

Iris Garland: Modern Movement

by
Tessa Perkins Deneault

Post-Baccalaureate Diploma, Simon Fraser University, 2018
Bachelor of Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2012
Certificate of Liberal Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2011

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
Graduate Liberal Studies Program
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

© Tessa Perkins Deneault 2023
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2023

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Declaration of Committee

Name: Tessa Perkins Deneault
Degree: Master of Arts
Title: Iris Garland: Modern Movement
Committee: **Chair: Gary McCarron**
Associate Professor, Communication

Santa Aloï
Supervisor
Professor Emerita, Contemporary Arts

Sasha Colby
Committee Member
Associate Professor, English

Selma Odom
Examiner
Professor Emerita, Dance
York University

Abstract

From 1965 to 2002, Iris Garland was a determined advocate for dance at Simon Fraser University (SFU), in the broader community of greater Vancouver, and at a national level. From humble beginnings in Chicago, Garland went from physical education teacher to dance pioneer. She joined SFU as a charter faculty member and created, along with her colleagues, western Canada's first credit program in dance. She taught courses, led non-credit dance workshops, invited prominent guest artists to the university, and, along with her students and in collaboration with the Centre for Communications and the Arts, choreographed full-length productions at the SFU Theatre. She was a strong mentor who influenced countless students, encouraging them to pursue dance no matter their previous training. Her partnership with husband James Felter, the university's first art gallery director, provided a strong foundation of artistic inspiration and mutual respect.

Keywords: contemporary dance; modern dance; Iris Garland; Simon Fraser University; SFU dance program; Centre for Communications and the Arts

Dedication

For Charlotte, who arrived just after I completed the 5th course of this master's program. I aspire to inspire you every day.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jeremiah for your unwavering support throughout all my academic endeavours, and to Charlotte for inspiring me to continue pursuing my passions. To my parents for putting me through many years of dance classes, surrounding me with books, and always supporting my education; and to my Nan and Grandad for their constant encouragement. Miss you Grandad.

A huge debt of gratitude to Jim Felter for generously sharing memories, documents, and details about Iris's life. I couldn't have done this without your help.

Thank you to my supervisor Santa Aloi for taking the time to help me get this project to this stage and providing thoughtful feedback along the way. Your contributions have been invaluable. And to my wonderful committee member Sasha Colby for providing encouragement and advice since this project was just an idea, along with expertise in the form of attentive notes. I am also grateful to Selma Odom for taking the time to join my defence on Zoom and provide helpful commentary.

I want to thank everyone who contributed their time and memories to this project thus far: Nini Baird, Mary Fox, Judith Garay, Terry Hunter, Karen Jamieson, Phyllis Lamhut, Savannah Walling, and Max Wyman. Thanks also goes out to all the critics and writers who documented dance happenings over the years — their work enables research like this to come to life.

The SFU Archives team, especially Matthew Lively and Melanie Hardbattle, are endlessly helpful and I thank them for keeping safe and providing access to all the archival materials that went into this research.

Thank you to everyone in the Graduate Liberal Studies program and faculty members who helped shape my degree: Gary McCarron for chairing the program and this defence, Sasha Colby for expertly directing the program through a time of great change and teaching courses full of insight, Sandra Zink for going above and beyond to provide student support, Steve Duguid for wonderfully inspiring courses, Chris Pavsek for a brilliant foundation in Marxist theory from a contemporary arts lens, and Carolyn Lesjak for more rousing Marxist theory from an English literature perspective. This degree has been full of amazing courses and inspiring people, and I'm thankful to have been able to finish it with this project about another inspiring figure, Iris Garland.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Acronyms.....	viii
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2. Meandering.....	3
Chapter 3. Moving.....	10
Chapter 4. Mediums.....	16
Chapter 5. Marriage.....	28
Chapter 6. Major.....	34
Chapter 7. Memory.....	42
Bibliography.....	48

List of Figures

1The Terrapin Club at University of Illinois. Iris Garland top right.	5
2Iris Garland (centre) in a performance of the Terrapin Club.	7
3Iris Garland's first official headshot as a faculty member at SFU.	11
4Garland on campus at Simon Fraser University.	14
5Poster advertising the first public event of the SFU Contemporary Dance Club, which became the SFU Dance Workshop.	17
6Mediums. Photo by Dan Scott.	19
7Garland teaching members of the SFU Clansmen basketball team.	22
8The SFU Dance Workshop, 1970. Photo by Tony Westman.	23
9SFU Master Class with Dan Wagoner, 1975.	24
10Still of Iris Garland in Hurrah, film by John Juliani.	25
11Garland and Felter on their wedding day.	29
12Felter and Garland in Garland's MGB convertible on Burnaby Mountain.	31
13Iris Garland and members of the Burnaby Mountain Dance Company. From an article by Mary Trainer in Comment magazine, 1974.	40
14A garland of irises to mark Iris' Spot where her ashes were spread.	42
15Watercolour portrait of Iris Garland by Jeannie Kamins, 1995.	43
16Iris Garland and Lifeforms. Oil painting by Jeannie Kamins, 2003.	44
17Iris Garland by Sylvia Tait.	45
18Iris Garland during a trip to Spain with husband Jim Felter, one of his favourite photos of Garland.	47

List of Acronyms

SFU	Simon Fraser University
CCA	Centre for Communications and the Arts
TCD	Terminal City Dance
UI	University of Illinois
UW	University of Washington

Chapter 1. Introduction

I have always felt that dance was a kind of addiction. Once you've had that fatal taste...lessons as a child and especially the fateful 'recital experience'...you are hooked for life. You may not study dance again formally for years, but there is always that nagging feeling that, if only the opportunity were there, it would be hard to resist. It goes beyond the recapturing of childhood or youth...even beyond the idea that it would be great to 'get in shape' again. After all, there are other ways of experiencing nostalgia and there is always jogging for physical fitness. Dancing transcends practical reasons for doing it. It demands total concentration of mind and body — a commitment to the moment.
Iris Lillian Garland, 1935 – 2002¹

As a charter faculty member at Simon Fraser University (SFU), Iris Garland provided the opportunity to study dance to a diverse range of students from across campus. Some were experiencing the “fatal taste” of dance for the first time as adults, while others were revisiting or continuing their dedication to the art form. Garland was an influential mentor to many of her students who were inspired to pursue dance professionally and start their own companies.

Dance at SFU had its beginnings in the Faculty of Education's Physical Development Centre where Iris Garland was hired in 1965 to teach dance courses that were often theoretical and served as elective courses for student athletes and others interested in learning a bit about dance. Originally hailing from Chicago, and coming to SFU from the University of Washington where she held a faculty position in their physical development department, Garland was determined to create a proper academic dance program at the university. But that would come years later, after a period of intensely experimental and inclusive work as part of the Centre for Communications and the Arts (CCA), an interdisciplinary creative hub. In the meantime, Garland set to work creating as many opportunities as she could for SFU students to be exposed to dance — most famously, her informal Dance Workshop that welcomed anyone who wanted to dance regardless of experience or training. “Dancers met a few times a week, mostly in the basement studio of the SFU Theatre on Burnaby Mountain and were led by the driving force behind dance at SFU: the late Iris Garland,” explains Alana Gerecke.²

While Garland was busy establishing dance in an academic setting, the late '60s were formative years for dance in Vancouver. In 1964, Norbert Vesak, who had trained with Ted Shawn, Merce Cunningham, and Ruth St. Denis, among others, founded Pacific Dance Theatre. The next year, Paula Ross founded The Paula Ross Dance Company, whose members included many dance artists who went on to form their own companies

¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-2. “Centre for Communications Resident Artists Fall '74.” *The Peak*. 11 September 1974.

² Gerecke, Alana. “Dance as ‘Lead card’ in the Development of Simon Fraser University's Fine and Performing Arts.” *Renegade Bodies*. Eds. Allana C. Lindgren and Kaija Pepper. Dance Collection Danse: 2012. 142.

and shape the dance landscape of the city over the next few decades — such as Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi who founded Kokoro Dance and the Vancouver International Dance Festival. Intermedia was formed in 1967 by a group of artists including Glenn Lewis and Jack Shadbolt and offered dance classes that were frequented by the next generation of modern dancers, including Karen Jamieson who studied there before joining Garland’s workshop at SFU. Max and Anna Wyman moved to Vancouver from London, UK in 1967; Anna formed the Anna Wyman Dance Theatre while Max became a highly regarded dance critic. Within the span of a few years, Vancouver went from having very few opportunities for modern dance training or performance to having a strong foundation for a thriving modern dance scene.

Although the university had no formal dance program or fine arts department, Garland continually advocated for more dance courses and ultimately a dance degree program. She developed courses in the Department of Kinesiology, ran inclusive workshops for dancers of all skill levels, invited prominent guests to give masterclasses and involved her students in her own original choreographies. Thanks to her efforts, and in collaboration with colleagues who would later join the university, the dance program grew into a minor in 1977 and a major in 1980. SFU played a central role in Garland’s life — it’s where she spent a great deal of her time for 35 years and where she met her husband James (Jim) Felter, the university’s first art gallery director. Garland retired from the School for the Contemporary Arts as Professor Emerita in 2000 before cancer took her life in 2002.

The impact of Garland’s work in establishing and growing the SFU dance program is broad and deep. While she did present some of her own original works at the SFU theatre, her lasting contributions were not in the originality of her choreography but in the way she supported and furthered dance as an art form. As Max Wyman describes, “Garland’s joyful pioneering in the use of the new technologies, and her consistent showcasing of performance and teaching by much of the cutting edge of New York new dance, helped shape the future of dance-making not only in B.C. but across Canada.”³ The credits of almost every contemporary dance production in Vancouver include at least one student, alumnus or faculty member of the SFU dance program. Most artists working in contemporary dance in Vancouver today have been touched by this program in some way, countless dance companies have been founded by students of the program, and Garland’s mentorship has been felt through the generations. Simply put, many contemporary dance roads in Vancouver lead back to Garland who was described by Nelson Gray in 1976 as “the centre of the dance vortex at SFU.”⁴

³ Wyman, Max. “Foreword.” A Magical Moment: The Early Years of the Arts at SFU. Unpublished manuscript. April 2021. 5.

⁴ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-2. “Spring Dance Blooms” by Nelson Gray. 25 March 1976.

Chapter 2. Meandering

Iris Garland Named to Honorary Society

In recognition of her outstanding work in student activities at the University of Illinois, Iris Garland, 6128 S. Whipple, a Lindblom graduate, has been named to membership in Torch, an honorary society for junior women. Members are selected at the end of their sophomore year for their outstanding leadership.

*Southwest News Herald, May 5, 1955*⁵

Garland's early life was spent on the south side of Chicago at 6128 South Whipple Street; the two-storey structure with four bedrooms and two bathrooms was built in 1919. When Garland lived there, it was a poor neighbourhood known for high levels of crime. Born on June 23, 1935, she grew up during the depression and its aftermath as an only child of bereaved parents who lost her younger brother, Denis Robert Garland, to smallpox when he was only two years old. Iris was 6 at the time.

Garland's mother, Lillian Margaret Garland (1907-1973), was the youngest of six siblings and worked in the slaughterhouse in Chicago, a booming industry that employed approximately 25,000 people and processed one sixth of the meat consumed in the United States.⁶ As Garland's husband James (Jim) Felter describes, Lillian would often bring home steaks for dinner. Lillian's mother (Iris's grandmother), Margaret Appelt (1866-unknown), had come to Chicago from Poland to visit her brother, says Felter. Her ship sank just off of New York City, and thankfully all the passengers were rescued. She never returned to Poland and ended up running a grocery store where her husband, Harald Peter Appelt (1866-1943), lived in the basement and from which her brothers stole money. As Felter recalls, this contributed to Garland developing a mistrust of men, especially regarding financial matters.⁷

Garland's father, Theodore Roosevelt Garland (1901-1956), was the youngest of five siblings and worked for General Motors. He was featured at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair where he took apart and put together a General Motors engine in record time. For a time, he served as head of public relations for GM, but he was an alcoholic who was often demoted or let go from the company. Felter says that Garland never forgave her mother for not leaving him.⁸

"Her family had come over probably because of a lot of the persecution happening in Europe in the 20s and 30s, that post World War I shift that occurred, and they had to get out of there," says Garland's close friend Mary Fox. "I know she was very proud of her Polish roots, but I think that her family had to leave for rather desperate

⁵ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-2-0-1. "Iris Garland Named to Honorary Society." May 5, 1955.

⁶ Chicago Board of Education. Chicago in the 1940s. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JzD9oYLVzY>

⁷ Email from Jim Felter, April 14, 2023.

⁸ Email from Jim Felter, April 14, 2023.

reasons.” Garland’s only surviving relatives from her side of the family are cousins and any children they might have.

