

Sacred Dance Guild – Honorary Member Toni’ Intravaia



**Joined SDG 1958
Named Honorary Member – February 2011**

- Founding member of Sacred Dance Guild
- Editor of the Sacred Dance Guild Journal – 1972 to 2010
- Named a “Living Legacy” of SDG at the 2008 Golden Anniversary Festival
 - Author: *And We Have Danced Vol. II and Vol. III, a History of the Sacred Dance Guild*
- Dancer, teacher, historian, writer, and dance notation specialist.

SACRED DANCE GUILD – HONORARY MEMBER Toni’ Intravaia

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By Linda Telesco



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Toni’ Intravaia, a founding member of the Sacred Dance Guild, was named Honorary Member in February 2011 by the Sacred Dance Guild Executive Board. SDG President JoyBeth Lufty offered this tribute, "For more than three decades, Toni’ has supported Sacred Dance as a sacred art form and a way to the Divine through her teaching of Sacred Dance to both adults and children in a variety of settings, advocating for Sacred Dance through her church and community, and being a part of the Sacred Dance Guild Board of Directors in a variety of roles, including that of Journal Editor."

Known for her boundless energy, radiant smile, and unwavering commitment, Toni' became part of SDG in 1958 and, 53 years later, is still one of the organization's most enthusiastic members. Over the years, she has served as teacher, writer, historian and – in what is undoubtedly her best known role – as editor of the SDG journal, a post she held from 1972 to 2010.

At the SDG Golden Anniversary Festival in 2008 (Connecticut College), Toni' was among those named a "Living Legacy" for their long and valued service to SDG. "She has done more for the Sacred Dance Guild than just about anyone I know," said Karen Josephson, then president of SDG.

Now, Toni' adds to her titles that of Honorary Member. "I've been here since the beginning, and after all these years, it's really interesting to get this," she laughed with characteristic understatement.

Petite with a silvery ballerina bun atop her head, Toni' is the picture of dancer delicacy, but anyone who has worked alongside her will agree that this little flower has a stem of steel. "I'm 88 years old now, but I still have a lot to do," she declared.

Early Life and Training

A lifelong dancer and dance notation specialist, Toni' began her dance training at age 7 in a Catholic convent school, learning patterns much like formal court dance. She later studied ballet and modern dance and went on to attend eight different colleges, compiling credits that led to her BFA, MFA, and DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) degrees. "There were no actual degrees in dance at the time," she explained. "I just took courses in music, movement, literature, and art wherever I went, and figured out my own program."

Along the way, she married Lawrence Intravaia, a bassoonist and music professor. Their son, Paul, is also a musician. "We were always a very artistic family," Toni' recalls. Sadly, Lawrence succumbed to cancer in 1973.

One of the First Members of Sacred Dance Guild

It was in 1958, while teaching dance at West Virginia University, that Toni' received a letter from Mary Jane Wolbers, a New Hampshire dancer who was coordinating a group that would evolve into the Sacred Dance Guild. "Mary Jane wrote to dance teachers at different colleges telling us about sacred dance and inviting us to participate," recalls Toni'. She adds, "Now Mary Jane and I are the two oldest members."

The formative years of SDG intertwined with the blossoming of modern dance in America, and Toni' recalls the years at the celebrated Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival when Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, two of the most revered names in modern dance, taught at the summer events that would later become SDG's annual festival.



**Toni' Intravaia dancing
"Rosary Series," 1964.**

She was impressed with Shawn and his seminal group of men dancers. “They were great,” she said. “At Jacob’s Pillow, they had so much space to move, but when I visited them later in their New York studio, they were so cramped.” Her memories of St. Denis? “Even as an elderly lady, she always dressed all in white,” said Toni.’ “She talked to us about how to move and was known for saying, ‘Why would a dancer wear shoes? A dancer wearing shoes is like a pianist wearing gloves.’ “

Dance Teacher and Notator

A tireless teacher herself, Toni’ has taught ballet technique, poetry, and church dance at SDG festivals and in university and community dance programs. She owned and directed a Creative Dance Workshop for children and implemented the program in West Virginia and New Jersey, when she lived in those states, and in her current hometown of Carbondale, Illinois. She now runs the Children’s Repertory Dance Company in



Toni’ Intraivaia and
George Allen, 1969

Carbondale. “We go into the schools and do presentations, so children can see what dance is.” Members of the group are teens from her dance classes.

Also a dance notator. Toni’ discovered this unique science in her early years at the University of Wisconsin where she had gone to study with the renowned Margaret H’ Doubler, a pioneer in bringing dance to higher education. “I found a book in the library on Labanotation and was inspired,” Toni’ explained. She went on to study at Connecticut College, became certified, and soon found her skills in demand. “The Dance Notation Bureau in New York wrote to me and asked me to do copywork,” she said.

Since then, she has been an active notator, as well as teacher and advocate of the art. When asked why anyone would use notation in this age of video reproduction, Toni’ replies without hesitation, “Notation gives exactness. It’s like written music. Videos supplement notation in the same way recordings supplement, but can’t replace the sheet music.”

Publications, Lectures, and Service

Toni’s publications include numerous articles on dance and dance notation, including several for the Dance Notation Bureau. She is also the author of *And We Have Danced Vol II* and *Vol III*, a history of the Sacred Dance Guild. Toni’ has lectured widely on dance notation, appearing four times at the American Dance Symposium (1968, 1969, 1970, and 1972,) and in discussions for the Dance Notation Bureau in New York. Her notation projects range from recording dances to notating animal behavior for scientific studies. She has also directed seven dances from Labanotation scores including Doris Humphrey’s iconic works, *The Shakers*, and *Water Study*.

Active in dance, educational, and community service groups, Toni' has won numerous awards including citations in Marquis Who's Who, Who's Who in American Women, :Honorary Mayor of Carbondale (1994), Phi Delta Kappa Outstanding Lay Leader in Education (1988), and the Southern Illinois University School of Music Award (1998). She is also coordinator of religious education at St. Francis Xavier Church in Carbondale where she founded a motion choir.

Looking back over the years, some of Toni's fondest SDG memories emerge from her service as editor of the journal. "I went through four typewriters," she laughed. "We used mimeograph machines to make copies and my friends would come over to help me put it all together." She also formed a special bond with a local printer and the postman. "Everyone was connected by that Journal," said. Toni' who still works closely with the publication which is now online.

But this irrepressible woman does not look back for long. When asked about her fondest wish for SDG she replies without hesitation, "That it continues always." She laments the fact that some other older members feel their age prohibits them from dance, and, true to form, decides to take action. "I think I need to write an article about that," she decides.

Even without the article, the woman herself is a living example of how to dance a life. Clad in a classic black leotard with pink tights and ballet slippers, she is trim, vibrant, and ready for action. Despite "Miss Ruth's" disapproval of dancing in shoes, Toni' is most often seen with her ballet slippers on. That's a good thing. If she ever decides to take them off, it's doubtful anyone else could fill those shoes with equal grace. Thank you, Toni' from all of us at Sacred Dance Guild. Dance on!