

Debbie Dee

Debbi Dee - Dance Teacher Extraordinaire

by Evelyn J. Mayblum

What can one say about an extraordinary person - a dancer, a choreographer, a teacher and a truly lovely human being? Interviewing Debbi Dee is a delight. A reflection of the accomplished and sensitive person she is.

How did the Debbi Dee teaching technique come about? How did she get where she is today? What is she doing that makes her special?

Like many people in dance, Dee's parents took her for lessons because she seemed uncoordinated. She was only five years old and living in Rochester, NY. Her parents looked for the best teacher available. They found a 70-ish man named Curley Fisher. Dee studied tap

only with him for quite some time. One of the wonderful things about Dee is that in spite of all her accomplishments, she has not forgotten those who got her started. She is really grateful to Fisher. She is proud of being a "hooper" and thankful for all the help she received along the way.

Besides studying with Fisher, Dee was on scholarship at the Eastman School of Ballet. She studied there five to six days a week. Her courses included, not only ballet, but also other forms of dance. At that time, jazz still came under the category of modern dance. She studied voice. Dee was totally immersed in theatre.

At the ripe old age of 7, she appeared on

the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour." She appeared on this show several times. Dee won first place at age 7 and then, again, at age 9. Having reached the age of 13, she turned professional. Dee has done it all: the state fair circuit, the USO, touring companies, etc.

Early on, neighbors and relatives asked her to teach their children so she started her own school at the age of 16. This school eventually grew to be three large and successful studios. She frequently left them in competent hands because the "performing" bug could not be denied. Dee danced Off-Broadway and in Las Vegas. She has a great

sense of humility. "When I was a soloist at Lincoln Center in New York - there is something about performing on that stage that gets to your heart - it was an honor for me."

The famous Henry LeTang was impressed with her abilities when she was quite young. He considers her one of his proteges. LeTang found Dee because he admired her students. He saw them dance and went looking for the teacher who had produced this quality level. As she says, "He couldn't believe there was a girl who could hoof like that." LeTang introduced her to a whole different type of performing. She used her voice and her dance ability. She offered all she had to each performance.

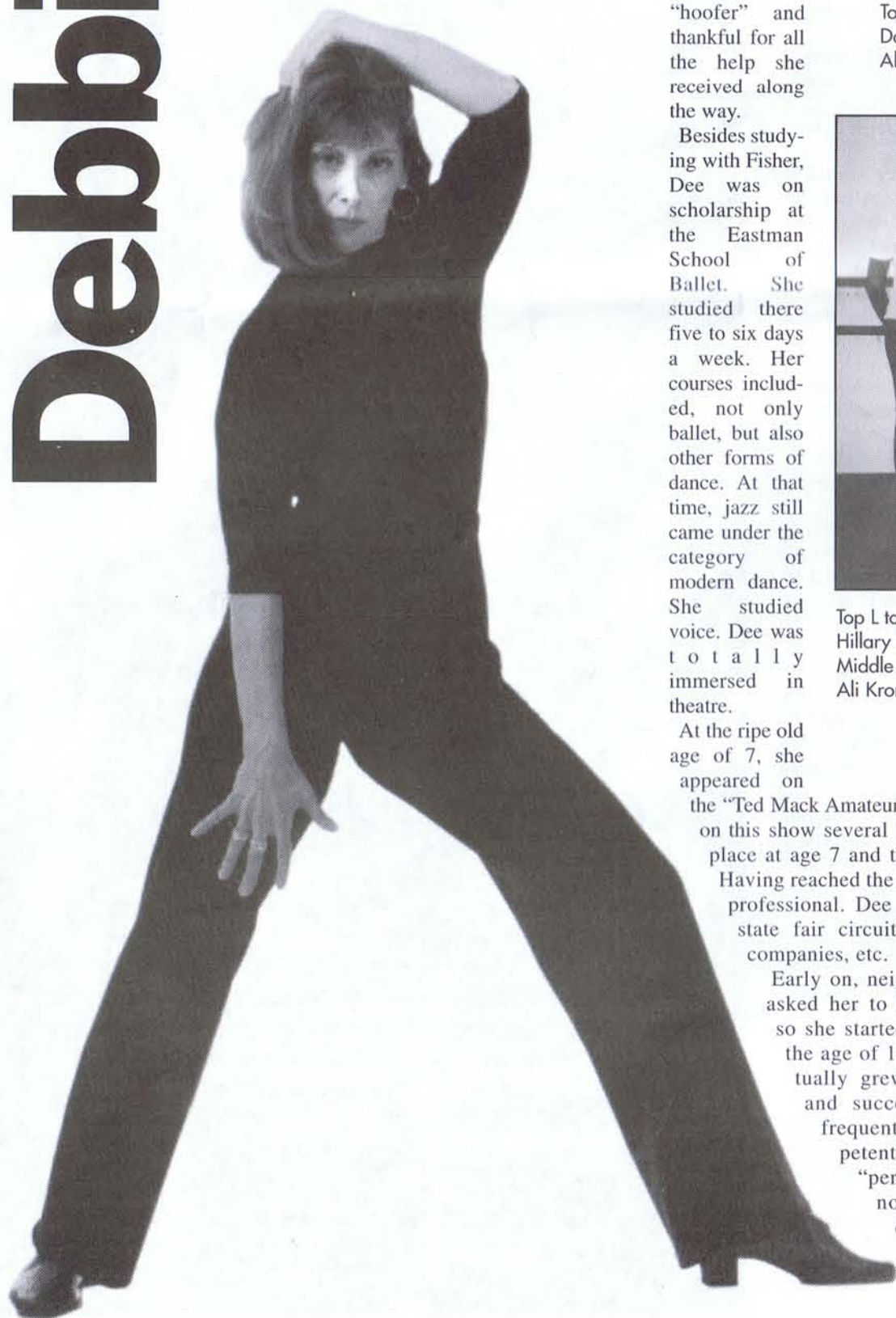
Ben Vereen's arranger became her arranger and conductor. LeTang and she choreographed together. He did tap. She did jazz and adapted some of his tap choreography to suit the dancers. Dee appreciates the fact that LeTang realized she was a dance teacher before they



