

*O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?* -W.B. Yeats

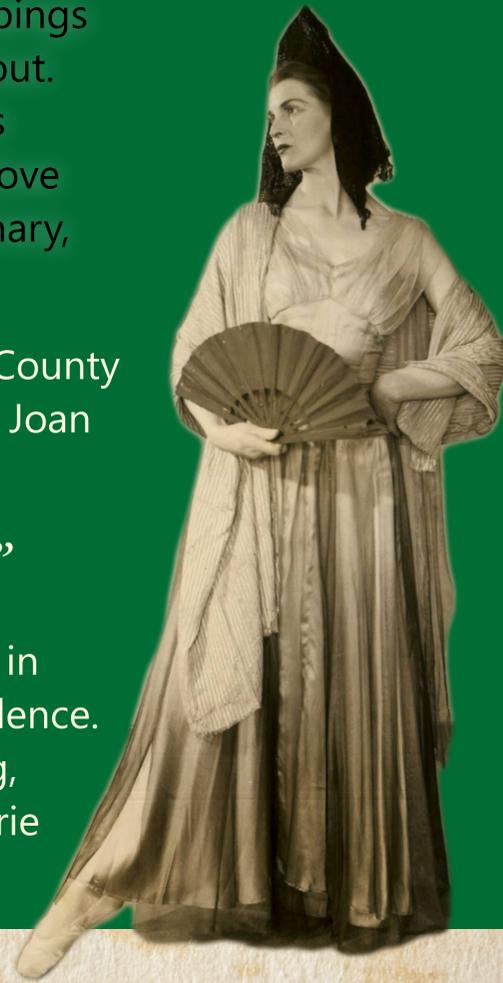


From the letters, testimonials, articles, and infinite newspaper clippings that Joan Denise Moriarty collected, her undeniable legacy sings out. It is a legacy that was rooted in an artistic spirit that met obstacles with conviction, challenges with boldness and conservatism with love and courage. Her archive is the delicate collection of an extraordinary, oftentimes lonely, life.

She spent her childhood in England but her family was originally from Mallow in County Cork. During a trip to the Royal ballet in Covent Garden with her mother, a young Joan Denise was at once mesmerised by the elegant dancers and declared:

*“Mummy Mummy Mummy, that’s what I want to be!”*

After some persuasion her mother agreed to send her to live with family relatives in Liverpool, where she trained in dance at the Shelagh Elliott-Clarke Centre of Excellence. ‘Then I went to Paris for three years where I studied dance, choreography, lighting, staging’ and returned once more to England where she trained with Madame Marie Rambert of the ‘Rambert Company’.



### **The Piper**

She spent her holidays in Scotland with cousins where she learned to play the war pipes and wore the family tartan. On the 2nd of July 1932, she was the only woman to enter the solo war pipes competition at Tailteann Games in Dublin, taking home the silver. At the Munster Open Piping Championships in Killarney, she won against 22 competitors; all men.

### **A fine dancer but too tall**

*“The tradition in England was that the dancers were all very small there. Now, there’s a reason for that actually because many many years ago when they were trying to establish a school in London, the only men they could get, who were interested in dance, were very tiny. So of course you couldn’t have tiny male dancers and a big tall female dancer so the tradition is **that they’re quite small. So, I didn’t fit into the scene at all**”*

-Joan Denise Moriarty

Her teacher and mentor Marie Rambert famously used to tell her ‘*Get out of my sight; there’s too much of you there*’ and encouraged her to take up choreography instead.



**JOAN MORIARTY, the Fan  
ireland Lady Prize Piper, will  
ctions on the Pipes ; also an E  
on of “The Blackbird” and c**

Moriarty often lamented her inability to speak Gaelic due to her upbringing in England. However her family retained strong Irish roots throughout their lives.

The dominant features of Miss Moriarty's character were determination and grit. She immersed herself in her work and made it her lifelong passion.

Joan Denise Moriarty led a very private life but was always surrounded with great and loyal friends. Her father died when she was just 18 months old and her mother, who she described as 'wonderful' died when she was in her early 20s.

*"I always felt she was a very lonely person,"* says Lavinia Anderson, former Cork Ballet Co. dancer, in an interview with Irish Life and Lore.



This was a paradox of Joan Denise Moriarty: rather shy but she drew people to her; seemingly lonely but surrounded by people; faced with countless obstacles but she always found ways past the impassible.

