

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
LEON DANIELIAN**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Leon Danielian, professor emeritus, theatre and dance, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
LEON DANIELIAN**

Leon Danielian, one of the twentieth century's leading American ballet dancers, died March 8, 1997. He was a professor emeritus of The University of Texas Department of Theatre and Dance, where he taught ballet from 1982 to 1991.

Born in New York City on October 31, 1921, he received his early dance training under ballet legend Michael Mordkin, one of Anna Pavlova's partners, and gained his earliest professional experience as a soloist with the Mordkin Ballet. After working under George Balanchine in Rodgers and Hart's Broadway production of *Married An Angel* in the late 1930s, he joined Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) as a soloist and charter company member in 1939.

As premier danseur with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo from 1943 to 1958, Mr. Danielian secured his place in dance history as the first American-born ballet dancer in the twentieth century to gain international fame. His Ballet Russe career and firsthand knowledge of the works of Michel Fokine, Leonide Massine, Anton Dolin, Eugene Loring, George Balanchine, and other great choreographers made him an invaluable company member, ballet master, and teacher.

As a performer, he was known for his virtuoso jumps, his partnering abilities, and his acting skills, which endeared him to audiences both in the United States and abroad. He was named the "Best Performing Male Dancer of 1949" by *Dance Magazine*, and received critical acclaim for many roles, including the Peruvian in Leonide Massine's *Gaité Parisienne*.

Mr. Danielian retired from the stage in 1959 because of arthritis, but continued teaching and coaching. He served as codirector of the School of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in New York City in the early 1960s, then as director of the American Ballet Theatre School from 1967 to 1980.

As an educator, Mr. Danielian won respect as a thorough, caring teacher, having taught many of America's leading dancers for more than 30 years. His performance style and teaching skills are discussed in several books and hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles. In 1978, he was interviewed by Morley Safer for *60 Minutes* on CBS television, and he was featured in the 1973 film *First Position*, which documented his transition from performer to teacher.

In the spring of 1982, he traveled to Austin to attend a gala honoring his friend Igor Youskevitch, who was retiring as head of UT's dance program. Mr. Danielian was impressed with the University's dance program and accepted the offer to fill Youskevitch's position, joining the UT faculty as professor of dance in 1983.

From 1984 until his retirement, Mr. Danielian held the Susan Menefee Ragan Regents Professorship in Fine Arts. In 1993, the Department of Theatre and Dance dedicated a studio in the Winship Drama Building as the Leon Danielian Dance Studio, and also announced a scholarship endowment in his name.

Mr. Danielian was a well-loved and highly-respected ballet master, as well as one of the best dancers of his generation. He is survived by his sister, Herculiea McDonald, of Williamsburg, Virginia.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professor Oscar G. Brockett (chair) and Sondra Lomax.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on November 3, 2000. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/>.