

## Dorothy Runk Mennen

### Tribute to Dorothy Runk Mennen

by Richard Stockton Rand and Richard Sullivan Lee

Dorothy Runk Mennen received her Bachelor of Science degree in Speech from Kent State University in 1938 and her Master's degree also in Speech from Purdue University in 1964. She was a pioneer in the teaching of voice and speech, served as vocal coach on over seventy Purdue Theatre productions, and was a founding member of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA), serving as its first president in 1987. Dorothy had many accomplishments that spoke to her passion in education and equality. She helped form the Purdue Women's Caucus to study and implement gender equity and recognition of women. She was also the first woman to serve as the president of the American Association of University Professors and she was the first woman to chair the Purdue University Senate. Dorothy served on the boards of numerous regional and national arts organizations and was a role model for countless students, faculty and alumni. She received a College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Alumni award and a Sagamore of the Wabash award from the Governor.



Dorothy Runk Mennen

Dorothy served Purdue University for more than sixty years. She believed that you could do anything you set your mind to and she instilled that belief in her students. They carried that belief into their lives and work, and her former students established the Dorothy Runk Mennen Scholarship in her honor in 2006. Recognizing her impact beyond academics, this scholarship celebrates her unwavering enthusiasm and steadfast encouragement of students to pursue their dreams.

On a personal note: I first met Dorothy as a new professor in voice in the Professional Actor Training Program at Purdue University in 1991. In my first semester here I quickly realized my professional experience was limited when it actually came to developing a program in voice for the actor. I sought out an old friend, Marya Lowry for advice, and she wisely introduced me to Dorothy. From the day I met Dorothy I felt so blessed, and for the next twenty years I was rewarded with having her as my personal mentor and dear friend. She offered me her wisdom and guidance and I have been indebted to her ever since. Through Dorothy's assistance and vast knowledge in the field of vocal training, my education began. One of her first goals in my education

was to introduce me to the VASTA, which has been an invaluable recourse in my growth over the past twenty years. Over the years she continually made an effort to know all of my students. When I needed assistance in diagnosing a particular student's vocal problem and trying to find a solution, Dorothy either knew what I could do or contacted the right person who could. Today I am the teacher that I am because of Dorothy. She has guided my training, taught me the true meaning of dedication and how important giving more of your self can mean to the success of a student. Before she left West Lafayette, not a month would go by that she did not check in to see how the new students were progressing or how the department was coming along with its new production, and always with a voice that said "I care." Meeting Dorothy was one of my great life changing experiences. Her mentorship guided me in my growth as a teacher in ways that are immeasurable. I do not start a semester's voice class without acknowledging her influence. She will remain in my thoughts and in my heart always.

**Richard Stockton Rand** has acted on and off Broadway; in regional theatres in the USA, Europe and Canada; and in film for public television. He has written and

performed numerous one-person shows and is the recipient of an Indiana Arts Commission-National Endowment for the Arts Artist Fellowship for solo performance. His work has appeared in *MONOLOGUES FOR MEN*, *BASEBALL MONOLOGUES* (Heinemann Press), and numerous journals. He has been a guest artist at a hundred universities, and directed, choreographed or acted in more than a hundred productions at Purdue University, where he has also served as undergraduate coordinator and chair.

**Richard Sullivan Lee** has been a faculty member at Purdue University since 1991. His 40-year professional stage career has spanned both coasts. In addition to performing and directing, he has been on the faculty of Virginia Tech and Virginia Commonwealth University and has had guest artist contracts in a variety of college settings.



## *Dorothy Runk Mennen*

### **Tribute to Dorothy Runk Mennen**

by Bonnie Raphael

Dorothy Runk Mennen was truly a queen among women, a fabulous role model for all members of VASTA, and a dear friend whom I sincerely miss. Second only to her family which was her primary reason for being on the planet, voice and speech were the center of her life and the focus of her energies during the course of a long and very productive career.

After leading and supporting the Voice and Speech program of the American Theatre Association, Dorothy was one of the founders and the first president of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association in 1986. During the course of the past 25 years, she grew this organization from a dozen or so members to a formidable presence in the world of voice and speech. She was there every step of the way—from the creation of a constitution to the formulation of professional standards and guidelines for tenure and promotion in our field; from a simple VASTA Newsletter to a highly regarded journal, the *Voice and Speech Review*; from VASTA-sponsored sessions at ATHE conventions to annual VASTA conventions, filled with presentations and networking and innovation and improving the practice of voice and speech training in the USA and around the world.