And it was this dedication to ballet that drove her on. In her earlier performances Lavinia Anderson, former Cork Ballet Company dancer, tells us 'she was practically laughed off stage' during the early years.

In the 1930s, Joan Denise Moriarty opened her first school of dance in the Parochial Hall, Shortcastle, Mallow. By 1940, she had moved to Cork and would soon form the Cork Ballet Group.



### Working with Aloys Fleischmann

The artistic collaboration between Aloys Fleischmann and Joan Denise Moriarty began when she played the warpipes for Fleischmann's 'Clare Dragoons'. On June 1st 1947, the Cork Ballet Group accompanied by the Cork Symphony Orchestra, and conducted by Aloys Fleischmann, made their debut to a delighted audience at the Cork Opera House. In May 1948, The Cork Examiner announced a week of ballet in the Cork Opera House which would continue to host the group for many years to come.

### President To Visit Cork For Tostal Functions

Unfortunately, in December 1955, the Opera House was gutted by a disastrous fire, a curse which would later follow Moriarty in the ballet's-to-be home in the Firkin Crane in 1981.



### A New Name

In 1954, the Cork Ballet Group rebranded to the Cork Ballet Company after a strategic move to the spacious 'The Studio' in Emmet Place; the move would in time allow the CBC to flourish and grow, becoming one of the most lasting relationships of her life.

Its longevity was owed to the tremendous collaborative determination that dancers, artists, administrators, designers and others demonstrated against a backdrop of a conversative, frugal government who were not forthcoming with funding for productions of ballet or the Arts in general.

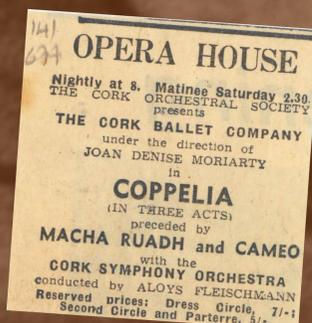
Facilities around the country were underfunded, inhospitable and unsuitable for the groups needs.

Nevertheless, she persisted



*"Absolutely nobody was paid"*

-Lavinia Anderson



# IRISH THEATRE BALLET

Irish Theatre Ballet  
Formed In Cork

## New Roads in the yellow woods

In 1958 Miss Moriarty formed an Irish Folk Dance Group which performed at festivals in Ireland, Germany and Dijon, France.



Domy Reiter-Soffer



Charles Czarny

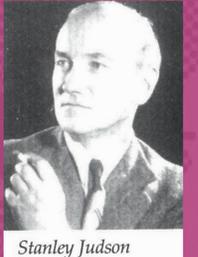


Peter Darrell

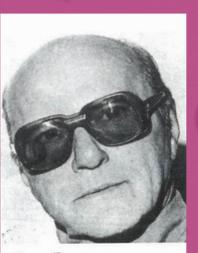
By 1959, a new scene had begun in the ballet of Joan Denise Moriarty's life when the Arts Council of Ireland came into being and with it, a hard won gift: funding. By September 1959, Moriarty had reached her first major milestone in life: to develop a professional ballet company and bring dance to every city and town in Ireland.

She founded the Irish Theatre Ballet.

After hanging up her dancing shoes to concentrate on creating ballets, she choreographed over 100 works for her own companies throughout her tenure and welcomed countless ballet dancers and choreographers to put a shoulder to the wheel of her ambitions, bringing Irish ballet to a standard absolutely nobody had expected.



Stanley Judson



Hans Brenaa



Toni Beck

## The Anti-Cork Conspiracy

With the establishment of the Irish Theatre Ballet, the ugly face of anti-Cork sentiment reared its head. As reflected in her letters for years to come, Joan Denise Moriarty believed that neither the government nor the Arts Council were happy that the National Ballet was located in Cork.

After a very successful year of performing in 70 towns across the country, North and South, the Arts Council insisted on a merger between the ITB and Patricia Ryan's newly established professional company in Dublin. There was some tension between the two women and Miss Moriarty's letters show us she had considered resigning but after much correspondence and consideration, she decided against it.

Controversy flared up in February 1964 when a letter (purportedly written by Miss Moriarty) was sent into an RTE programme called 'Take my Word' after the co-director of the Irish Theatre Ballet, Patricia Ryan, made an appearance on the show. The host, Irish actor Mr. Milo O' Shea, read the letter to the TV audience at home and in studio. Miss Moriarty was mortified and requested that RTE make a correction live on TV, however Mr. O'Shea declined to do so.

