84 season was resident conductor of the The Australian Ballet. In a warm tribute, Maina Gielgud wrote after his death: "He made each of us feel special to him and was special to each one of us — sometimes irritating, but a totally lovable person".

John Brenna

JOHN BRENNNA, who has died at the age of 90, will be remembered as the man who, joining the firm of Gamba in 1914, made shoes for such artists as Adeline Ganeé, Vaslav Nijinsky and, supremely, Anna Pavlova. He was also proud of the fact that he made shoes for Fred and Adele Astaire — in addition, of course, for many other great stars. When Gamba moved into the Dean Street premises, John was put in charge of the store where he was joined by his son, John Junior, still with Gamba. John remained a much loved friend of the firm until his death. He was fond of this photograph (taken last year) and we have chosen it for illustration rather than the more usual ones of him with Pavlova because it indicates the range of his talents which embraced tap shoes as well as ballet.



John Brenna with Fred Astaire looking over his shoulder.