A constant feature of Garland’s life, and perhaps an escape from her meagre surroundings, was dance and movement. She started dance classes at an early age and also became an accomplished swimmer. Garland’s route to teaching dance at a university was circuitous. She had studied ballet, but as she got older, she was more interested in the work of modern dancers in New York City such as Merce Cunningham, Alvin Ailey, and Alwin Nikolais. She graduated from Chicago’s Robert E. Lindblom Technical High School in 1953 as a member of the school’s honor society and winner of a “Golden Eagle” award.⁹ As her husband Jim Felter describes, Garland’s mother said she had a decision to make: she could study dance or go to university. She had been told she was too tall to be a dancer — a common discriminating factor in the ballet world — so she decided to pursue a career in journalism. After the head of the journalism department told her there were no women in journalism, she decided to study physical education — the closest she could get to dance at a university — first for her undergraduate studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, then for her master of science at the University of California at Los Angeles.¹⁰ “The way she described it to me,” says Fox, “she really felt her future was going to be gym teaching. I think her whole life was a bit of a surprise.”

Garland’s time at the University of Illinois (UI) was formative; she quickly took on leadership roles while excelling in her studies. She lived in residence at the Busey-Evans Hall, and found a community of women through joining the Alpha Sigma Nu sorority then Kappa Delta Pi. “The purpose of Kappa Delta Pi shall be to encourage high professional, intellectual, and personal standards and to recognize outstanding contributions to education,” says Garland’s certificate of initiation.¹¹ Dance and swimming combined for Garland when she joined the Terrapin Club at UI, blending synchronized aquatic athleticism with theatrical performance. For the club’s 30th annual show in 1953, *Concerto in Sea*, Garland performed in a piece called “Real Gone Goldfish.” The Terrapin Club provided Garland’s first outlet to express her love of performance and choreography.

9 Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-2-0-1. “Lindblom Technical High School Commencement Exercises. June 24, 1953.

10 Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

11 Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-2-0-1.



1The Terrapin Club at University of Illinois. Iris Garland top right.¹²

*University of Illinois
Department of Physical Education for Women
Urbana, Illinois*

May 22, 1956

*Miss Iris Garland
1111 W. Nevada
Urbana, Illinois*

Dear Iris:

Congratulations from the staff members of this Department upon having earned Junior College Honors and having been elected to Alpha Sigma Nu. We also are happy that you were honored by Shorter Board. Best wishes to you as you face your senior year while serving as Terrapin Club president.

Best personal wishes to you and a happy summer vacation to come.

Very sincerely yours,

¹² Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds. F-197-1-2-0-1.

*Laura J. Hulester
Head of Department¹³*

As president of Terrapin in her senior year, Garland produced the club's year end performance, *Potpourri*. Combining both dance and synchronized swimming, she departed from the show's usual format to create a modernist production that focused on movement quality and emotion rather than narrative. "Potpourri is an intentional departure from the format of past Terrapin productions in that no attempt has been made to develop a particular theme or to tell a story," reads the program description. "Rather, ideas and techniques suggested by past Terrapin performances and by experimentation during club meetings have been used as initial points for the development of individual numbers. Synchronized swimming, programming, music, lighting and staging are elements which combine to create the mood of the show. The final interpretation is up to you, our audience." Garland's multi-disciplinary, modern movement style was already being developed as she honed her skills both in the water and on dry land. The head of the department shared her enthusiasm for the show's innovative new direction:

*University of Illinois
Department of Physical Education for Women
Urbana, Illinois*

May 7, 1957

*Miss Iris Garland, President
Terrapin Club*

Dear Iris:

Congratulations to you, the members of Terrapin Board, and all who helped to make "Potpourri" the successful production which it was. I also want to thank Terrapin for the complimentary tickets made available to me.

I continue to be an enthusiastic rooter for Terrapin and its annual production along with other important phases of the club. I particularly appreciated it this year—the "finished" performance of each of the numbers. I think you were wise not to try to stick with a given theme throughout and you must be aware of the fact that this is not absolutely essential to a well received and interesting production. "Experiments" was unique and very interesting to hear with the dancers as the only ones to be seen from the side balcony. It was, of course, a pleasure to see Toni Stewart again and Carol Aronson's solo was a fine individual production.

My sincere good wishes to Terrapin at present and in the future.

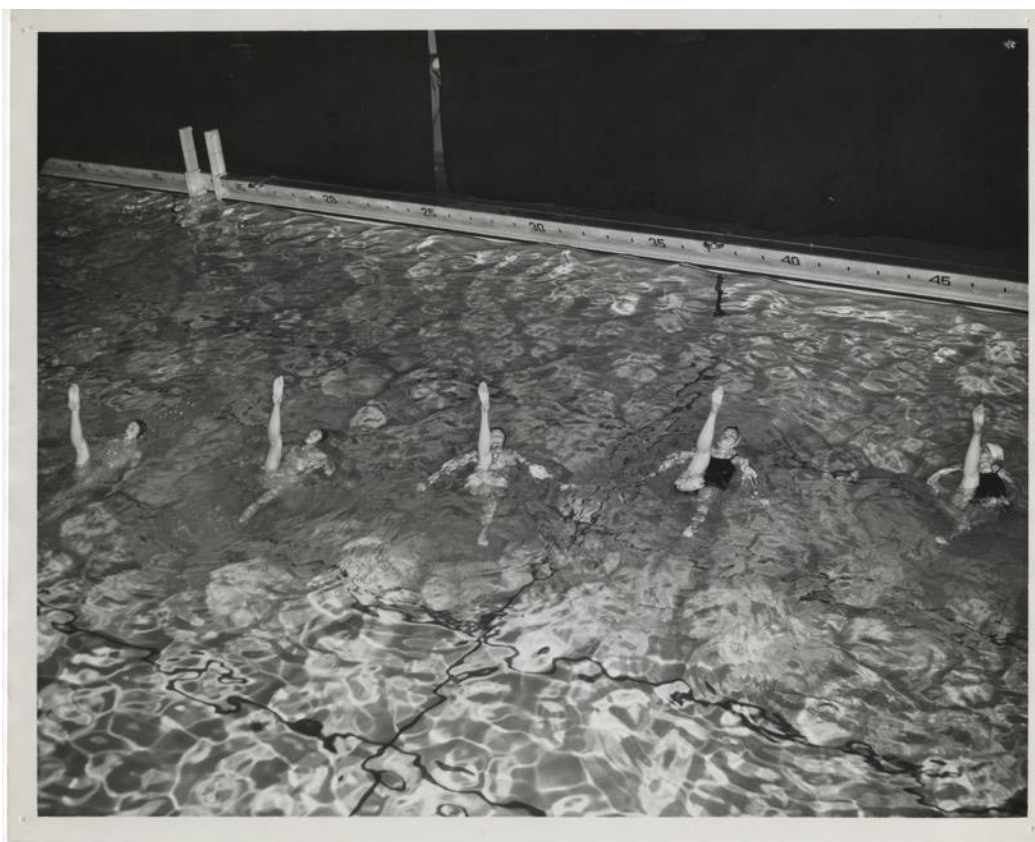
Very sincerely yours,

¹³ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-2-0-1. Letter to Iris from head of Department of Physical Education for Women, University of Illinois. May 22, 1956.

Laura J. Hulester
*Head of Department*¹⁴

Garland graduated with a Bachelor of Science with High Honors from the School of Physical Education at UI in 1957. She was recognized in the commencement program as member of the “Bronze Tablet” group of undergraduates who had “distinguished themselves in scholarship during the two previous semesters.” Along with her degree in physical education, Garland was certified to teach grades six to twelve by the State of Illinois for a period of four years.

Excelling in both academics and aquatics, Garland received certification from the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation in aquatic leadership in the areas of advanced swimming, diving, and techniques of teaching swimming. In 1957 and 1958 respectively, Garland was certified in first aid and home nursing by the American Red Cross. At the 1957 Aquatic Art Festival at Northwestern University, she was presented with Third Class Honours from the International Academy of Aquatic Art. Although Garland hadn’t yet found her way to a career in dance, she had found a way to combine her academic pursuits with a love of movement, choreography, and performance.



*2Iris Garland (centre) in a performance of the Terrapin Club.*¹⁵

¹⁴ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-2-0-1. Letter to Iris from head of Department of Physical Education for Women, University of Illinois. May 7, 1957.

¹⁵ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds. F-197-1-2-0-1.

After completing her master's degree at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1960, Garland looked for academic jobs in physical education departments — although she would have preferred a dance department, those were still fewer and farther between and dance was most often classified under physical education. “Her first job was in Fargo, North Dakota,” explains Felter. “The faculty used to get together at the highest building in town that had a restaurant on top of it and wonder what the hell they were doing there. She thought to herself ‘I can move! I don't have to stay here.’” Her time in Fargo was, however, a wonderful opportunity to gain experience in teaching a wide range of courses, performing administrative functions, leading student extracurricular activities, and generally becoming accustomed to the life of a faculty member. But Garland wasn't prepared to stay in Fargo for long, and her colleagues at the University of North Dakota were sorry to see her go:

April 12, 1961

*Dr. Ruth Abernathy
University of California
Los Angeles 24, California*

Dear Ruth:

It has been a personal pleasure, a professional stimulus and a refreshing tonic to be associated with the penetrating, intellectual curiosity and delightful candor of our Iris! The cooler clime, Nordic reserve, and the challenge and adventure of the new job have not daunted her high spirits.

A cooperative, hard-worker, she has contributed professionally to the department curriculum revision, taught major courses (including Tests and Measurements), assisted in the supervision of student teachers, and served as advisor to the Triton Swim Club. Her considerable experience in producing swim shows has resulted in better-trained student leadership, greater variety, and much more originality in routines and numbers. She shows remarkable ability in guiding inexperienced students through the pangs of creativity and the intricacies of routine planning. Her dedication to her responsibility as advisor to the annual water show resulted in her giving up plans to attend national and regional professional meetings this spring.

[...] In February, she was responsible for a fine demonstration and clinic on tumbling and apparatus activities for high school girls. [...] Iris uses imagination and good common sense in her programming.

I have deeply appreciated Iris' frankness in situations demanding candor and forthrightness. Her personal integrity, poise, and tact in dealing with professional associates and students strengthens the effectiveness of the occasional conferences of this nature. Her lofty ideals, coupled with a cosmopolitan outlook, cloaked in a subtle sense of humor and combined with charismatic qualities augur well for the future of this youthful leader in our profession.

It is my sincere hope to retain her as a member of my staff. My interest in her personal happiness and professional growth, however, causes me to lend all

possible assistance in bringing to her attention opportunities which may have greater appeal. Such is fate!

*Cordially,
Wilma N. Gimmestad¹⁶*

Garland's "lofty ideals, coupled with a cosmopolitan outlook, cloaked in a subtle sense of humor and combined with charismatic qualities" would indeed take her far and be essential qualities for establishing and advocating for dance at SFU. While in Fargo, Garland was already becoming a valuable mentor to her students, guiding them through the "pangs of creativity" — a gift she would continue to share with her students and become well known for. She would make one more stop before coming to SFU, at the University of Washington (UW). Garland knew someone at UW and heard about a position in their dance area. She was hired to teach both dance and synchronized swimming. "The faculty in that department were all ancient," describes Felter, "and they hired the young professors to do their work, but they had no possibility of promotion." From 1964-65, Garland was teaching Physical Education 352, History of Dance in the UW's School of Physical and Health Education, Department for Women. At the time, women were still segregated into their own physical education departments. For the final exam, students had to answer questions such as "Compare Eastern art to Western art. What relationship does this have to the development of the present avant garde dance movement?" and "Briefly trace the development of modern dance in America. Mention significant artists and the unique aspects of their style."¹⁷ Looking for some modern dance inspiration and training, Garland enrolled in the Connecticut College School of Dance in the summer of 1964. UW was proving to be a professional dead end, and she would be glad to move north the following year.

When Garland and her friend and colleague from UW, Margaret Savage, heard about a new university being built just outside of Vancouver, they thought it might be their opportunity to get their feet in the door on the ground floor and work their way up in the academic world.¹⁸ They were both hired into SFU's Physical Development Centre, Garland for dance and aquatics courses and Savage as a swimming and diving coach, along with her husband Paul Savage who was SFU's first head coach of the swimming program — the university's pool is now named after Margaret and Paul. At SFU, Garland was able to excel as a leader and help design the kind of program she would have loved to be part of as a student, while not worrying about working in a department that was "for women."

¹⁶ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Letter to Ruth Abernathy from Wilma N. Gimmestad. April 12, 1961.

¹⁷ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-2-0-2. "P.E. 352 History of Dance Final Examination." No date.

¹⁸ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

Chapter 3. Moving

Christmas 1965

Dear Friends and Relatives,

Well, it's finally happened...I owe practically every single friend & relative a long overdue letter! The thought of all that "catching up" on Christmas cards made me feel like Scrooge towards Christmas, so I've finally settled on this compromise...a group letter!!!

