

Denise Jefferson

1944 - 2010

IN MEMORIAM

Denise Jefferson, beloved past president of NASD and director of the Ailey School, passed away on Saturday, July 17, 2010. Denise was a person of light. She radiated with confidence in the power of art and the abilities of people to do something of value. She inspired with a smile that revealed a deep humanity. She spoke with authority and consummate grace. She was kind and patient, always willing to help. Denise simply nurtured everything she touched. NASD and its member institutions were one of the greatest beneficiaries.

The artistic and educational achievements Denise produced are well known in the dance world internationally. Her mission for education started with dance and radiated to other things. The artistic and educational growth of the Ailey School under her leadership inspired admiration and respect for the highest values of performance as means to realize aspirations for student development. No one could meet Denise without being reminded that dance was serious business, that the beauty and power came from great effort, that the essence was the art itself. Denise worked hard, and expected the same from others. And the results came — for her, and for the Ailey School, her students, and the field of dance in all its dimensions.

Denise Jefferson was president of NASD from September 2004 through September 2006. Prior to that, she was Secretary of the Association; a member and chair of the Commission on Accreditation; and Vice President. In the position of Immediate Past President, she served on the Board of Directors and as Chair of the Committee on Nominations. At the time of her passing she was Treasurer *pro tempore* of NASD, and chair of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools. She contributed in numerous other ways, as well -- as an accreditation site visitor, as a presenter at annual meetings, and as a representative of NASD in higher education and public forums. During her terms as vice president and president, she was a trustee of the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations. Her contributions to education in dance through these means are beyond counting. Institutions, students, colleagues, and academics in other fields found themselves in new positions of understanding and confidence, encouraged, empowered, and refreshed to continue their efforts.

At the beginning of Denise's love affair with dance there was a small child of eight and a teacher, Edna L. McRae. Along the way there was the study of French, the movement of dance into new dimensions, the developing skill, the opening of new opportunities, the growing vision, the service, the dedication, the beautiful stewardship, the magnificent example. Now in this time of apotheosis and transcendence, it is clear that the light that Denise radiated has not gone out. It has just moved. The fires of inspiration, work, and achievement still burn in memory and legacy and will light the world of dance and art and education in unfathomable ways for years to come.

Readers may wish to see:

The Ailey School: Remembering Denise Jefferson New York Times ~ July 20, 2010