

Q&A An Alliance Of Dance And Design

▶ In 1966, the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and the dance pioneer Anna Halprin invited 40 young people to Northern California to participate in a roving summer workshop. Moving from San Francisco north to Sea Ranch, the modernist coastal development master-planned by Mr. Halprin, the architects, artists and dancers investigated the common ground between the couple's two professions: the environment. They staged a happening in San Francisco's Union Square, took blindfolded walks, built a village of driftwood and dropped paper from trees. A new exhibition at the Graham Foundation in Chicago, "Experiments in Environment: The Halprin Workshops, 1966-1971," explores the Halprins' interdisciplinary creative process through photos, films, drawings and the scores that gave the participants' movement a shape and purpose. Mr. Halprin died in 2009; Ms. Halprin, 94, spoke this month about the workshops and her continuing dance practice. (This interview has been edited and condensed.)

Q. Tell me about the dance deck at your house in Kentfield, Calif.

A. Larry designed the dance deck so I could do my work and be with my daughters as they were growing up. The space is very different than the regular studio and stage space. Instead of being a rectangle, it wanders in and around the trees. That had a tremendous impact on me. There was no proscenium arch, no enclosure. It led to "City Dance," which took place in Union Square, in department stores, with people in parks.

"City Dance" was the first piece you did with the workshop participants, right?

They were given the score that said where to go and what time to be there before they came to San Francisco. They hadn't seen each other before, but they were all to meet in Union Square at 3 p.m. and face west.

A score? What does that entail?

The score just tells you what activity to do. It doesn't necessarily tell you how to do it. The space tells you how to do it. We did put people in pairs so they wouldn't be completely overwhelmed by arriving in a foreign city. We coupled a dancer with an architect. The first week of the workshop



FROM TOP, DREW KELLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; LAWRENCE HALPRIN COLLECTION, ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA



was in San Francisco, in my studio there at 321 Divisadero, then we went on a ferryboat to the dance deck, worked there for another week, then up to the Sea Ranch, where we worked for two weeks. At the end you couldn't tell who was the architect and who was the dancer.

What was the point of the workshop activities?

They had to do with awareness. We were teaching people to really notice how people are responding in an environment. Larry's work reflected that always. What's the difference between a pathway that's curved and one that is at right angles? He wanted to make something people could experience, not just use as a place to go through.

The Portland Open Space Sequence he designed has that feeling of wandering and discovery.

I was invited to do something there, and I designed this score for one of his fountains. But I didn't anticipate that they would go in the fountain. Within five minutes they were in the water.

The two of you collaborated often. How do you think your work influenced his, and vice versa?

Larry and I were married 70 years. I guess I was about 18 when we met, and he was 22, so he definitely influenced me and I definitely influenced him. How to specify? I always say in my classes: "Ask yourself, 'Where am I? Who am I with? What have we gathered here for? What is our intention?'" It is the same thing if you are designing a square or a park. When I rebelled against modern dance and started to do workshops — that name wasn't used at that time — Larry became

very intrigued that this could be for everybody.

Why did you rebel against modern dance?

I didn't like it because it was automatic. I thought anybody could create a dance. I started to teach people how the body actually works. I looked at the skeleton. I did human dissection. I did all these things to understand the nature of movement, not just my movement. The dance reflects their input, not just a choreographer coming in and teaching them steps.

That means the dance must be different every time.

During the time of Fluxus, I would get scores from Yoko Ono. One of hers was, "Release 100 butterflies." Where am I going to get 100 butterflies? I took her score and modified it to, "Imagine at this site, at this time, releasing 100 butterflies." And I would send her a score to do.

You are 94. Do you still dance every day?

I'm still doing what I have always done. In relation to Larry, each year since his death I have done a special event in his memory. I am going to Israel in a couple of months, connecting with peace organizations. I will do a walk with 100 women from different religious backgrounds on the Haas Promenade he designed in Jerusalem. I will be using dance as a way to create peace.

ALEXANDRA LANGE

"Experiments in Environment: The Halprin Workshops, 1966-1971" is on view through Dec. 13 at the Graham Foundation, 4 West Burton Place, Chicago. Information: 312-787-4071 or grahamfoundation.org.

The dancer-choreographer Anna Halprin, top, at home in Kentfield, Calif. In 1966, she and her husband, the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, staged a movable workshop to explore the environment in Northern California in places like Sea Ranch, where participants built a village of driftwood, above.