And Dorothy achieved all this with an iron fist enclosed in a velvet glove. Her leadership over a period of far more than 25 years was gentle but determined, formidable but without pretension, joyful rather than dictatorial, collaborative rather than hierarchal. Her sincere enthusiasm and belief that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of the



parts was absolutely contagious. Rather than attracting attention to herself or seeking recognition let alone fame, Dorothy's gifts lay in creating opportunities and circumstances for all of us to do our best, to surpass ourselves in what we believed we could accomplish, to achieve considerably more than we ever dreamed we could. She gave her peers the encouragement and support they needed to take their respective next steps; she provided newcomers to VASTA with opportunities to further their education and training and to add their particular talents and abilities to the organization she had originated. She rarely said no or turned down opportunities to interact and interface with other professional organizations like NATS or the Voice Foundation or ASHA and fostered the exchange of knowledge whenever she could.

Her twinkling eyes and hearty laugh and ability to take our work totally seriously without taking herself too seriously provided such joy and opportunity for those of us who were lucky enough to know her and build this organization with her. Her wisdom and determination provided such a solid foundation for those VASTA members who have become active since her most active years. She was a woman whose life and example have truly made a difference in the vigor and vitality of this unique organization. Hail and farewell to my mentor, my role model, my friend. With great love and deep respect, Bonnie Raphael

*Bonnie Raphael has recently retired, after teaching and coaching professional voice users for over thirty years--at the University of North Carolina, the ART Institute at Harvard, the National Theatre Conservatory, Northwestern University, the University of Virginia, etc., acting as a voice consultant to well-known professional clients; and coaching hundreds of productions at major regional theatres.*

### **Dorothy Runk Mennen: visionary, leader, founding mother**

by Rocco Dal Vera

Vision, leadership — easy qualities to cite but harder to define. Often we can only understand them in retrospect. We can see looking back that a certain individual noticed a possibility others had missed. Hindsight makes it all look so obvious. We forget that the initiator of an idea had to think in thoroughly original ways, to struggle to enroll others, and to overcome their own and other's resistance, doubts and confusions.

The loss of someone dear to us invites retrospection. We may not experience as keen an appreciation of their impact until their absence invites us to wonder what our lives would have been like without them. As I write this on



Mother's Day, 2011, I'm thinking back on the life and influence of Dorothy Mennen, one of the founding "VASTA Mothers." I'm finding that, as I have done with my own mother, I only casually appreciated the extraordinary gifts I received from this great woman. VASTA didn't always exist. It had to be envisioned first. The time before voice and speech training was a recognized profession is well within the memory of many of us. There were no schools where

you could major in the discipline. There was no agreement on what the job of a voice and speech professional was. There was no shared sense of how one was supposed to interact with colleagues, directors, actors, students, faculty, administrators, producers or critics. There was a poor body of research on methods, no commonly held set of ethics, standards, or the scope of one's practice, and no clear way to evaluate the quality and impact of the work. The great leap forward came from a small group of individuals who first recognized that voice and speech training was an independent profession. Dorothy was central to this.

Understanding that it is the responsibility of a profession to define itself and to elevate the common standards of the craft, Dorothy, along with a core of visionary women (Mary Corrigan, Carol Pendergrast, Bonnie Raphael, Lucille Rubin, and an expanding group of others) formed the first international association in the field, and in doing so established the field itself. At this point, everything was new and had to be discovered, debated, fought over, experimented with and concretized.

It's hard to hold up the torch of a vision while grabbing a shovel to dig the foundations. Dorothy did both. I sat in Board meetings for years observing her deep dedication to fairness, openness and professional standards, often in the face of a fractious membership holding divergent views and prone to grudges, gossip and intrigues. She was our mother throughout, and loved us equally.

And we grew up. And the landmark achievements were made: constitution, incorporation, conferences, newsletter, directory, tenure standards, website, listserv, peer-reviewed journal, endowment, scholarships, grants — all these hap-

pened under her determined encouragement, and all are a product of her original vision and her enduring leadership. The death of a parent is a critical passage in one's life. Dorothy brought us up right though and we'll be fine, thanks to her.

**Rocco Dal Vera**, founding editor *Voice and Speech Review*, professor University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, co-author with Robert Barton *Voice: Onstage and Off* (2nd ed.), with Joe Deer *Acting in Musical Theatre: a comprehensive course*, MFA Theatre Voice and Speech Coaching from the National Theatre Conservatory, certified Alba Emoting trainer with an interest in the voice and emotional extremes, resident vocal coach, Associate Artist, Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, faculty Xavier Leadership Center, and clay street project.