Top L to R: Jamie Milanese, Meerali Patel, Hillary Reuter, Debbi Dee, Dana Castle, Anca Grigore, Erica Peralta Bottom L to R: Danielle Megano, Allison Megano, Elozabeth Gilbert, Ali Kronick, Ali Berman



Top L to R: Christine Engelhardt, Whitney Leeds, Jamie Milanese, Meerali Patel, Hillary Tueter, Debbi Dee, Dana Castle, Anca Griegore, Erica Peralta Middle L to R: Lauren Puleo, Danielle Megano, Allison Megano, Elizabeth Gilbert, Ali Kronick, Ali Berman Bottom L to R: Erica de Martino, Jessica Kurzweil



met and didn't try to change that. She was able to learn more because of his sensitivity to her needs and viewpoint.

As a choreographer, Dee sees what a person looks best doing and works from there. She works with what each individual dancer has to offer. Dee tells you that she uses her eyes. She watches carefully and then she can communicate successfully. She can choreograph and conduct.

Her stage experiences are simply too abundant to list. They range from Lincoln Center to Vegas. She has been in national touring companies. She has danced for many but she remains committed to teaching. While she was performing, she kept her schools in Rochester. She taught for Henry LeTang. She taught at what is now Broadway Dance Center in New York City. At that time, it was still called Hines and Hatchett. Dee now lives in Florida and teaches at Carol Colbert's in Boca Raton and coaches privately on an advanced and professional level. When she first came to Florida, she commuted to teach at Hines and Hatchett and elsewhere.

Her teaching experiences are vast in quantity and quality. She has taught all over the world, including Japan and Europe. Once again, Dee does not hesitate to give credit to her mentors. She tells you it was Grace Wakefield of the DEA who first saw her teach and promoted her. Wakefield put her on a platform teaching teachers. Dee has been doing it for almost nineteen years. She still loves doing it. Almost every dance convention has had her teach at one time or another. Her students and teachers love her.

Dee's sensitive character comes to the fore when she replies to questions. I quote her directly because her answers tell it all. Not only is Dee a wonderful hooper and teacher, she is more importantly a person with strong character.

1 What was one of your most memorable experiences as a teacher?

When I was living in Rochester, NY, I worked yearly for a camp with children who were terminally ill. I would perform with them and teach them. My students would perform. I did this for 10 years. I was then moving out of state and when they found out, they invited me back to the camp. This time they put on a special show for me and presented me with a hand-made (6 feet) dancer that they each contributed to (embroidered). The words said 'Love is Debbi Dee at Camp Haccamo.'

2 What was your most challenging experience?

I would have to say teaching the blind and deaf. I also used to work with kids in wheelchairs at the camp. They actually taught me. That's when the Debbi

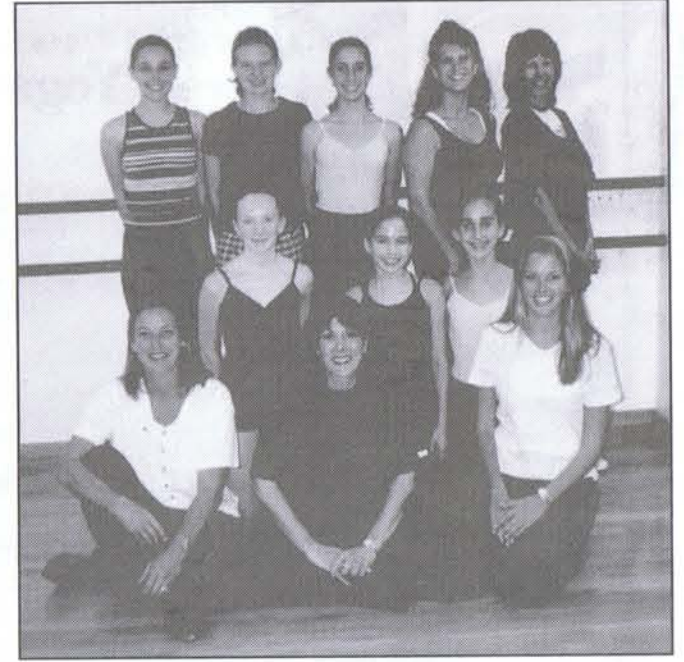
Dee Technique developed. I learned how to really be a true technician and a true teacher by teaching these special angels.

3 Where is your heart?

My heart is in teaching teachers and professionals. I know that they are there (in class) because they want to be there. They want to learn and grow as dancers and educators. I'm honored that I am asked to be on convention platforms and teach in private studios worldwide. I get to pass down the knowledge I've learned and created to many talented people. The bonus comes when I can choreograph and see the final product of my work.

Dee is now teaching and choreographing (including special projects for Disney). Her name is on shoes: Debbi Dee TAP OXFORD by La Mendola. She has a line of tapes that teach tap technique. These multi-level videotapes are used by many. About them she says, "After all, teachers appreciate them. Not everyone can come to the latest convention."

If you want her for professional coaching or teaching, call her at 561.736.3052. No matter what, you'll love talking to her.



Back Row L to R: Rachel Krimholtz, Adine Grigori, Melissa MacIntey, Linda Haynie, Linda Radish Middle Row L to R: Tara Conroy, Ashley Elliott, Michelle Liuign Front Row L to R: Carol Colbert, Debbi Dee, Brittany Lents