First of all, as you may or may not know, I've changed jobs again! I'm not really a nomad at heart, but it just sort of worked out that way. I loved Seattle, but my job at the University of Washington was a three year terminal position from the outset and... (that's the way the cookie crumbles, etc.) Having been hooked on the advantages of the Northwest, naturally I wanted to stay in the same green nature. Vancouver is really more of a city than Seattle and cultural activities abound (for those lucky people with time to partake).

My Status here is "landed immigrant" (which makes me feel as though I just got off the boat with brown shopping bag and babushka). However, despite the immigration red tape, I still feel intact (U.S. citizenship and all).

Simon Fraser University is a brand new provincial (equivalent to state) university that was started from scratch atop Burnaby Mt. two years ago. The architecture is a new concept in university building replete with multilevels, covered walkways, malls connecting lecture rooms, and a master plan for expansion to 18,000 students in the next 10 years. We opened with 2,500 this fall. The university is often referred to as the "instant university."

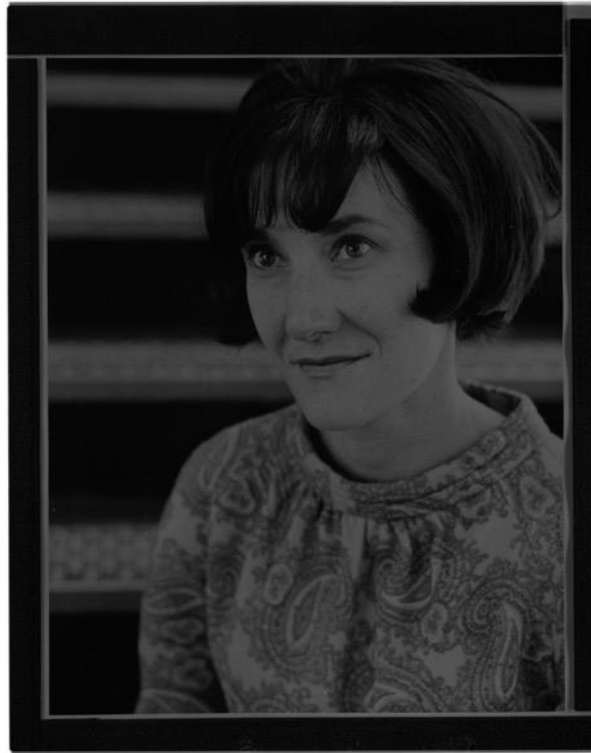
I am a member of the "Physical Development Centre." How about that? There are two women and eight men on our staff and we are a most congenial group (everyone under 35 and eager to avoid the disadvantages of our previous positions). I am especially enjoying being in close contact with all phases of the program (athletics included). I'm living in a beautiful brand new apartment with Margaret Cant, the other gal on our staff who I knew at Washington. She is Canadian which is a great help in acculturating me (in other words, answering my questions). Since our apartment was unfurnished, I bought a teak living room suite which is the first real furniture I've ever owned.

This fall has been extremely hectic and almost every weekend I've either been out of town (Seattle is only 3 hours away) or entertaining weekend guests. At Christmas I'll be in NYC taking the Graham Dance Course (yes, I'm still in my modern dance phase). Grad school is on the docket for next summer.

Best wishes in the new year for you and yours and if you get near this corner of the world...do drop in...I live only 5 min. from the foot of the Grouse Mt. chair lift!! Bring your skis!

As always, Iris¹⁹

Garland wrote this group letter to send out with her Christmas cards in 1965, a few months after she moved to Vancouver from Seattle, leaving the University of Washington to take up her new position in SFU's Physical Development Centre. Her duties, which came with an initial \$6,800 salary, were to: "Instruct in recreational programs, specifically in dance and aquatics; supervise and instruct in the Faculty of Education's Professional Development Program; and engage in research in association with other members of the Physical Development Centre."²⁰



21

3Iris Garland's first official headshot as a faculty member at SFU.

SFU, which, as Garland said, was often referred to as the "instant university," was built and opened in roughly 18 months. When Garland arrived, the university was in a state of becoming where the rules were being made up along the way. The university's Centre for Communications and the Arts was meant to be, as Hugh Johnston describes in *Radical Campus*, "a small experimental institute that integrated the arts," similar to the

¹⁹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-2. Christmas letter from Iris to friends and relatives. 1965.

²⁰ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Letter from Glen Kirchner to Iris Garland. 15 July 1965.

²¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds, F-109-12-7-0-26. Iris Garland headshot.

Bauhaus School. Bringing together the fine and performing arts in this way was a first for a North American university.²² From the beginning, SFU was a place where rules, processes and best practices were being made up along the way — as the saying goes, the new faculty members were building the plane as they were flying it. Thomas J. Mallinson, a professor of communication and the first director of the CCA, describes the atmosphere well in his unpublished essay, “Brave New University.” The day before the university opened, he looked out the window of his office on the sixth floor of the Academic Quadrangle throughout the day noting the preparations to ready the campus for opening the next morning: first, the crews were hastily gathering lumber and debris, throwing it in piles behind the theatre where it would be picked up and trucked off the mountain. Later in the day, he noticed the workers had decided there was not enough time to have the debris hauled away, and they were setting fire to the piles. Before leaving campus for the day, he looked out his window again and observed trenches being dug to bury the debris, with grass sod being laid over top to conceal it.²³ This series of events seems emblematic of the university’s approach from the outset: find innovative ways to get things done and adapt when needed, without waiting for approval or official direction. Garland joined this exciting, emergent environment with her own plans to build something from the ground up. As Mallinson says:

In those early days enthusiasm was in the air and, as each new faculty member arrived, more energy was added to an already heady atmosphere. For had we not all been lured with the prospect of a ‘Brave New University’? With no tradition, no dead weight of past practice, the way would now be open for us to initiate those utopian ideals and methods we had all longed to implement.²⁴

Garland now had the opportunity to shape SFU’s dance offerings and set the tone for the university’s treatment of the form. The Centre for Physical Development that Garland was hired into was one of three Centres in the university’s Faculty of Education — the other two were the CCA and the Centre for Professional Development. The CCA and Physical Development Centre both offered a broad range of non-credit courses for students, faculty, and members of the community. “The rationale behind these non-credit courses,” explains Mallinson, “was that both students and faculty should be encouraged to broaden their knowledge and explore, in common, areas outside narrow disciplinary boundaries.” Students were required to take two of these courses that didn’t involve any grading or exams; they just had to show up. “Students were encouraged to create their own programs and give presentations in the theatre, which for a time was the centre for campus activity; it was a rare noon hour that did not have one or more offerings (including a tongue-in-cheek “Zen Rock Concert”; when the curtain opened to a packed house it revealed only a small pyramid of rocks.)”²⁵

22 Johnston, Hugh. *Radical Campus*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2005. 244.

23 Simon Fraser University Archives. Allan B. Cunningham fonds, F-70-2-0-0-8. “Brave New University” by Thomas J. Mallinson. No Date. 3.

24 Simon Fraser University Archives. Allan B. Cunningham fonds, F-70-2-0-0-8. “Brave New University” by Thomas J. Mallinson. No Date. 3.

25 Simon Fraser University Archives. Allan B. Cunningham fonds, F-70-2-0-0-8. “Brave New University” by Thomas J. Mallinson. No Date. 5-6.

Wyman describes the role of dance in the revolutionary creative fervour on Burnaby Mountain: “The dance department was part of the tremendous creative uproar on the hill. There was always something going on — the founder of the Centre for Communications and the Arts talked about it being a new Bauhaus where they would fuse theatre and music and dance and writing, and make something new and revolutionary.” In addition to all this creative spirit, the campus was full of activist energy, with frequent demonstrations, sit-ins and protests. A large proportion of the new faculty and students were Americans, many heading north to dodge the Vietnam draft. “It was a place where everything was possible,” says Wyman. “It was a new dreamland for intellectual activity, and dance was part of that.”²⁶

Although dance was originally housed administratively in the Physical Development Centre, there was a great deal of collaboration with the other arts disciplines in the CCA. Wyman describes a “wonderful cross-fertilization of disciplines” with music and sound pioneers Murray Schafer and Phill Werren, theatre heavyweight John Juliani, and avant-garde visual artist Iain Baxter&. “Everybody played together,” says Wyman, “and nobody wanted to just learn about the arts, they wanted to do. That was the difference: it wasn't a place just to go and study, it was a place to go and make things.”²⁷

This collaborative, creative environment suited Garland very well. She was finally able to choreograph and present her works rather than solely teach theoretical courses about dance and movement. She was extremely dedicated to her craft and a natural mentor to so many of her students, while rising to the occasion of building a dance program and collaborating with colleagues to establish the first dance degree program in western Canada.

²⁶ Wyman, Max. Quoted in *Coming Out of Chaos*, Chapter 1: Before Chaos.
<https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>

²⁷ Wyman, Max. Quoted in *Coming Out of Chaos*, Chapter 1: Before Chaos.
<https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>



Garland on campus at Simon Fraser University.

It turned out that joining SFU as a charter faculty member was one of those ‘right place, right time’ moments. How many people have the opportunity to build a university program from the ground up, to go down in history, and put their mark on it in such a profound way? “When Iris would get totally depressed with the politics of the university,” says Felter, “I’d sit her down and I’d say, ‘look, you’ve created the dance program and I’ve created an art gallery. How many people in a generation are able to make these things? Mould it themselves? Everything is by committee now. We were just in the right place at the right time to exert our own ideas.”²⁹ Garland had free reign to do as she pleased within the courses she taught. Meanwhile, she was eager to continue her own education. In her Christmas 1965 letter Garland mentioned that grad school was “on the docket” for the following summer, and, in 1966, she was accepted into a Doctor of Education Degree at Columbia University in New York, with a major in Health Education, Physical Education, and Recreation: Dance Education. She had planned to travel to Columbia during a sabbatical in 1968-69, but it seems that by that time her plans changed and her role at SFU became more all-consuming. Instead, she would take a trip to London to absorb new forms of modern dance.

For Garland, dance and movement were her way of life. It permeated everything she did. “Iris didn’t see anything unless it moved or she could move it,” says Felter. “It was the movement that was interesting to her. I thought it was fascinating because one day I changed all the pictures in the house, and it was about a week later when she began to realise that things had changed. She hadn’t seen them move, so it didn’t register.”³⁰

Garland’s friend Mary Fox also recalls her unique outlook on the world that prioritized movement. Garland was visiting Fox in Toronto while in town for a conference, and Fox recalls that Garland arrived at her home and right away noticed a difference in how she was moving in the space. “Her first comment to me was, ‘Mary,

28 Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds. F109-12-7-0-26.

²⁹ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

³⁰ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

your whole physicality here is so different than it was in BC.’ She said, ‘It’s not just that you’ve lost weight, it’s the way you were moving your arms.’ I just thought this is really interesting. It really told me so much about how she was experiencing space, and the integration of her real life and her choreography.”

In a piece choreographed during Expo 86 in Vancouver, Garland’s real life was prominent in her choreography due to the fact that she had broken her leg during a trip with Felter to their property on Cortes Island. Fox remembers it well: “I’d never seen her disabled that way and she was on crutches and we were trying to find ways to get her around. In the piece she choreographed, a phone rings on the stage, and it’s your body calling. I was in hysterics. I had never seen anything that really connected human experience — that whole disconnection that can occur when something changes with the way your body functions, and how disconnected you become from your identity.” With Garland’s identity being so wrapped up in moving, a broken leg was a huge obstacle to overcome, but she didn’t let it stop her from dancing.

Chapter 4. Mediums

Film, dance and electronic sound were blended for a Simon Fraser University presentation Friday noon that proved to be one of the most intriguing theatre events I have seen on that campus. The production, titled Mediums, was an attempt to express visually and aurally some of the implications of W. B. Yeats' theories about life — and it showed how effective mixed or parallel media can be when they're handled in a circumspect manner. [...] Within the range of their performance abilities, the dancers did considerable justice to the work's dance ideas. And these ideas — despite what seemed to be an abrupt slackening of tension and invention around the middle of the work — were at times gratifyingly fresh and arresting: writhing diagonals, squirming circles and whirling starburst shapes created moments of bewilderment and desperation, and moments of great sadness."