Irish Theatre Ballet soon came to an end in 1964 when funding ceased for the company and it was disbanded. However not before a rather embarrassing performance in Dublin which Julia Cotter writes about in 'Joan Denise Moriarty The Founder of The Irish National ballet'



*'The final show of ITB in Dublin's Olympia...was a disaster for her. Apparently everything went wrong and she got no co-operation or support except from her own dancers. I knew nothing of the politics involved at the time but I sensed a boycott and that the Dublin committee was trying to oust Miss Moriarty'*



# JOAN DENISE MORIARTY

## School of Dancing

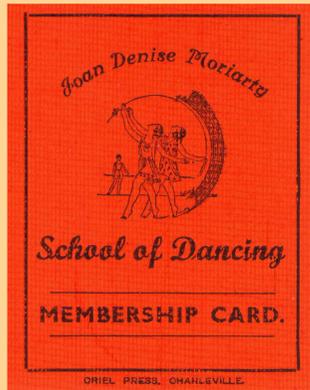


### *“Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh siad”*

During its short life, low attendance was often reported at shows by the Irish Theatre Ballet. Miss Moriarty believed the underdevelopment of the Arts around the country played a huge part in this. Therefore, thriving ballet schools were a major part of her mission: to have an interested and appreciative audience, she needed an educated one.

Julia Cotter recalls how she would do this for the dancers:

*‘At one stage Miss Moriarty started a series of little lectures in the studio- she was always trying to better us, to educate us. She had Professor Fleischmann give us a talk on music, and I remember Dan Donovan speaking on the theatre in Cork. She also brought us over to the School of Art several times to see the paintings there’*



### **Ni raibh aon airgead agaibh**

Although Joan Denise Moriarty publicly proclaimed her disinterest in money, financing the ballet was a continuous struggle.

*‘She was always looking for money,’* says Monica Gavin.

Between costumes, lighting, wages, administration costs, travel expenses, heating, and a recession; the ballet company didn't have two pennies to rub together. She was constantly seeking out public and private funding in order to keep things up and running and even when a tight public purse was opened to the Arts, it remained pinching.

### **Na Scoileanna**

Ballet schools were set up in Cork, Wilton, Clonmel, Waterford and Limerick under the tutelage of Joan Denise Moriarty.

Although the accounts of JDM as a teacher are largely positive, it must be noted that her strictness and discipline also gave her a terrifying reputation at times. One such example of JDM's strictness can be seen in a letter she received from a parent in Waterford in 1970 which recounts the story of an upset child who was reprimanded for not having the correct hairband.

Many of her students would go on to pursue ballet as a career in later life and many retained the life lessons that were instilled in them at ballet school.

*“As well as employment she gave some of us, we all learnt lessons from her of the greatest importance for life. She gave us confidence, she gave us ideals, she taught us to look for and bring out the best in everyone. For as long as I live I want to continue in that sense to be her pupil”*

*Principal.*

-Breda Quinn, Cork



# So You Think Ballet Is For Cissies!



## Not for men

Another difficult piece of the puzzle in Joan Denise's ballets were men: she could never find enough male dancers.

'She always had trouble getting boys,' says former dancer Lavinia Anderson. The reasons for this were complex: cultural, financial and political.

## Boys don't Dance

Ballet dancing was 'for cissies' and looked down on in Irish culture as something 'feminine' and 'wrong' for a man or boy to do. Most male dancers who took part in the ballet in Ireland were not homegrown but internationally sourced.

## Financial

Although male dancers were paid more than female dancers, it was still a measly sum of money to live on at a time of high inflation. Therefore the Irish National Ballet and other dance companies in Ireland were not able to attract top-talent to the Irish stage except when Miss Moriarty's negotiation skills pulled them in. There were far fewer male dancers available and simultaneously, little money to pay them with.

## Politics

It has long been a political decision to defund and underfund the Arts in Ireland, partly due to the belief that the Arts don't provide 'value'. Since the 1930s, when Bishops made it their mission to crack down on the 'immorality' of dancing, the state has regarded the Arts somewhat suspiciously.

