



Meet the 85-year-old SHOWGIRL



NATURAL TALENT: Dorothy tap dancing at the age of 18

Dorothy Dale Kloss talks to ANTHEA GERIE about her career and how she beat cancer to carry on dancing

AT FOUR she performed on stage for the first time. At 14, she taught Bob Fosse to tap dance. Yet at 64 it seemed like curtains for hooper Dorothy Dale Kloss when she was struck down with cancer and given five years to live. "But I wouldn't let the doctor even finish that sentence," says the woman who defied fate to become the world's oldest working showgirl, with an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

She launched herself into a full-time stage career aged 71 and, despite the rigours of performing six full-blown production numbers and her

own tap-dancing solo nine times a week, the 85-year-old plans to dance on ad infinitum.

"As long as I've got the moves and the hips, I'll still be going at 100," winks the lithe, long-legged lovely.

"Tired? A bit now that our season has ended," she admits, "but I can't wait to fly to New York and sign up for dance class."

The gamine size eight blonde with an unfaded twinkle in her eye is a whirlwind who doesn't know how to slow down.

"That's what got me into tap shoes in the first place. In the Twenties, I drove my mother crazy dancing the Charleston round the house. By the time I was three she had enrolled me in dance school."

Only 10 years later, her teachers in Chicago were learning from their prodigy and she was inspiring children like Fosse, who went on to choreograph musicals and movies such as *Cabaret*, only 10 when he signed up with his teenage instructress.

"When I booked to see him on stage years later, I had no idea how big he had become," she confesses. "And when I ran into him before the show, he paid me the greatest compliment of my life. 'This is the greatest tap-dancer I've ever known,' he told anyone who would listen."

You don't doubt that, watching Dorothy sashay across the stage in California's Palm Springs, where she's the star of the famous *Follies*. She may need body make-up to cover freckled arms and two pairs of nude stage tights to disguise any age marks or bumps on those great legs but no Botox appears to have been at work on an unwrinkled but delightfully mobile face.

THE FOLLIES is a high-energy show comprised entirely of strangely virile silver-haired chorus boys still capable of lifting gorgeous older showgirls and escorting them down glamorous staircases that they descend encased in feathers, fishnets and precious little else.

It's these mature beauties' capacity to allure that has landed them their place in this award-winning troupe, comprised solely of over-55s. Forty years after Dorothy had given up performing, a pair of admiring students sent her audition tape to *Follies'* founder Rick Markowitz.

Her marriage to a Chicago doctor lasted just seven years, leaving Dorothy with son Craig to raise. "I had started a dancing school by then and taught at Craig's school all the time he was growing up," she says.

It was a maternal instinct as



WHIRLWIND: DOROTHY HAS NO PLANS TO SLOW DOWN AND WANTS TO BE PERFORMING AT 100

long-lived as her hoofing talent that brought Dorothy across the country to join Craig in Los Angeles and help raise Jamie, the eldest of her two granddaughters, as well as work.

When colon cancer suddenly threatened to cut her life short, the career woman who had just gone into business with her son as she hit retirement age resolved not to play along.

"I never thought my illness was a tragedy; I figured it was happening to me for a reason. In my case, I figured the reason was I needed to take care of myself instead of just dashing and running all the time. I told the doctor I would do whatever was necessary, and was discharged from chemo within four months instead of six. I believed it would all go away and it did."

Back out in the world, she started yet another dance class but felt she needed to fill a void in her life when Craig and his family moved to the other side of the country in a permanent career move.

She decamped to the desert and the *Follies*, where a 10-hour working day doesn't faze her. "I've learned to pace myself over the years, so I don't get up early.

At 9.30 I'll have coffee and oatmeal, read the papers and pootle into the theatre about an hour before our 12.30 call. I'll limber up and do my stretches and jog 500 steps in place to get the blood flowing."

Most days there is both a matinee and an evening show, and Dorothy drives herself home in between to make dinner.

"I'm no cook, and I don't follow any kind of diet. I love salads but I also love desserts. And after the show, I also love a margarita."

Ask for the secret of her energy and she credits her beloved live-in boyfriend, Ken Prescott, a mere 63-year-old she met in the *Follies*.

"He doesn't still dance there but he works the casinos and choreographs. He's a total whirlwind who can't wait for the next job. And he keeps me alive."

"I think the reason I've lived this long is not planning every move. When you plan, you're forcing yourself to succeed on a given path and not leaving yourself open to whatever else might be waiting for you."

● *Want to get in touch with your inner showgirl? Audition details are at www.psfollies.com*