Max Wyman, The Vancouver Sun, 31 May 1969³¹

Every spring, the students from the SFU Dance Workshop would present a performance of their original work in the SFU Theatre. In the university's first yearbook in 1966, a few photos of the "contemporary dance club," as it was first named, were included along with a rather ignorant description:

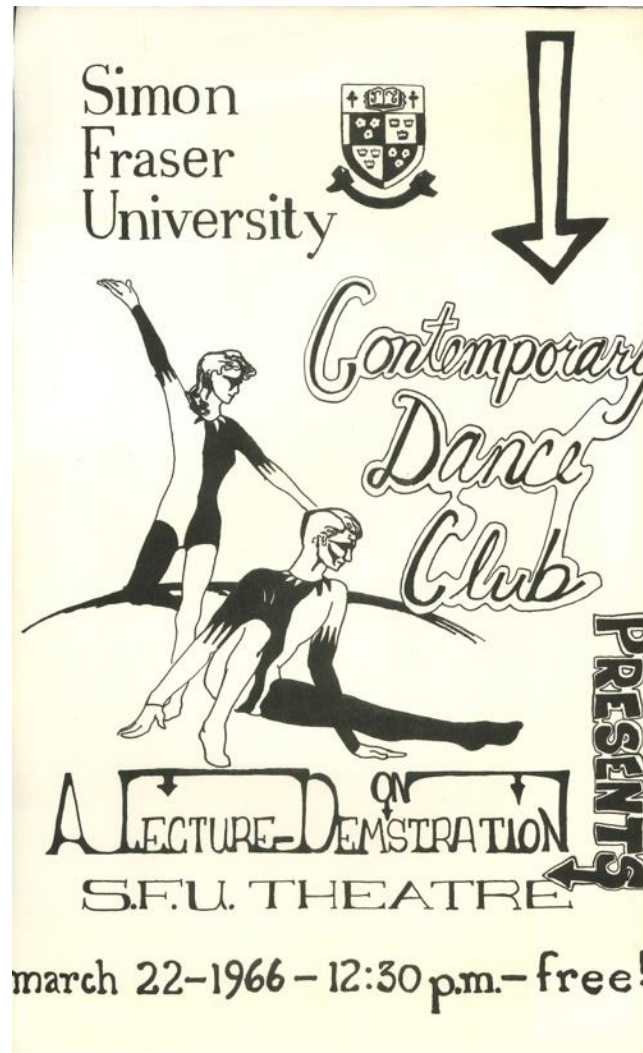
According to its director, Iris Garland, the Contemporary Dance Club is an outgrowth of the Physical Education program. Behaving much like a 'workshop', this club encourages students to learn a performing type of dance in which a kinesthetic feeling is expressed.

In a contemporary Dance Lecture-Demonstration held in the Theatre on March 22, the club members were given an opportunity to express themselves through this type of dance.

This club has a rather misleading name, because contemporary dancing is not synonymous with popular dancing as many would think. Hence it does not include the Jerk or the Watusi.³²

³¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-1. "SFU Medium Mixture Scores" by Max Wyman. The Vancouver Sun. 31 May 1969.

³² Simon Fraser University Archives. Simon Fraser Student Society fonds. F-74-10-0-0-37. SFU Yearbook 1965-66. 105.



5Poster advertising the first public event of the SFU Contemporary Dance Club, which became the SFU Dance Workshop.³³

Wyman more aptly describes one of the dance workshop performances in 1969:

Freshness, vitality and a good deal of tongue-in-cheek charm are the outstanding qualities of the concert of modern dance currently presented by the Simon Fraser University dance workshop. Permanent workshop director Iris Garland has gathered around her 26 young people with an evident enthusiasm for movement—and she has very properly allowed them to shoulder the burden of choreographic creativity.³⁴

Garland would often allow her students to “shoulder the burden of choreographic creativity” and incorporate their improvisations into her works — something that was not as common in contemporary dance as it is today. In the days when critics still reviewed

³³ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-2. Contemporary Dance Club Lecture Demonstration poster. 22 March 1966.

³⁴ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-4-0-0-3. “Seven Girls With Synthesizer” by Max Wyman. The Vancouver Sun. 15 March 1969.

student productions (before the dance program became for-credit), Wyman was a prolific dance reviewer at *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* who spent a great deal of time at the SFU Theatre — he even had a designated parking spot under Convocation Mall. “The student performances on the hill were open to the public and the paper had a much more generous and inclusive vision of what we should cover in terms of the arts than today,” says Wyman. “I’d be up there two or three times a week looking at dance and listening to music.”³⁵ Garland took his criticism seriously and on one occasion was so displeased with a review that she wrote to the paper. “I was snootier about an end-of-term show than I perhaps should have been,” says Wyman, “and Iris promptly loosed off a thunderbolt to the *Sun* letters page reminding ‘Mr. Wyman’ in no uncertain terms that few choreographies ‘spring fully-formed from the brow of Zeus,’ and would he kindly learn to be more understanding.”³⁶ Once courses became for-credit, critics were not invited to review student productions — some faculty members felt strongly that this would interfere with students’ freedom to take risks and make mistakes before joining the professional arts world.

Garland’s reaction to Wyman was not out of character, however, as she seems to have been sensitive to criticism in other publications, including an on-campus newsletter called *The Horse Sheet*, which was run by theatre artist in residence Peter Hay. As *The Peak* reported in 1969, Garland physically confronted Hay in the faculty lounge: “Peter Hay was standing by a table around which six or seven theatre students were sitting when Iris Garland, Assistant Professor in the Communications Centre, tapped him on the shoulder. As Hay looked up, Miss Garland slapped him powerfully on the face.”³⁷ At the time, Hay, who had made a number of enemies, had been forbidden to enter the theatre for the semester, and it was as yet unproven whether he had any connection to the publication.

Mediums, an interdisciplinary, experimental production premiered in 1969, was a seminal piece of work for the CCA. Under the direction of Garland, it was choreographed by two of her students, Edith Feinstein and Karen Jamieson (then Rimmer). An original score was composed by Phillip Werren (Feinstein’s husband), and an abstract film was created by Jamieson’s then-husband Dave Rimmer.³⁸ Felter designed the program, although it wasn’t something he wanted to make a habit of. “That was a touchy thing because I didn’t want to become a graphic designer for my wife,” says Felter. “So only if I was interested and had an idea would I consent to it and lend my hand to producing something.”³⁹ With its abstract film backdrop, modern dance movement, and electronic score, *Mediums* was innovative for its time. “Multi-media” was a new fad, and critics loved it. Aside from Wyman’s rave review, James Barber added his approval in *The*

35 Wyman, Max. Quoted in *Coming Out of Chaos*, Chapter 1: Before Chaos.
<https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>

36 Wyman, Max. “Foreword.” *A Magical Moment: The Early Years of the Arts at SFU*. Unpublished manuscript. April 2021. 6.

37 “Assault Claimed.” *The Peak*. 2 July 1969. 2. SFU Digitized Newspapers collection of the SFU Library.

38 Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds. F-109-7-3-0-4. SFU News Release. 21 May 1969.

39 Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

Province when *Mediums* was staged for a second time as part of a mixed program of works from the dance workshop. He described it as “the most exciting local multi-media production I have seen. [...] an outstanding trip, which in its subtlety, its complete integration, its rich and exciting sensory blendings, comes close to mysticism.”⁴⁰ *Mediums* went on to be the first production of the CCA to leave the mountain — first appearing at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in December 1969, then touring to Santa Barbara, California the following February.⁴¹



Mediums. Photo by Dan Scott.⁴²

Not only did *Mediums* impress critics, it left such a strong impression on one audience member that he sent a donation to the university to support the dance workshop:

⁴⁰ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-4-0-0-3. “Mediums steal the show at Workshop” by James Barber. *The Province*. 25 July 1969.

⁴¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-2. “Hello No-Name Dancers” by Max Wyman. *The Vancouver Sun*. 29 October 1969.

⁴² Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-1. “SFU Medium Mixture Scores” by Max Wyman. *The Vancouver Sun*. 31 May 1969.

*Robson, Alexander & Guest
Barristers and Solicitors*

March 20, 1969

Personal

*Simon Fraser University Dance Workshop,
c/o Simon Fraser university,
Burnaby, B.C.*

Dear Sirs:

[...] my wife and I attended your Dance Workshop last Saturday night. It was for us a beautiful and exciting experience and, if you had another performance and sold the seats at \$5.00 each, we would have come back and brought our grade school age children in the hope that some of the feeling expressed in your performance might have rubbed off on them. If, and when they reach university, they are able to advance as far beyond you as you have advanced beyond those of us who attended in the immediate post war period, their education will certainly be worthwhile.

The enclosed cheque, therefore, is sent as a token donation for the use of the Workshop and the benefit of the students involved in it. Whether it is used to finance after-practice refreshments for the cast next year, or to supplement (but not replace) some part of your music, production, costume or lighting budget, does not matter to me. I hope it will be accepted and effectively applied toward more performances of the kind presented by you last weekend to your fellow students and the interested public.

[...]

Once again, thank you for a most delightful evening and our best wishes for continued successful artistic expression.

Sincerely,

Gowan T. Guest

This cheque from Mr. Guest was likely the first donation received in support of dance at the university, and it is evidence of the impact of Garland's dance workshop reaching broadly into the community—beyond those already in the dance world.

Aside from being a major production for the Centre, *Mediums* was also a pivotal moment for Jamieson's career. "That was my first dance performance, and that was supported by Iris," she says. "Even though she shouldn't have supported me — I was nobody from nowhere, I knew nothing — but she did." Jamieson's husband mentioned to Garland that his wife loved to dance, and Garland, always inclusive, said Jamieson would be welcome to join the group. "What Iris did for me is whet my ambition in dance. She was very supportive, and I love her for that. She was definitely a serious mentor to me."⁴³ Jamieson had planned to pursue a career as a teacher, but soon fell in love with dance. "I

43 Interview with Karen Jamieson. October 27, 2022.

took that dance workshop and abandoned all notions of being a teacher,” she says. “I just wanted to dance.”⁴⁴ Brenda Lee Eisler, who later dropped her first name, is another artist whose career was directly inspired by Garland. Eisler changed direction from Olympic long jumping to a career in dance after attending Garland’s workshop at SFU and completed her master’s degree in 1980 with a thesis on modernism in dance supervised by Garland. Eisler founded the East Vancouver Institute of Multidisciplinary Arts in the late 1970s, along with friend Karen Greenhough and partner Nelson Gray. In 1984 Eisler and Gray formed JumpStart, a company that carried on the multi-disciplinary tradition Eisler was first exposed to at SFU until it was dissolved in 2015.⁴⁵

In 1969, the CCA seemed to be functioning as intended. As its director Patrick Lyndon said, the main question the Centre raised was “can you, without the conservatory notion, help the young person become an artist?” He seemed to think the answer was yes. “Look at Iris Garland’s dance section. Her students have reached the point where they want to set up their own company, independent of the university. I’m thrilled. That’s what we want.”⁴⁶ Lyndon was referring to a group of Garland’s students who had decided the twice-weekly non-credit dance workshops at the university were not enough to provide the training required to pursue a professional dance career. After Feinstein and Rimmer created and performed in *Mediums*, they, along with seven of their classmates, decided they should take matters into their own hands and form their own dance company. With Garland’s support and under her direction, they made Kitsilano’s Alexandra Neighbourhood House their base. “After our dance production at the university last July, we realized how far we had to go if we really wanted to be dancers,” says Feinstein. “But we were all very keen to try. We wanted to see how much work we could do, and how far we could develop as dancers away from the university atmosphere and away from the idea that we were only dabbling in dance.”⁴⁷ This idea that participants of the dance workshop were only dabbling in dance while studying in another program at the university is one of the reasons Garland was so determined to establish a credit program for dance—without it, dancers who wanted to take their training more seriously were forced to look elsewhere.

After spending a few years studying dance in New York, Jamieson returned to SFU in 1974 to teach dance as a sessional instructor alongside Garland, and she remembers teaching athletes in the Kinesiology department. “The athletes were urged to take dance so they could get a little more flexible because they were subject to groin injuries. It was fun, but, ultimately, I didn’t really want to teach at university. I wanted to go to the big bad world and be a professional.”⁴⁸ Jamieson established her company Karen Jamieson Dance in 1983 and has gained national recognition for her work, including being inducted into the Canadian dance hall of fame. She credits Garland with

44 Interview with Karen Jamieson. October 27, 2022.

45 Email from Santa Aloï. 19 July 2023.

46 Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-1. “Some Thoughts on the Arts Blossoming at SFU” by Max Wyman. *The Vancouver Sun*. 5 September 1969.

47 Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-2. “Hello No-Name Dancers” by Max Wyman. *The Vancouver Sun*. 29 October 1969.

48 Interview with Karen Jamieson. October 27, 2022.

providing her the opportunity to choreograph her first piece and gain the confidence to pursue dance as a career. “It was absolutely terrifying, but also exhilarating when it seemed to work,” says Jamieson. “*Mediums* got me on my way, and I thought ‘I can actually do this.’ I don’t think Iris’s work was terribly ground-breaking or experimental, but her support was because she said it doesn’t matter if you’re 25 years old, you can start dancing. Don’t allow yourself to be limited by prejudices.”⁴⁹



*7*Garland teaching members of the SFU Clansmen basketball team.

