

# *Honorary Member*

## *ScotDance Ontario*

*June 1997*



### **Gladys Forrester 1914 - 1998**

Generations of dancers have been influenced by the work of Gladys Forrester – champion Highland dancer, television choreographer and teacher. Born in Winnipeg in 1916, Forrester began Highland dance classes at the age of seven and soon added ballet, tap, and acrobatics, adagio and musical theatre. At the age of eight, she was hired to dance in the Doll Revue at theatres in Winnipeg and Regina. By 1926, she was touring western Canada in *Three Little Maids*. A captivating performer, she appeared as an actor in several drama productions. She was dubbed “Winnipeg’s Own Child Wonder Entertainer”.

During World War II, Miss Forrester formed an ensemble to perform for troops at various Manitoba air training camps. It was here that she met RAF Squadron Leader Gerald “Jig” Smither, whom she married in 1942. After the war, she was cast in the corps de ballet of the film, *The Red Shoes*. The couple lived in Toronto where she opened her dance studio.

When television came to Canada in September of 1952, it opened a whole new area of professional work for Miss Forrester. Elegance, excitement and prestige were involved and dance was an integral part of that. Gladys Forrester and Ludmilla Chiriaeff were in on the excitement from those early days.

As choreographer and lead dancer, Forrester was linked to many of the CBC's Folio series programs. She choreographed CBC productions of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, *Patience*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Pinafore*, and *Mikado*. Her experience is diverse but most people think of her as that tiny elegant dancer who was in the movie *The Red Shoes* and did so much work with the CBC. In a feature article about Forrester in the *Star Weekly Magazine* of June 27, 1959 it was apparent just how well known and respected she was in the CBC studios.

She was nicknamed "Mighty Mouse" by Norman Campbell, a CBC producer, and was described as a "ball of fire around the set." Campbell was quoted as stating, "Actually, she's a no-nonsense gal who knows what she wants and will stick to it until she gets it right. Generally she's even-tempered, but she's also the sort of pro who expects professionalism from the people she works with. If she doesn't get it, she can lay down the law as vehemently as anybody I know." Gladys Forrester was an important presence in television and was looked upon as an authority when it came to making the shows work.

After her CBC days, Gladys Forrester finished out her career as a teacher at the Canadian School of Ballet, and was a director at the School of Dancing which later became the Gladys Forrester / Veronica Mazur School. She was also one of the Founders of ***The Scottish Dance Company of Canada*** which was established in Toronto, January 1996. The Company was established with the goal of providing elite performance opportunities for accomplished highland dancers. Since 1996, there has been an impressive array of dancers who have performed on Canada's best stages with top Celtic musicians.

A former dance pupil summed up Miss Forrester perfectly, “Gladys Forrester: Legacy of a Canadian Dance Pioneer”.

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**DANCE ONTARIO** Association was founded in 1976 as the regional arm of Dance In Canada Association (DICA), and incorporated not-for-profit in 1985. Since the demise of DICA, the membership-based association has developed into a dynamic cross-section of all areas of the dance sector from internationally renowned companies to local dance clubs, technicians and agents.

***A DANCE ONTARIO AWARD is given by the Province of Ontario in recognition of the unique contribution of individuals to the development of dance in the province. Gladys Forrester was presented with this award in 1993 in recognition of her lifetime of achievements.***

***We would like to create a photo collage in memory of Gladys Forrester. If you have any photos, or memorabilia that you would like to share on this site, please contact Gillian Macdonald at [gillian@scotdance-ontario.com](mailto:gillian@scotdance-ontario.com).***