

# Dorothy B. Perkins

Ballet Teacher  
1884-1981

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by David Conrads

Dorothy Burrows Perkins began her career as a ballet teacher when she was just 18 years old. Although at that time her goal was to be a professional dancer, circumstances intervened and she became a teacher. Over a long and distinguished career, Perkins became internationally known in the ballet world as one of a small handful of truly great instructors.

Dorothy Burrows was born in Kansas City in 1884. Her father taught her to dance when she was a young girl. Although she wanted to be a performer, her mother refused to allow it. Instead, young Dorothy taught a dance class for neighborhood children in the early 1900s, while keeping her sights set on the stage. A back injury sustained after falling on ice in 1914 ruled out any possibility of a career as a dancer. The injury, coupled with her divorce from Frederick G. Perkins shortly after their marriage, put her in tight financial circumstances, but Perkins was determined not to be dependent on anyone. At the urging of Clara Kellogg and Katherine Baxter, publishers of *The Independent*, she began to teach dance as a profession.

Perkins began attending dance classes in New York and Paris in the summer and teaching in Kansas City in the winter. Exercise was the foundation of her teaching, and she developed her own techniques based on the instruction she received from some of the biggest talents in the world of dance. She developed an international reputation and, at one point, turned down an opportunity to teach in New York.

Perkins taught thousands of students over the course of her career. Her most celebrated pupils were Ula Sharon, who attained stardom in New York, and Rosella Hightower, who became the principle dancer of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Marquis de Cuevas Ballet. At one point, more than 200 of her students were working in ballet or related fields. Although she stopped teaching formally in the 1950s, she continued to work with special students in her living room for several years.



Sources

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