Other notable alumni of the dance workshop include Savannah (then Elaine) Walling and Terry Hunter who met in 1971 in SFU’s mime troupe before joining Garland’s workshop. “After I got a job as a library clerk at Simon Fraser University on Burnaby Mountain, I enrolled in the non-credit dance workshop that I discovered,” says Walling. “My first teacher was Anna Wyman, who replaced Iris Garland who was on sabbatical, and I continued with Iris Garland after she returned. These free workshops attracted dancers of all skill levels from across the city. Such an exciting opportunity and life-gift when I think back to those days.”⁵⁰ Along with Jamieson, Walling and Hunter went on to establish Terminal City Dance (TCD) in 1976 — an influential collective that also served to provide a space for other artists to rehearse and create. Their studio in Chinatown became a hub of creative activity. After TCD split up, they founded

49 Interview with Karen Jamieson. October 27, 2022.

50 Walling, Savannah. Quoted in *Coming Out of Chaos*, Chapter 1: Before Chaos. <https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>

Vancouver Moving Theatre and later the Heart of the City Festival, a multi-disciplinary community-based arts and culture festival in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Walling and Hunter were appointed to the Order of Canada in 2023.



8The SFU Dance Workshop, 1970. Photo by Tony Westman.⁵¹

The SFU Theatre where the dance workshop rehearsed and performed was a bustling interdisciplinary hub of creative activity at the university. The space served as a catalyst for collaboration with students spending their free time there and watching many free performances. And there was always something happening. As James Barber writes, "I cannot remember ever seeing the theatre without an almost packed house, evenings, lunchtimes and weekends, and there are more variations of theatre performed than anywhere else. People go to look, and they leave as they should leave, in some way affected by what they have seen. And nobody in the theatre appears really to care whether the audiences like them or not, so long as they do not ignore them. Which is what a theatre is for."⁵²

⁵¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds. F-197-4-0-0-10.

⁵² Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds. F-197-4-0-0-3. "A 'Windmill' that can't be ignored." The Province. by James Barber. November 1967.



*SFU Master Class with Dan Wagoner, 1975.*⁵³

Many of the productions Garland was involved in were collaborations with other choreographers or artists from other disciplines. In *Choros*, choreographed by Garland and visiting artist from New York Mary Staton, dance was mixed with poetry, lights, and vocal and instrumental sound, as Wyman explained in his review. “Choristers bearing globular glowing-red bowls lit from inside by candles spoke the words, as Ron Wattier and Donna Wong danced the meaning. [...] As the moods of the poetry changed, so did the colors on the screen and the tempo of the shadows’ dance...and the effect these changes achieved was sometimes lightly lyrical and sometimes gently sad.”⁵⁴

Occasionally, Garland would collaborate with the Artists in Residence of the CCA. In 1969 she appeared, with her characteristic charisma, in *Hurrah*, an experimental film by theatre artist John Juliani.

⁵³ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds. F-197-4-0-0-10. Photo of Dan Wagoner master class.

⁵⁴ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds. F-197-4-0-0-3. "Concert Mixture Served at SFU" by Max Wyman. No date.



10 Still of Iris Garland in *Hurrah*, film by John Juliani.⁵⁵

This interdisciplinary, experimental energy was felt by the student body as many who had never had any dance training were joining Garland's workshops and taking up their newfound passion. While SFU students — many with no prior dance training — were busy creating new dance works, renowned choreographers from New York were visiting to share their unique style in feature performances and inspire the next generation in workshops and masterclasses. Invited by Iris Garland and administrator Nini Baird, modern dance heavyweights such as Martha Graham, Yvonne Rainer, Alwin Nikolais, Paul Taylor and Merce Cunningham all presented their work at SFU. Master classes with visiting artists drew students from the university as well as the broader community. Sometimes the classes were led by recognizable leaders of modern dance, and other times they would be with the next generation of modern dancers who had studied with the greats. For example, a class led by Dan Wagoner, a choreographer who danced with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor, filled the stage of the SFU Theatre in 1975. The lasting influence of these visits is reflected in the current dance program where many faculty teach modern dance styles pioneered by these artists. "Iris's influence was, I think, fundamental," explains Wyman. "She brought in all kinds of people from New York who showed our local people, our local students and people who were interested in the arts, that there were new ideas to be looked at. Nikolai worked a lot with improvisation and that was a big influence. [...] There was a sense of people able to make a contribution to what was going on themselves as artists."⁵⁶ Hunter also remembers the strong influence of New York based modern dance at SFU:

⁵⁵ Juliani, John. *Hurrah*. 1969

⁵⁶ Wyman, Max. Quoted in *Coming Out of Chaos*, Chapter 1: Before Chaos.
<https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>

So here I am, heavily involved in the dance programme as opposed to university, before it was a credited programme. They were called workshops, and they were at later in the day at four or five o'clock. It was a very active, thrilling place to be, very much driven and influenced by the Alwin Nikolai and Murray Lewis school from New York, which was based a lot on composition and people creating their own work, choreographing. It was a very accessible form for people who, like myself and Karen and Savannah, did not have training as children -- to be able to enter the form and to quite quickly be able to be dancing and creating.⁵⁷

Phyllis Lamhut, a disciple of Nikolais, brought her company from New York to perform at SFU. "I loved it up there," says Lamhut. "I just loved the university, everybody was really very nice, I love the area. I was going to buy a house," she laughs. "I just thought the university was refreshing."⁵⁸ In 1973, Lamhut returned to teach a four-week workshop that was intended to, as it says in a press release, "awaken the senses in relation to motion and to stimulate through creative effort."⁵⁹

In February 1966, the Merce Cunningham Company was presented by the Centre along with a public lecture by composer John Cage whose music accompanied Cunningham's works. As the brochure for the event says, "The Merce Cunningham Company stands at the apex of experimental dance, seeking to relate it to the other arts in what has been sometimes referred to as an absolute theatre of the future."⁶⁰ In 1969, Garland's plan to bring Cunningham to campus for a four-week summer residency fell through due to lack of funding. The plan was to have Cunningham set up in the SFU Theatre and hold classes and lecture-demonstrations, present performances, and develop choreography. As Wyman explains in a Vancouver Sun article, an original proposal estimated the cost of the visit at \$68,000 but after the Canada Council turned it down, the proposal was revised to \$40,000, with Cunningham's company paying for their own travel. "Certainly \$40,000 is a big bundle of money to find. But the opportunity it would provide is a big one, too," says Wyman.⁶¹ Cunningham's visit would have been a welcome taste of current modern dance to infuse the local dance scene with new influences. But the Canada Council felt that their funding should go to Canadian companies first. Garland was also a supporter of local and national dance companies, many of whom presented their works at SFU, including Vancouver's Paula Ross Dance Company, Toronto Dance Theatre, and Entre Six. Folk and classical dance was also represented with visits from the Cosmopolitan Folk Dance Ensemble, Chetna and Usha

⁵⁷ Hunter, Terry. Quoted in *Coming Out of Chaos*. Chapter 1: Before Chaos. <https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>

⁵⁸ Interview with Phyllis Lamhut, March 27, 2023.

⁵⁹ Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds. F-109-7-3-0-8. News Release June 20, 1973.

⁶⁰ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-4-0-0-3. Merce Cunningham performance brochure. 8 February 1966.

⁶¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-1. "Save This Dance For Yourself--But Hurry" by Max Wyman. *The Vancouver Sun*. 28 March 1969.

Thakore (classical Indian dance), Teo and Isabel Morca (flamenco).⁶² In 1970, the Don Redlich Dance Company brought *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* to the SFU Theatre. As Wyman describes, “It follows the contemporary trend toward deliberate audience bewilderment and hyper-stimulation through the frantic juxtaposition of multiple images in multiple media.” It’s the type of company that continued to bring avant-garde work not only to SFU but to the broader dance community in the city. “Wednesday night’s performance by the Don Redlich company was an important event in local dance circles,” said Wyman, ” — and Iris Garland and the SFU dance department should be congratulated for arranging his visit.”⁶³ In 1976, the dance program hosted masterclasses by Entre-Six and members of the Martha Graham Dance Company, and in June of that year the intensive dance residency program featured Judy Jarvis and Danny Grossman as guest teachers.⁶⁴ All of these visiting artists were not only inspirational for the students at SFU, but their performances were also contributing to building an audience for dance in the city.

Garland’s own choreography, however, was not so experimental. Her works tended to draw from traditional American modern dance styles such as those pioneered by Graham and Cunningham. As Wyman says in a 1984 review, “Unlike many of the graduates of her dance program at Simon Fraser University, graduates whose work gives the Vancouver dance scene much of its current air of rude and glowing health, Garland is by no means in the vanguard of choreographic experiment.” This, however, did not hamper the work’s relevance or impact:

The current evening of live works at the Firehall Theatre runs from the 1981 work, *Miniatures*, a warm and graceful frolic, through last year’s *Labyrinth* (with Santa Aloi, one of the most absorbing dancers in Canada, drawing us deep into the heart of its darkness), to the new *Notes*.

This trio for two women and a man is actually a collaboration based on the dreams of the dancers, with Garland fashioning the interweaving of the images.

The piece is filled with universal images of power, dependence/independence, male-female relationship, which Garland manipulates and juxtaposes with a sure hand, setting the images in a lean and languorous swirl of movement.⁶⁵

A constant feature of Garland’s works was her collaborative choreographic process with the dancers. In this case, using their dreams as the basis for her imagery and likely working with them to create the movement. Although Garland didn’t appear on stage often, when she did she was amazing and certainly had charisma, describes Aloi.⁶⁶

⁶² Simon Fraser University Archives. *Public Programs*. F-109-7-1-0-9.

⁶³ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-4-0-0-3. “Revolution Sweeps Through Dance” by Max Wyman. *The Vancouver Sun*. 29 January 1970.

⁶⁴ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-3. *Dance in Canada Winter 1976*.

⁶⁵ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-3-0-0-2. “Garland weaves magic through the maze” by Max Wyman. *The Province*. June 5, 1984.

⁶⁶ Conversation with Santa Aloi. 18 July 2023.

Chapter 5. Marriage

July 23, 1971

Dear

I never expected to be sending out an announcement such as the enclosed, but life is full of surprises.

Needless to say, it was a happy occasion for all concerned as I like Jim and he has my complete approval. To give you a little background on the groom — he was born in Bainbridge, New York; lived there until almost 18; then moved to Tampa, Florida, where he attended the University of South Florida; on graduation he went into the Peace Corps which took him to various countries in South America. He is an artist, has a studio, and works hard at his painting. His work is abstract and has sold a number of paintings locally. He also has a full time appointment at Simon Fraser University and bears the title “Curator/Director – Exhibitions” He purchases all of the art works for the university and mounts all their exhibitions. Iris met him at the university when he first came from the States (about 2-1/2 years ago) and they became good friends.

The wedding was a civil ceremony after which we had a luncheon at Trader Vic’s in the Bayshore Hotel in Vancouver. It is a beautiful place with a marvellous view. After the luncheon we went back to the house and had a reception for more than 50 people. The guests were mostly their colleagues at the University. The weather was perfect and we all spilled out into the garden. They got some lovely gifts. Jim’s friends gave him art objects and Iris’ friends wonderful things for the kitchen.

Thought you would like to have those details.

Sincerely,⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-2. Letter about wedding. 23 July 1971.



II Garland and Felter on their wedding day.

Garland and Felter were married on July 16, 1971. The letter above sharing the details of their wedding was written by Garland’s mother to send along with a wedding announcement to their relatives in Chicago. Felter says that Garland was quite upset about the way the letter begins — “I never expected to be sending out an announcement such as the enclosed.” By this time, Garland’s mother had also moved to Vancouver where she spent her last few years before cancer took her life in 1973.

Immigrating to Canada from the United States, Garland and Felter had similar backgrounds and were both creative, intellectual people who had already found some success but were looking for something more. “They were both very much matched that way, coming from fairly humble backgrounds but with great personal capacity for growth,” says Fox. “Some people have that seed and they will grow no matter where you put them.”⁶⁹ They each came to SFU with an opportunity to reinvent themselves, evolving away from their pasts and looking to the future with hope and optimism. “They did it exquisitely, with a great deal of energy and ambition,” says Fox.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Photo courtesy of Jim Felter.

⁶⁹ Interview with Mary Fox. March 30, 2023.

⁷⁰ Interview with Mary Fox. March 30, 2023.

