



*“The highest flowering is in old age. Like snow in a silver bowl, that quality shines.” —Sachiyo Ito*

way she approached dance. “I was much more hyper-aware.” When a hip injury ended her career with the company, she knew she needed a break from dance, both “physically and emotionally,” she says. Rudner, who now directs the dance program at Sarah Lawrence College, often choreographs collaboratively these days. “When we work we ask, ‘What can we do now?’ instead of ‘What did we do then?’” And she does enjoy dancing now. Her preperformance ritual consists of 45 minutes to an hour of warming up. “I walk backwards, lie down, work my body as thoroughly as I can so that I’m hypermobile, so that my muscles are active. I don’t go out every night after performances like I used to. And I need physical therapy tune-ups.”

Sachiyo Ito, a 58-year-old New York-based, Tokyo-born performer and teacher of traditional Japanese dance, says that for her particular genre of

dance, it’s all about being in the present moment. “We are constantly changing,” she says, “and the dance is constantly changing.” Unlike most of the Western performers interviewed here, when asked if she knew she would be dancing well into her older years, Ito says, “Yes, of course. Dance is lifelong learning. It is good to have a beginner’s mind throughout life.” Such a resounding “yes” points to the Eastern respect for the aging process. “Maturity is required in order to express the beauty of the dance fully,” Ito says. “There is a flowering of performance that happens when one is young, but the highest flowering is in old age. Like snow in a silver bowl, that quality shines,” she says. However, she acknowledges the reality of the aging body. “I can no longer jump the same way. I have pains in the back and knees. And now I need to be more careful, stretch more, rest. But the body is a tool of expression and

just one simple movement or gesture can be filled with inner emotion one gains through maturity.”

“Why not?” Carmen deLavallade asks when musing about dancing at 76. “I’m not one to give up that easy, so why not?” As a solo performer who is still one of the world’s most glorious dancers, she is also part of Paradigm, a group that includes Gus Solomons jr and Dudley Williams. She is accustomed to change, embraces it, and seems to have an insatiable appetite for new things. “The form is always changing. I don’t know where I’m going, but if there’s a door open, I’m going to walk through it.”

DeLavallade’s dance career has been enhanced by her acting experience and training. She’s learned to not only rely on her body, which gets its occasional aches and pains, but as a dancer and choreographer who works with movement and text, she is well aware of when she may need to allow the words to take over. She cites one example. After a day of film-shooting during which she was required to walk up and down a set of stairs for take after take, she woke up the following morning finding her legs just wouldn’t move. “They were dead, and I thought, what am I going to do?” She finally accepted the fact that she would not be able to perform the piece with the physicality it normally demanded. Instead, she’d need to change the work a bit, relying more on the text. “Before, the piece was more about the body, but it changed shape when I had to let the words speak, and the words became richer. It was a new way of doing it, but it was just as effective.”

“If it doesn’t work, Saturn isn’t going to lose its rings,” deLavallade declares. That healthy dose of perspective only comes with experience and, dare I say, age.

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Resource: *How to Dance Forever: Surviving Against the Odds* by Daniel Nagrin, Harper paperbacks, 1988.