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Remembering Sally Banes: Recipient of the Selma Jeanne Cohen Prize in Dance Aesthetics 2008

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Sally Banes, (1950--2020), foremost among American dance historians and critics of the mid Twentieth Century, died in Philadelphia on June 14. She will be remembered for her outstanding history and theatre scholarship and dance criticism resulting in multiple books and critical writings. Her books include the highly regarded *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post Modern Dance* (1987) that positioned Postmodern dance in the context of mid-twentieth century dance criticism and dance history. Dr. Banes' contributions to dance scholarship include five additional books: *Democracies Body: Judson Theater Dance 1962-1964*, (1983); *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (1993); *Writing Dancing in the Age of Post-Modernism* (1994); *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (1998); and *Before, Between, and Beyond: Three Decades of Dance Writing*, forewords by Lyn Garafola and Joan Accocella, (2007). Dr. Banes edited the *Dance Research Journal* from 1982 to 1988.

Dr. Banes was appointed Director of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and served in this position during 2001, 2002. She served as head of the University's Dance program from 1992-1996. In 2020, The University of Wisconsin Madison established the Sally Banes Professor of Dance in honor of Dr. Banes. Her previous academic appointments took place at Florida State University 1980, Purchase College 1981-1986, Wesleyan University 1987, 1988, and Cornell University 1988-1991. Awards

In recognition of her many contributions to dance scholarship and criticism Dr. Banes has received numerous awards: in 2008 Dr. Banes received the American Society for Aesthetics Selma Jeanne

Cohen Prize in Dance Aesthetics for Lifetime Achievement. In 2003, she received the Lifetime Award for Dance Research from the Congress of Research in Dance. The Society for Dance History Scholars also awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award. Additional Awards include A Betsy Award for Lifetime Contribution to Dance Criticism. The Biennial Sally Banes Publication Prize in her honor is awarded for the publication that best examines intersections of theatre and dance or movement.

As a critic with her eyes focused on avant-garde and urban dance and theatre in New York, Dr. Banes challenged both critics and dance practitioners to explore new approaches to the art of dance. All forms of dance and performance unfolding in the dynamic mid-century art cultures of New York drew scrutiny and challenge from her energetic gaze. This included the avant-garde dance culture taking place in Soho as well as Break Dance happening in the Bronx before it was known or appreciated for its contributions to contemporary dance culture. She was first to position break dancing culture introduced by Black and Latino street dancers in New York with a critical focus. Writing for the *Village Voice* in 1981, Dr. Banes, called out Break Dance in these words: "Breaking is a public arena for the flamboyant triumph of virility, wit and skills. Breaking is a way of using your body to inscribe your identity on streets and trains, in parks and high school gyms. It is a physical version of two favorite modes of street rhetoric, the taunt and the boast."

As a contributor to the "Concepts in Performance" page of the *Soho Weekly News* from 1976 to 1980 -- and Editor-- for its last two years--Dr. Banes narrates her own account of the New York dance scene in what was arguably its most exciting period of innovative new dance and theater of the century. She occupied a key role in interpreting innovative developments in dance, and theatre of the Mid Twentieth Century. Dancers Meredith Monk, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Steve Paxton, Kenneth King and Simon Forti performing at the Judson Theatre and elsewhere in Soho were among the innovative dancers on Dr. Banes' critical palette. Also Modern Dance's Merce Cunningham and New York City Ballet's 20th century choreographer George Balanchine. Joining the dance figures covered in Dr. Banes' reviews are major theatre artists: Robert Wilson, Laurie Anderson, and Whoopi Goldberg.

Commenting on Dr. Banes' dance criticism, Joan Acocella a critic for *The New Yorker* remarked, "One of the great things about her and the work she wrote about, was just vitality -- freshness, excitement, wit, can do....Like a good critic, she brought her imagination to bear on works of the imagination." (Cited in the *Washington Post* June 17, 2020). In 1999, the ASA Pacific meeting featured an author-meets-critic session on her pioneering book, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (Routledge, 1998), with commentary by Peggy Zeglin Brand and Janice Ross. The exchange, with a response by Dr. Banes, was published in *Dance Research Journal* 31:2 (Fall 1999), 111ff.

In addition to her roles as dance scholar and dance critic, Dr. Banes took time to explore dance in the role of performer. Her early performance experience took place during her college years and continued in Chicago theatre projects which she helped establish. In 1974 she founded Community Discount Players a company consisting of actors, dancers, film makers and artists who created and performed theatre works. Also, in 1974 Dr. Banes co-founded MoMing Dance and Art Center, a dance theater company featuring avant garde performance. Visiting artists arriving from New York to perform at MoMing enabled Dr. Banes to establish connections with avantgarde performers in New York. MoMing continues to operate today. Dr. Banes met her future husband Noël Carroll at a MoMing event in 1975. They moved to New York together in 1976 and were

married in 1985.

A highlight of Dr. Banes' performing experience took place in 1974 at Oberlin College where she went to observe Meredith Monk who was in residency there with Ping Chong and her performing group, "The House." Dr. Banes' aim was to observe and write about Meredith Monk's choreographing process by becoming engaged as much as possible in the process of the students and the Company. As a result, Meredith Monk invited her to perform with the Company in "Chacon." Dr. Banes published an account of her experience at Oberlin College with Meredith Monk in *Dance Chronicle* Vol. 1 No. 1. Among her other performances were A duet with Ellen Mazer called "Sophia Eats Shrimp," performed in Chicago at Moming in 1975, and "Sophie Heightens the Contradictions" performed in New York with Amy Taubin and Wendy Perron at P.S. 122 in 1983. She also performed in Simon Forti's "Planet" (1976) at P.S. 122.

Dr. Banes' academic training in the arts began at the University of Chicago where she graduated in 1972 with an interdisciplinary degree in criticism, art, and theater. She earned the Ph. D. degree in drama from the Performance Studies Department of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, awarded in 1980. Her doctoral advisor was Michael Kirby. Her dissertation, "Democracy's Body: The Judson Dance Theater 1962-1964" was reprinted by Duke University Press and has informed young scholars who aspire to enrich contemporary dance with their own contributions. While in New York Dr. Banes took classes in ballet with Ed Parish and Peter Saul, and modern dance at the Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham Studios.

Dr. Banes suffered a life changing stroke in 2002. We can only imagine the contributions that might have flowed from her continuing life engagements had not this tragic event intervened to silence all future gifts.

Sally Rachel Banes was born on October 9, 1950. Her early life was spent in Silver Springs, Maryland where she grew up with her family, attending ballet classes in Washington, D. C. and exploring the arts. Her mother who was an artist no doubt influenced her interest in the arts. Her father was director of pharmaceutical sciences for the Food and Drug Administration. She is survived by her husband Noël Carroll, a Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and leading contributor to philosophy of art, who lives in Philadelphia. Her two surviving sisters are Susan Barnes Harris of Potomac, Maryland and Ruby Bell Sherpa of Mendocino, California.

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