Felter joined SFU in January 1969, and he met Garland on his first day of work. “Iris had been on a sabbatical in London, England for six months,” he says. “The revolution at the university happened in the fall of ’68 when the students liberated the faculty lounge and took over.”⁷¹ The revolution Felter refers to is described in Johnston’s *Radical Campus*: “In the late spring of 1968, in a spontaneous lunch-time action led by a pregnant young woman looking for a place to sit, a group of students barged into the faculty lounge and briefly liberated it. A partition put up by the administration to restrict access did not last long; students knocked it down during a visit to SFU by the black civil rights leader Stokely Carmichael, and they renamed the area the workers’ canteen. Faculty did not get their lounge back, although a vote organized in 1970 showed that many still wanted it.”⁷² Garland had missed the excitement while she was in London and only read about it in the newspaper, says Felter. “She was in shock. She was standing in the faculty lounge seeing all these hippies and their bare feet thinking ‘what’s happened here?’ She had this incredulous look on her face, and she was dressed in a Carnaby Street outfit, which she had just bought, and she was tall. She was just looking around and I saw her, and I thought, ‘Oh, she looks interesting, I’ll chat with her.’ We were in line to get coffee and started chatting and sat down and discovered we were in the same department, and the rest is history.”⁷³

Garland and Felter quickly became good friends and then much more, although Felter says they decided to keep their relationship secret for a while — “I always thought it was frowned upon for people in the same department to have affairs,” he says. It didn’t take long for things to progress as Garland was eager to buy a house after her experience of renting an apartment in London. She and Felter went looking at houses in West Vancouver. “Where I was living on Capitol Hill, in the basement of a house, they sold the house and told me I had to move,” says Felter. “I said, oh dear, what am I going to do? They said, well, you stay so long at Iris’s, you might as well move in with her.” As Felter remembers it, they were living together within a year of meeting each other. About a year and a half after that, they were married at the clerk’s office in North Vancouver, with the registrar Tom Ford and his wife as witnesses, along with Nini Baird, Program Manager of the CCA. When Felter decided to propose, he didn’t want to waste any time. “I proposed on Sunday and I got the licence for Thursday. I said if I’m going to do this, do it now. I’m not going to have a long engagement.” Although the ceremony was a modest affair, Baird took the wedding party out for lunch at the Bayshore Hotel and they had a reception and party at their house in West Vancouver. The photo above is the only one taken that day. “The neighbours were so appalled that nobody had a camera that they ran home and got a camera and came over and took our picture,” says Felter.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

⁷² Johnston, Hugh. *Radical Campus*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2005. 141.

⁷³ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

⁷⁴ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.



12Felter and Garland in Garland's MGB convertible on Burnaby Mountain.

Garland became accustomed to wearing beautiful clothing and visiting her hairstylist at Park Royal mall religiously every five weeks. “Her wardrobe was quite a sight and she could wear these incredible outfits,” says Fox, “and she would have intentionally dressed a certain way every day.” Garland and Felter would drive to campus from their home in West Vancouver, most days in their own vehicles to accommodate their different schedules — she in her white MGB convertible and he in his Triumph Spitfire roadster. “Somebody said we were the power couple in the area,” laughs Felter. They loved the little house that Garland had bought at the foot of Sentinel Hill, but Felter needed a studio space, and they needed a two-car garage for their sports cars. They bought a house together on West Vancouver’s Rosebery Avenue, with a beautiful backyard full of trees and marvellous view over to Vancouver Island, where they lived for the rest of Garland’s life.⁷⁵ Today, the homes on this street sell for millions.

“A household of two creative people has a whole different energy,” says Mary Fox who was first a friend of Felter’s then also became very close with Garland. She describes the way their house was arranged with a physical separation of their workspaces: Felter’s studio was above the garage and Garland’s office at the back of the house, packed with books and featuring a home computer which was uncommon at the time. “It was a very busy, used office, and it was very dark and very womb-like almost. It was an intellectual space,” says Fox. “I used to go over with my boyfriend, later husband, just to watch movies, and they were very technologically advanced. We would go over and they would get a pizza and we’d watch a movie on Friday nights after the work week. They both had this fascination with keeping up with the latest technology, like the Beta system where you could watch movies at home — people weren’t doing that yet, they were ahead.”

⁷⁵ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

“I think they tended to engage with very different worlds, and they respected that,” says Fox. “They were both very self-contained in their creative worlds. They absolutely adored each other, and they seemed to be way ahead in terms of how they figured out how you live together as a man and a woman and have your separate interests and conduct those and have a marriage at the same time. They just seemed to be operating in a whole new dimension. There was no sense of consistent roles that were assumed.”⁷⁶ Fox describes Garland as an incredible cook, but says the couple frequently ate takeout due to their busy workloads and schedules. They did like to entertain friends at their home, hosting frequent dinner parties. “The house was such that you could have 20 or 30 people,” says Fox. “They had incredible parties with artists and movie people; Vancouver was like that—those circles mingled quite a bit. The communities were smaller and more integrated.” Baird confirms this sense of a community spirit among those in the arts: “We were all in and out of each other’s lives all the time. We were more a collective than individual relationships.”⁷⁷

Garland and Felter discussed having children of their own over the years, but, as Felter says, he never had a desire for children and Garland was not enthusiastic about being a mother. “Sometime in her 50s, after hearing about the difficulties friends were having with their children,” says Felter, “she commented that she was ‘glad’ that we never had a child.”⁷⁸ Their good friend Mary Fox describes them as enjoying spending time with children, but not wanting their own. Like people who enjoy walking your dog, but don’t want one of their own, says Fox. They were very intentional about everything they did. Garland liked her circumstances and wanted to keep her lifestyle the way it was, says Fox. The only other member of their household was a cat, who would eat out of dish sitting on the front page of the New York Times. Their last cat, Sebastian, lived for 23 years.⁷⁹

Their partnership was strong and loving, yet could have an air of competition, describes Fox. She recalls their banter being a game of who could say something more important or who could outsmart the other. But this was all done with the utmost respect and admiration. They supported each other in their work, gave each other the space they needed to pursue their passions, and enjoyed their time together, including secluded summers on Cortes Island and frequent travels to South America. Fox describes their place on Cortes as a shack that was out of character with their usual lifestyle, but they loved the location, which allowed them to have space and time to just be with each other and their individual creative thoughts.⁸⁰ When Garland passed away in 2002, they had been married for 31 years. As Felter says in an email to the SFU retirees’ forum:

It is Spring time in South America and soon to be Summer. I will be leaving for a four-month tour of Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil at the end of the month, spending Christmas with my Ecuadorian

⁷⁶ Interview with Mary Fox. March 30, 2023.

⁷⁷ Interview with Nini Baird. June 23, 2023.

⁷⁸ Email from Jim Felter, April 14, 2023.

⁷⁹ Interview with Mary Fox. March 30, 2023.

⁸⁰ Interview with Mary Fox. March 30, 2023.

friends and New Year's on Easter Island. I will return on or around April Fool's Day, hopefully refreshed, renewed and ready to face the future without my wife of 31 years beside me. She will always be within me.⁸¹

⁸¹ Felter, Jim. "Sad News: Iris Garland." Email to retirees-forum@sfu.ca. November 4, 2002.

Chapter 6. Major

September 1973 - Proposed Dance Major

Introduction

Simon Fraser University desperately needs a dance major. It needs a dance major because the extra-curricular dance workshops in the Arts Centre have created an interest that cannot be pursued in depth without a credit program. Therefore, we are losing numbers of students to other Universities. (Three former students have transferred to York University just this summer). The real tragedy is that we have lost students who, through circumstances cannot go elsewhere, but their vital interest in dance prevents them from continuing their studies in other majors.

[...]

What has happened to the promised Fine and Performing Arts Department? Why has this University encouraged “instant” Criminology and Computer Science Departments while Fine and Performing Arts remains a huge gaping hole in the University Curricula? Is it because the Academic Planning Committee in adhering to the “Great Man Theory” has ignored the well-paid talent at its finger tips?

[...]

The proposal is made to circumvent the development of random courses that are springing up in the Faculty of General Studies to supposedly serve music and visual arts. There is also a suggestion that the Arts Centre non-credit workshops be converted to credit. In my opinion, this fragmentary approach is disastrous to any kind of meaningful program in the arts for committed students.⁸²

Garland, a “fierce defender and advocate for dance,”⁸³ was always looking for the latest developments in modern dance and dance education while thinking of ways they could be implemented at SFU. Sometimes they were practical things, such as getting a proper dance floor in the theatre, and sometimes they were much more lofty goals or ideas. She made a point of getting involved in committees where she could exert her influence; for example, in the 1966-67 year, she served on the General Education Committee, which was responsible for establishing non-credit courses broadly across the university.⁸⁴ In preparation for her sabbatical in 1968-69, she wrote a memo to Patrick Lyndon and Steve Stratton, directors, respectively, of the CCA and the Physical Development Centre. She had just returned from modern dance conference at the University of Alberta and was full of ideas for how SFU could improve their dance area. Her main concern is who will take over the dance area during her time away. She notes that the professional dancers she has talked to are not interested in long-term contracts,

⁸² Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-4-0-0-1. “Proposed Dance Major” by Iris Garland. September 1973.

⁸³ Interview with Nini Baird, June 23, 2023.

⁸⁴ Interview with Nini Baird. June 23, 2023.

and they would be unlikely to accept a position as an artistic associate for a semester or two.

The only people I can envision coming on as associates, would be young, inexperienced dance majors straight out of university. A minimum of two semesters would be necessary to make it worth their while. I would not be too happy having an inexperienced person handling the Dance program during my research semesters. This is a problem that must be solved shortly if we wish dance to continue growing at the rate of the other arts (which all have two residents plus associates).

It is preferable to have guest professional artists come for short term workshops when there is another full time dance person to smooth the way and make the necessary arrangements. Otherwise, this task will fall upon other Centre staff.⁸⁵

Her confidence in her leadership of the dance area and protection of its future direction are evident — she doesn't want someone coming along and undoing any of her progress or taking the program in a new direction she doesn't approve of while she's away, nor does she want someone else from outside the dance area handling visiting artists. Also impressive is her candor and conviction that dance is an art form deserving of equal treatment in the CCA, with more staff resources and funding. She also mentions that forward looking universities in the United States are inviting leading dance companies for month-long residencies — for example the Alwin Nikolai Company at the University of South Florida. She explains that a grant covered half of the total expense and the university covered \$20,000. It's clear that Garland was interested in doing the same at SFU. Along with Baird (who began as publicity coordinator for the CCA in 1966 before quickly moving up to become the director by 1973), she would go on to invite many prominent modern dance icons to campus for residencies, master classes, and performances. Two things she notes SFU is already doing well are more performing than other universities and having dance more closely aligned with the arts rather than solely physical education. This shift to categorizing dance as an art form and not recreation or physical fitness was gradual, but SFU had the advantage of Garland leading the way and advocating for dance to have a dedicated program. In 1966, only a year after arriving at SFU, Garland was promoted from instructor to Assistant Professor and is described as an outstanding teacher. "She possesses the confidence, professional skill and enthusiasm that are prerequisites of good teaching."⁸⁶ Glen Kirchner, the head of the Physical Development Centre also expresses concern that the university could lose Garland: "I feel like so many other Department Heads, that if her promotion is turned down, we may very well lose Miss Garland to another institution. This is in no way a threat, but a simple fact, that people of this caliber are in great demand not only in Canada, but also in the United States."⁸⁷ Garland was teaching recreational dance and aquatics programs while working

⁸⁵ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Memo from Iris Garland to Patrick Lyndon and Steve Stratton. September 3, 1968.

⁸⁶ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Letter from Dr. Kirchner to Faculty of Education Promotion Committee. April 5, 1966

⁸⁷ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Letter from Dr. Kirchner to Faculty of Education Promotion Committee. April 5, 1966

with a group of students in her dance workshop. She wrote a memo to the head of her department describing her concern for dance at the university being in a “precarious position.” She recommends, as the only full-time person teaching dance at the university, that dance be moved to the Centre for Communications and the Arts:

Dance is in the unique position of being a performing art as well as a physical activity with contributes to the development of a sound body. The field of physical education was the first to recognize the value of dance in education and incorporated it into the university curriculum in North America. Thus, it was logical that the Physical Development Centre at Simon Fraser University included dance as an area in its general education and proposed professional program.

However, dance as an art, cannot be completely nourished in the Physical Development Centre. It requires the atmosphere of the theatre, the stimulation of the other arts, and the status of association with the other art forms.⁸⁸

Many North American universities, explains Garland, had recently made this change within their administrative structures to move dance from physical education to the fine arts (she cites UCLA and NYU). Although she describes the close like that had been built between the two centres at SFU through performances, visits by companies such as The Merce Cunningham Company, and collaboration in course content, she is concerned that “this tacit link may serve to inhibit or at least complicate the general growth of dance at Simon Fraser University.” Among her concerns is the lack of clarity for administrative duties related to arranging guest artist visits and hiring artists in residence. She also worries that it is unsustainable to have an unofficial agreement for a faculty member of the Physical Development Centre to be contributing their time to the CCA based on decisions of individual administrators. “In view of the desired growth of dance as an art form this latter problem is likely to become greater as the University grows,” she says. “Thus far it has been a mutually satisfactory arrangement, but University personnel and whims change. This leaves dance in a precarious position.” She proposes that the solution is to make her position a joint appointment in the Physical Development Centre and the Communications Centre in order to maintain the relationship between dance as a physical activity and dance as an art. “Certainly such forms of dance as folk, square, and ballroom performed for recreational purposes belong in the Physical Development Centre,” writes Garland. “Elementary school educational dance also is basically within the province of the Physical Development Centre. However, dance as an art form (contemporary dance, ballet, ethnic theatre dance) would be growing in its proper environment; the Theatre.”⁸⁹

Garland was granted a joint appointment in both centres in order to better reflect her work in the early years of the university, but in 1970 her position moved back to the Physical Development Centre full time as a reorganization of the CCA meant faculty

⁸⁸ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Memo from Iris Garland to Glenn Kirchner. 13 September, 1966.

