



MALU RIVERA-PEOPLES

WSPA DIRECTOR
BALLET PROGRAM DIRECTOR



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“I had such a full, exciting, and rich life as a student and as a young adult because of dance. We trained, traveled and performed around the world. I feel I have been blessed by all the success as well as the disappointing experiences as a dancer,” she said and added, “I owe a lot to my very first teacher Tita Radaic who passed on her passion, dedication, and respect for dance. I learned the discipline from her. I also am very blessed to have had such a professional and creative artistic director (Alice Reyes) in my professional years with Ballet Philippines.” (Alice Reyes is the Philippine National Artist for Dance)

Ms. Rivera-Peoples then went on to the international stage, training with international figures such as Kenneth Gillespie, Armin Wilde, Norman Walker, Luminita Dumitrescu, William Morgan, Alfred Rodriguez, Gray Veredon, and Mikael Kukarev. She has also collaborated and performed with internationally acclaimed guest dancers such as Alicia Alonso, Margot Fonteyn, Patrick Bissell, Fernando Bujones, Leslie Brown, Joyce Cuoco, Martin Van Hamel, Natasha Makarova, Eleanor D’Antuono and Rudolph Nureyev. She has traveled all over the world and has performed solo roles in full-length productions of Swan Lake, Giselle, Don Quixote, Nutcracker and Romeo & Juliet, to name a few.

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But her biggest achievement seems to be off the stage – as a teacher. Ms. Rivera-Peoples' teaching career began at age 14, under the supervision of her teacher, Felicitas Radaic. At the age of 16, she became a member of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD, London), qualifying her to prepare children for the annual RAD Children's Examinations. Then at 19, she opened her own school in Manila, the Silid-Sining Workshop for the Performing Arts in Manila.

In 1983, Ms. Rivera-Peoples migrated to the US. By the summer of 1991, she co-founded the Westlake School for the Performing Arts (WSPA) in Daly City. Under her leadership, WSPA has continued to have the respect and reputation of the community for being an outstanding school. The school and its students have been receiving awards for their ensemble and solo entries in national and regional dance competitions.

“Anyone who runs their own business would say that the work is 24 hours a day. It is the same with running a performing arts school, you are continually on the edge of your seat creating new works (as a choreographer), hiring teachers to replace the good ones who had to move on, letting go of teachers who have not delivered well, promoting students who deserve and having to deal with parents who do not agree with your decisions, so forth and so on,” she explained. “I have learned to take it all objectively, and because of all the human interaction the business has fortunately allowed me to have, I have learned so much about people, relationships, life, and so much about myself as well.”

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Aside from these, Ms. Rivera-Peoples is recognized as an excellent choreographer, receiving several awards for modern, ballet, lyrical jazz and musicals. Twice awarded as Outstanding Choreographer by the Youth America Grand Prix in Long Beach in 2004 and 2006, she also directs WSPA's full-length ballet, *The Nutcracker* every year at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco. (In the Filipino community, she was honored with a Pamana Arts Legacy Award from the Filipino-American Arts Exposition and selected as one of the "Top 100 Most Influential Filipina Women in the US" in Washington D.C. by the Filipino Women's Network. In October 2013, Malu was awarded the "Lifetime Achievement Award" by the Asian-Pacific American Heritage Organization.)

As to her advice to those who wish to pursue a career in dance, she simply said, "Follow your heart and do not give up. When you are true to your goal and true to yourself, everything in the universe will work together to make sure you reach your destination. The journey may not be easy, but the rewards will be beyond your imagination."

Retrieved from "[A Life Full of Passion -- and Dance](#)" by Malou Liwanag Aguilar / AJPress