⁸⁹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Memo from Iris Garland to Glenn Kirchner. 13 September, 1966.

appointed to that department were ineligible for tenure. Garland had been granted tenure in 1969 and continued to advocate for more dance courses and opportunities for her students to study dance in a formal capacity at the university. It took time for the university to work through some early growing pains and reorganize some disciplines into new departments. As Mallinson explains in his essay:

The third innovative concept—the structure of the Faculty of Education—also gave way to new realities and changed priorities. The demands of space and time occasioned by the regular course offerings did not fit comfortably into the much more fluid structure intended for the Faculty; the overlapping disjunctures between the school and University timetabling also made it increasingly difficult to keep both in tandem. Then, of course, there were increasingly incompatible visions, priorities and demands which led first to the Dean’s abrupt resignation and ultimately to the dissolution of the original concept of the Faculty in 1970. (Ironically, President McTaggart-Cowan had once remarked that whatever remained after five years of the University’s inception would probably endure.) Suffice to say that the differing philosophies made the reorganization of the Faculty inevitable.⁹⁰

The Department of Kinesiology and the Program for Athletics and Recreation replaced the Centre for Physical Development, while the Centre for Communication and the Arts became the Department of Communication and the Centre for the Arts. Garland had long advocated that dance belonged in the CCA. Finally, after this reorganization of the Faculty of Education, it was moved to the new Centre for the Arts in 1970. By 1971, the senate had decided that the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies would have a new Department of Fine and Performing Arts, but it took a few more years before it was up and running. During these years when the university was considering what to do with its arts offerings, Garland was a proponent of studio work being given academic credit. A modernist debate about technique versus pure creativity was playing out as the department struggled to settle on what type of courses would be counted for credit. The first director of the department, Evan Alderson, said that the department was founded during a passing “modernist moment” — what began as a grand interdisciplinary vision became, in practicality, a department offering separate programs in each artistic discipline.⁹¹ This debate has never been completely settled and haunts the School for the Contemporary Arts to this day.

In the 1972-73 academic year, Garland undertook the responsibilities of running the dance workshops and directing the spring dance production as her “research” interest in Kinesiology. A letter from Baird, by that time Director of the CCA, outlines the hours required to teach two dance workshops and lead a performing group for a production in spring 1973. Although the duties come without extra remuneration, Baird explains that Garland can hire an assistant.

A 1972 memo to Garland from Vice President Academic Wilson discussing her “possible participation” within the CCA dance program refers to the “Fine Arts dilemma”

⁹⁰ Simon Fraser University Archives. Allan B. Cunningham fonds, F-70-2-0-0-8. “Brave New University” by Thomas J. Mallinson. No Date. 10.

⁹¹ Johnston, Hugh. *Radical Campus*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2005. 247.

as the university had still not formalized a fine arts department.⁹² In the meantime, Garland maintained a relationship with the CCA, teaching workshops, leading the dance production, and advising on dance residencies and events. This dilemma coloured the coming years and left the arts at a disadvantage for some time. As Alana Gerecke explains:

From the beginning, SFU had a complicated relationship with its fine and performing arts program: on one hand, the university was accommodating, encouraging and respectful, and yet, as Alderson puts it, “the arts were subject to academic scorn—as they always are.” [...] While SFU’s academic program was taking shape in the early seventies, there was a clear tension between the credit and non-credit, or academic and “alternative”, approaches to the arts. Many of the artists involved pushed to maintain an element of the original organizational structure; they wanted to preserve a program outside the strictures of the university even as a parallel for-credit program developed. [...] With the development of an academic arts program, the art produced in the Centre “merged with the mainstream activity of the University.” As the fine and performing arts morphed into academic programs, much of their original volatility subsides and many of the artists involved in the original iteration of the Centre extracted themselves from the increasingly institutional environment at SFU.⁹³

Garland’s frustration at the university administration and bureaucracy is clear in the introduction to her proposal for a dance major. Her 14-page document lays out a clear rationale and plan for a dance major program, including considerations for new personnel, courses, space, and budget. At the time, York University was the only Canadian institution to have a dance department, and many students from the west coast were forced to choose between pursuing other programs locally or relocating across the country. Garland felt strongly that SFU needed its own credit program that would give students interested in dance a pathway to pursue it academically. “Becoming a credit program was an important step,” says Jamieson. “It got a lot of people engaged and involved because for a lot of people they’re not going to take a course of they’re not going to get any credit. So, it was huge; it was important for Vancouver to have that degree program in dance. Then we would have people come to take the program and end up staying to become part of the dance scene in Vancouver and contribute to it.”⁹⁴

In a 1974 profile of Garland for SFU’s internal magazine, *Comment*, publicist Mary Trainer described her accomplishments: “Iris Garland is rightfully a very proud woman. In less than 10 years she has cultivated dance at Simon Fraser University into one of the most popular art forms on campus. Her student dance performances, which always attract full theatres, are a showpiece for the Centre for Communications and the

⁹² Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-3. Memo from Vice President Academic Wilson to Iris Garland. 17 March, 1972.

⁹³ Gerecke, Alana. “Dance as ‘Lead card’ in the Development of Simon Fraser University’s Fine and Performing Arts.” *Renegade Bodies*. Eds. Allana C. Lindgren and Kaija Pepper. Dance Collection Danse: 2012. 145.

⁹⁴ Interview with Karen Jamieson. October 27, 2022.

Arts. And, although her workshops are non-credit, their calibre is extremely high.”⁹⁵ Dance at SFU went from an art form that wasn’t initially included in the CCA, with Garland fighting for rehearsal space, to one that made a name for the university. She was not only an advocate for dance, but for her own career and position within the university. In 1973, she requests a higher salary step increase due to her many contributions to the CCA: “My work in the Arts Centre has been under-rated both as to time and value to the University community and the community at large. I would like to point out that this work is done above and beyond a normal teaching load in the Kinesiology Department.” She goes on to explain that the norm would be to mount one dance production per year, whereas she has done two all while choreographing the opera *Dido and Aeneas*. “I do all these extra things because I want to and have volunteered in every case to take on all of these various projects,” she says. “However, I do not expect this to be considered average for myself as at some point energy must be recouped by a slightly lesser load. It would then be unfair to be rated below average.”⁹⁶ When she is promoted from Assistant to Associate professor, she responds to the committee’s recommendation to set the record straight by explaining her work with graduate students who are outside of her Kinesiology department:

I find it very difficult to ‘toot my own horn’ (although I certainly seem to be doing it more lately!), but having been the only faculty member in my field for so long it seems very few other faculty members are aware of exactly what I do. I receive many letters from prospective graduate students and I always refer them to Universities that have graduate programs in dance (that seems only fair to the student). Nevertheless, when students appear on my doorstep and want to be a committed professional, I do the best I can.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Simon Fraser University Archives. University Communications fonds, F-61-4-3-0-5. “Take a bow, Iris Garland” by Mary Trainer. *Comment*. October 1974.

⁹⁶ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Memo from Iris Garland to Dean Brown. 12 February 1973.

⁹⁷ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-3-0-1. Letter from Iris Garland to Dean Brown. 22 January 1975.

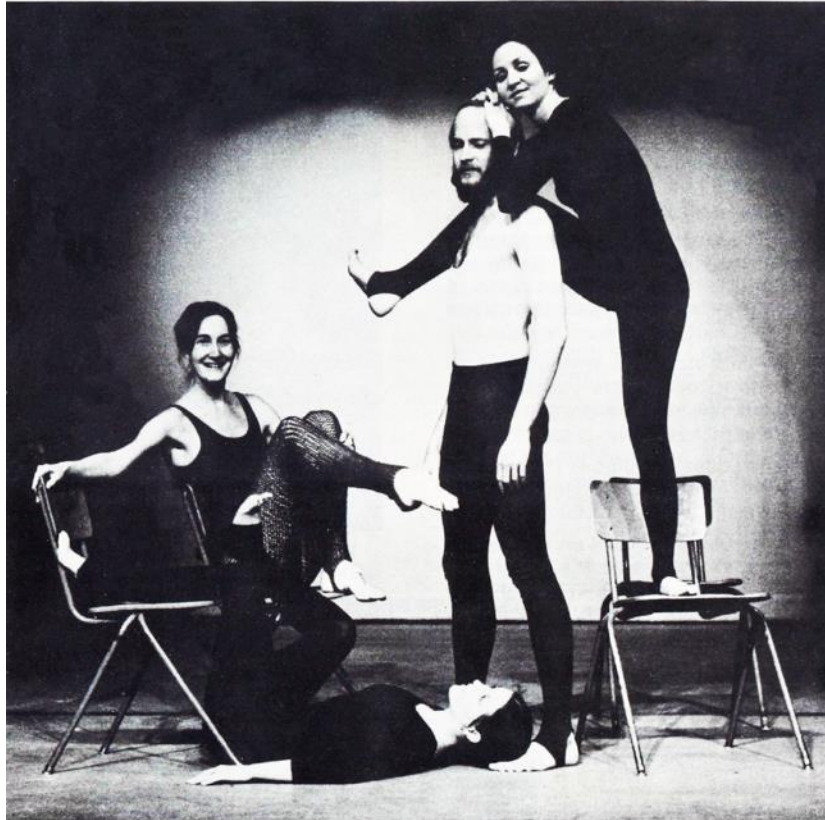


Photo: Roy Allen

Iris Garland (left) with members of the Burnaby Mountain Dance/Company.

13 Iris Garland and members of the Burnaby Mountain Dance Company. From an article by Mary Trainer in Comment magazine, 1974.⁹⁸

A Vancouver Ballet Society newsletter in September 1976 announces the new dance minor program to begin the following year:

The Dance Programme at S.F.U. has moved to the newly formed centre for the Arts which incorporates credit programmes, non-credit workshops, and public events. Ms. Santa Aloï, a former member of the Gus Solomons Dance Company has recently been appointed Assistant Professor-Dance. She joins Iris Garland, Karen Rimmer, and Savannah Walling in teaching the Contemporary Dance Programme. A Dance Minor is in the works for September 1977.⁹⁹

Finally, in 1979, Garland's dream of a degree program came to fruition with plans to welcome the first dance degree students in September 1980. As Garland wrote in her article, "Dance in the university...no longer a frill!" for *VanDance* in 1979, dance had "finally scaled the hallowed halls of academia in British Columbia." By that time, Concordia University and the University of Waterloo joined York University as the only other Canadian universities offering dance degrees. "The trend augers well for the art as

⁹⁸ Simon Fraser University Archives. University Communications fonds, F-61-4-3-0-5. "Take a bow, Iris Garland" by Mary Trainer. *Comment*. October 1974.

⁹⁹ Simon Fraser University Archives. University Communications fonds, F-197-1-1-0-3. "Dance News from Simon Fraser University." By Vancouver Ballet Society. September 1976.

it broadens the scope of study for the prospective artist that is not readily available in an isolated studio or even conservatory situation.”¹⁰⁰ Garland explained that focus of the program “will be dance as a performing art. The aim of the Program is to provide a basic core of training in contemporary dance technique, improvisation, composition, and production. Academic courses in history, aesthetics, and criticism of the arts will be integrated into the program, along with experience in ballet and the other art forms, such as film, theatre, music, and visual arts.”¹⁰¹ Garland had succeeded in building a brand new academic program that brought dance out of physical education and into an interdisciplinary arts department. “For so long in Western society, dance was considered frivolous nothingness,” says Jamieson. “Iris getting it into a degree programme was a major accomplishment. She was determined and so dedicated to dance; she made a contribution and should be recognized.”¹⁰²

Dance, no longer considered a frivolous pastime, had finally become a serious academic program amidst an interdisciplinary school that offered dance students the opportunity to study a broad range of electives. It didn’t take long for SFU’s dance program to build a reputation. In 1988, Raewyn White wrote in *VanDance* that SFU’s dance students “have coloured the Vancouver dance scene with bold, brash, bizarre and beautiful multimedia works. They've enlarged the possibilities of dance through their use of text and film; they've shattered expectations through the places they've chosen to perform and their choices of themes and movement vocabularies; and they've brought a new excitement to dance viewing through their disregard of the conventions.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-3. “Dance in the University...No Longer a Frill!” by Iris Garland. *VanDance*. December 1979.

¹⁰¹ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-3. “Dance in the university...no longer a frill!” by Iris Garland. *VanDance*. December 1979.

¹⁰² Interview with Karen Jamieson. October 27, 2022.

¹⁰³ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-4-0-0-3. “Developing Creative Dancemakers.” by Raewyn White. *Vandance*. 1988.

Chapter 7. Memory

I released Iris's ashes into the air and the sea, as was her wish, on Saturday November 2, 2002 between 2pm and 2:15pm, PST at NL 49 19 48.6, LW 123 22 223 in the Gulf of Georgia. This location will be forever known to us as "Iris' Spot". The sun was shining, the air was brisk, but not cold, the sea was a gentle rolling calm as was the breeze. I was accompanied on this journey by a few close family friends without whom I could not have carried out this mission. I will be forever grateful to them for their comfort and assistance during this period of my life, as I am to all of you for your thoughts, your cards, your e-mails, etc. I hope many of you will be able to attend the Festival/Celebration of Iris' life with me on April 27th. This celebration will launch a week of dance events at The Dance Centre in Vancouver to commemorate International Dance Day 2003.¹⁰⁴



14A garland of irises to mark Iris' Spot where her ashes were spread.¹⁰⁵

When Felter told Fox that Garland's health was declining, she came down to Vancouver from the Yukon where she was living at the time and spent some time with her. They went down to the beach and sat in the shade people watching. Garland was dressed elegantly in a beautiful dress, sun hat and heels, looking glamorous. Fox told her about her son's health troubles and the difficulties they were having, and Garland said, "You've got to keep yourself in all of this. You have to come out of this with who you are intact. I want you to promise me you're going to do that." Fox thinks about this conversation often and says it has sustained her over the years. "I always go back to that

¹⁰⁴ Felter, Jim. "Sad News: Iris Garland." Email to retirees-forum@sfu.ca. November 4, 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Photo courtesy of Jim Felter.

when I begin to question what I'm doing. She really gave me a strong sense of self." This feminist conviction that one must not lose themselves in motherhood or any other endeavour seems to have been important to Garland, and she remained a strong advocate for both her own career advancement and the advancement of the dance program more generally. Garland knew this visit with Fox was the last time they would see each other. "When I left, she said 'I want to come to the door, I want to see you as long as I can.'"



15 Watercolour portrait of Iris Garland by Jeannie Kamins, 1995.¹⁰⁶

Aside from all of Garland's contributions in creating the SFU dance program and mentoring countless students, her service to the dance community included administrative roles in organizations such as Dance in Canada. She was president of the association in 1978 and a member of the steering committee for that year's national conference which was held in Vancouver. In August 1986, their 14th annual conference, "Dance on Track" was in Vancouver in conjunction with Expo 86, held at UBC, and Garland served as the chair of the daily programming committee.¹⁰⁷ Her course 'Dancing in Cyberspace: Creating with the Virtual Body' was ahead of its time and attracted

¹⁰⁶ Kamins, Jeannie. Iris Garland. Watercolour, 1995. Image courtesy of Jim Felter.

¹⁰⁷ Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-3. "Dance in Canada Newsletter" Dance in Canada. April 1986.

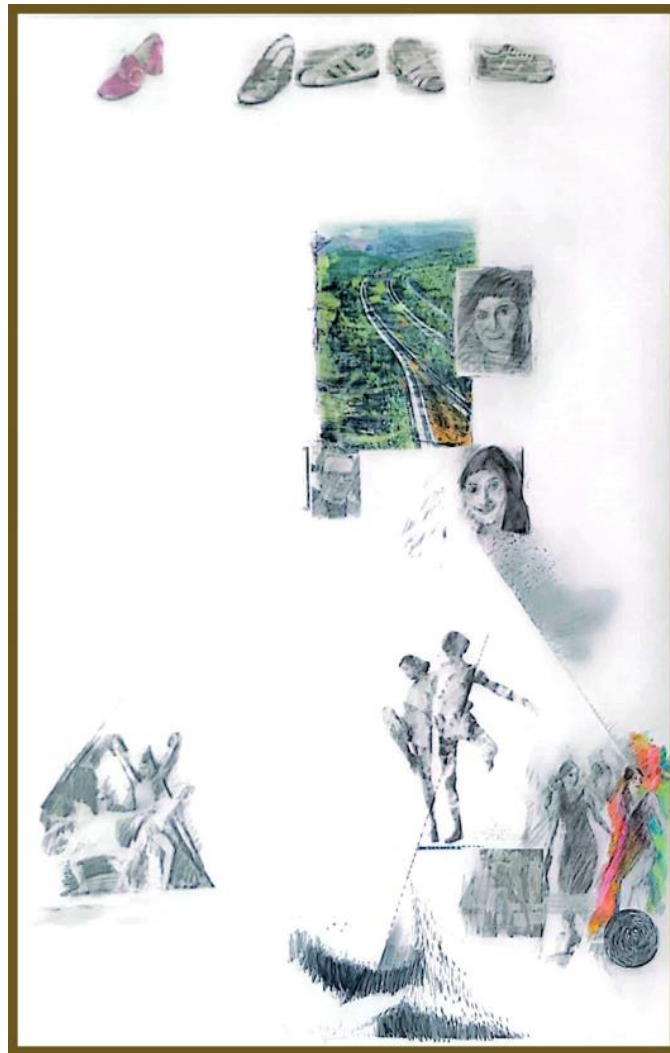
international interest, while her work with LifeForms computer software furthered the possibilities of integrating digital technology with choreography. Later in life, Garland took up flamenco and studied the history of Spanish modern dancer Tortola Valencia, writing a biography of her that was edited by Fox and published posthumously.



16Iris Garland and Lifeforms. Oil painting by Jeannie Kamins, 2003.¹⁰⁸

It's hard to imagine how many lives must have been influenced by Garland as a teacher, choreographer, and researcher. And she continues to impact the lives of dance artists in the community through awards established in her name. Felter established the Iris Garland Emerging Choreographer Award at Vancouver's Scotiabank Dance Centre to support young dance artists and keep Garland's legacy alive. The award provides \$5,000 every two years to a senior dance student or emerging dance artist to assist with the costs of presenting their original work. The award's recipients to date are Amber Funk Barton (2005), Chengxin Wei (2007), Sara Coffin (2009), Shannon Moreno (2011) Vanessa Goodman (2013), Deanna Peters (2015), Julianne Chapple (2017), Jamie Robinson (2019), Shion Skye Carter (2021), and Anya Saugstad (2023). Half of these artists are alumni of the SFU dance program.

¹⁰⁸ Kamins, Jeannie. Iris Garland and LifeForms. Oil painting, 2003. Image courtesy of Jim Felter.



17Iris Garland by Sylvia Tait.¹⁰⁹

Felter also established the Iris Garland Guest Artist fund at SFU to provide financial support for visiting dance artists to engage with the students and faculty of the university's School for the Contemporary Arts. Both of these funds in Garland's memory serve to continue the work she dedicated herself to — providing opportunities for young dancers to enhance their skills, present their choreography, and learn from visiting artists. "What Iris was interested in," says Felter, "and what I'm interested in, is instilling creativity — not to teach only a theory, but to teach how to be creative, and that allows a whole lot of things to happen."¹¹⁰

Garland was a multifaceted, passionate advocate for dance who fought hard to stand up for not only herself and her own interests, but those of the art form. Her determination and resolve are admirable, and her perseverance is inspiring. The cover of the Festival of Life program describes Garland as a "Canadian Dance Pioneer, Instigator,

¹⁰⁹ Tait, Sylvia. Iris Garland. Transfer drawing, 1974. Jim Felter personal collection. Image courtesy of Jim Felter.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Jim Felter. October 24, 2022.

Choreographer, Educator and Friend of Dance.” On July 6, 2003 at Vancouver’s Scotiabank Dance Centre, close friends and colleagues from Vancouver’s dance community came together to remember Iris and celebrate her life and work. Dianne Miller served as the mistress of ceremonies, presiding over a program of videos, dance performances, and speeches. Marla Eist performed Garland’s “Snake Dance,” Santa Aloï performed an excerpt of her own “Bus Stop Reveries,” Karen Jamieson performed an homage to Garland, Flamenco Rosario performed “Bulerias,” and Terry Hunter performed “Drum Mother’s Gift” which he choreographed with partner savannah Walling. Speakers included Mary Elizabeth Manley, Evan Alderson, Tom Calvert, Judith Garay, Cheryl Prophet, Sandy Acton, Lola McLaughlin, Max Wyman, Nini Baird, and husband Jim Felter. A “fiesta” followed the program in the Judith Marcuse studio on the 7th floor of the Dance Centre. The poem, “for Iris” was printed on the back page of the program and read by Rona Murray during the event. It captures Garland’s energy, resilience, and enduring spirit As Phyllis Lamhut says, “She had a strength within her to keep going and a gentle fortitude.”¹¹¹ Fox confirms this as she says, “there was always this wonderment with her, her voice was so vibrant, she would bring such enthusiasm and she just loved dance. When Iris loved something, she loved it a lot. She’s one of those people you never forget; you would have a lasting energy from her, and I’m so glad I can still hold onto it.”

for Iris

I would say you are
rainbow Iridaceae

hope’s plumage
in the sky

iridescent
messenger

hummingbird
of spring

and
you are

tall green long legged Siberian queen
of dance when small winds breathe
tantalizing airs upon your skin

and
you are

blue and purple flags
in the wind
of Himalayan hills

hooting joy

111 Interview with Phyllis Lamhut. March 27, 2023.

undiminished echoing:

here and there
there and here
there

here

by Rona Murray
June 2002¹¹²



18 Iris Garland during a trip to Spain with husband Jim Felter, one of his favourite photos of Garland.¹¹³

¹¹² Murray, Rona. "For Iris." Festival of Life program. The Dance Centre. July 6, 2003.

¹¹³ Photo courtesy of Jim Felter.

Bibliography

Aloi, Santa. Personal email to author. July 19, 2023.

Aloi, Santa. Conversation with author. July 18, 2023.

Baird, Nini. Interview with author. June 23, 2023.

Chicago Board of Education. "Chicago in the 1940s." YouTube video.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JzD9oYLVzY>

Felter, Jim. "Sad News: Iris Garland." Email to retirees-forum@sfu.ca. November 4, 2002.

Felter, Jim. Interview with author. October 24, 2022.

Felter, Jim. Personal email to author. April 14, 2023.

Fox, Mary. Interview with author. March 30, 2023.

Gerecke, Alana. "Dance as 'Lead card' in the Development of Simon Fraser University's Fine and Performing Arts." *Renegade Bodies*. Eds. Allana C. Lindgren and Kaija Pepper. Dance Collection Danse: 2012. 141-154.

Jamieson, Karen. Interview with Author. October 27, 2022.

Johnston, Hugh. "Specialization and Interdisciplinary Studies." *Radical Campus*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2005. 218-254.

Juliani, John. *Hurrah*. Film, 1969.

Kamins, Jeannie. *Iris Garland*. Watercolour, 1995. Image courtesy of Jim Felter.

Kamins, Jeannie. *Iris Garland and LifeForms*. Oil painting, 2003. Image courtesy of Jim Felter.

Karen Jamieson Dance. "Before Chaos." *Coming Out of Chaos: A Vancouver Dance Story*. <https://www.kjdchaos.ca/chapters/1>

Lamhut, Phyllis. Interview with author. March 27, 2023.

Murray, Rona. "For Iris." Festival of Life program. The Dance Centre. July 6, 2003.

The Peak. "Assault Claimed." *The Peak*. 2 July 1969. SFU Digitized Newspapers collection of the SFU Library. <https://newspapers.lib.sfu.ca/peak-642/peak-july-2-1969>

Simon Fraser University Archives. Allan B. Cunningham fonds, F-70-2-0-0-8. "Brave New University" by Thomas J. Mallinson. No Date.

Simon Fraser University Archives. Iris Garland fonds, F-197-1-1-0-1 – F-197-1-3-0-3.

Simon Fraser University Archives. *Public Programs*. F-109-7-1-0-9.

Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds. F-109-7-3-0-4. SFU News Release. 21 May 1969.

Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds. F-109-7-3-0-8. News Release June 20, 1973.

Simon Fraser University Archives. School for the Contemporary Arts fonds. F-109-12-7-0-26. Iris Garland headshot.

Simon Fraser University Archives. Simon Fraser Student Society fonds. F-74-10-0-0-37. SFU Yearbook 1965-66.

Simon Fraser University Archives. University Communications fonds, F-61-4-3-0-5. "Take a bow, Iris Garland" by Mary Trainer. *Comment*. October 1974.

Simon Fraser University Archives. University Communications fonds, F-197-1-1-0-3. "Dance News from Simon Fraser University." Vancouver Ballet Society. September 1976.

Tait, Sylvia. *Iris Garland*. Transfer drawing, 1974. Jim Felter personal collection. Image courtesy of Jim Felter.

Wyman, Max. "Foreword." *A Magical Moment: The Early Years of the Arts at SFU*. Unpublished manuscript. April 2021.