## Gardai stop Cork show

TWO gardai came to the Granary Theatre in the UCC Maltings last night halfway through the performance by the Mixed Media Theatre of Cardiff and informed the door staff that a complaint, on the grounds of indecency, had been lodged by a member of the audience who attended the previous night.

Mr. John Kelly, a member of the technical staff of Everyman Theatre which is presenting a special season at the Granary Theatre, spoke to the gardai. He immediately informed the Cardiff players who were just finishing the first part of their production and who would have been putting on "Death Kit", by Susan Sonntag, after the interval.

A leading player of the visiting company addressed the audience and said that the gardai were outside the door, and since they were not willing to risk a prosecution the show would not continue. He apologised and

said the people could have half their admission money back if it would not be possible to attend a future performance.

He also outlined the background to their Cork visit, and explained that following a visit to one of their presentations by two members of the Arts Council, his company had been invited to Ireland. They had already performed in Dublin and no objections had been made there, either by the audience or in the press.

They would seek legal advice this morning, said the player. The audience—it was a packed house—was very strongly on the side of the players, and among those who voiced their disapproval at the interruption was Miss Joan Denise Moriarty of the Irish Ballet Company. It is understood that the objection was to the nudity of one of the male players in the closing scene of "Death Kit."

*'We still have this terrible prejudice that boys shouldn't dance. Why not? It's ridiculous.'*

-Joan Denise Moriarty



*"Professor Fleischmann tells it: he recalls after one performance at the Opera House, Moriarty attended mass at the church of St. Peter's and Paul's only to hear the priest denounce what he described as the scandalous scenes at the Opera House where a semi nude female figure had offended against all normal codes of decency. He was referring of course to the first tutu ever worn in Cork."*

-Pat Murray in an interview with Mike Murphy 1998

## "Lost to marriage"

Even though there were many women involved with the ballet, sometimes marriage 'took' women from dancing. Until 1973 women were not allowed to work after they got married due to the Marriage Bar, but of course this wasn't always strictly enforced. The decision often depended on the permission of a dancer's husband or the attitude the dancers had themselves. Many of Moriarty's ballet dancers were 'lost to marriage' which appears to be more of a personal/cultural decision rather than one made by Moriarty as an employer.

I am glad to say the epidemic here is on the wane, and Joan started the Company at work on Monday last. She had a very good attendance, but we have unfortunately lost two leads through marriage, Mary Conran and Edith Harding, two of this year's cygnets.

# CORK OPERA HOUSE

# IRISH BALLET COMPANY

29th JANUARY-2nd FEB

A PROGRAMME OF CLASSICAL, IRISH & CONTEMPORARY



You'll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind.

Once more Miss Moriarty fulfilled her dream of a professional dance company in Ireland but this time, on her own terms. 1972 saw a new grant from the Arts Council and the beginning of the Cork based Irish Ballet Company (IBC), later renamed the Irish National Ballet, of which Joan Denise Moriarty was the sole artistic director.

Just six years later, a collaboration of dance, music and theatre brought J.M Synge's 'Playboy of the Western World' into the world in the form of a ballet, adapted by JDM for Dublin Theatre Festival in 1978 with music from The Chieftains.

"Playboy" was also performed in The City Centre Theatre, New York, Sadler's Well, London and Rennes, France.

It would become one of Irish Ballet Company's great successes. The Táin- a story of the formidable Queen Maeve- would also hold these honours in the years ahead when the IBC would perform with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1981.

## Cultural bridges

Joan Denise Moriarty's determination pulled a lot of life stories and paths together, binding communities through ballet.

In 1985, the ballet company made a very special trip to Rennes which became a cultural twinning between Irish and the French city. The Cork Examiner did a double publication in French and English to mark the occasion and advertise Ireland as a tourist destination!

The Irish ballet dancers put on a show for the sun drenched crowd in Rennes; an outdoor stage was constructed in front of the magnificent city hall with dancing accompanied by The Chieftains signature musical style. The show was a roaring success and a cultural moment unlike anything the French, or indeed the Irish, had ever experienced.

Today, Irish culture, music, dance, and sport is very popular in France, especially in the countryside.

The performance by the Irish National Ballet was a momentous occasion for Irish music and dancing fans in the region.

The Irish Ballet Company, like the Irish Theatre Ballet, made many trips to the North of Ireland during The Troubles. It was perhaps Joan Denise Moriarty's dual heritage that allowed her to be and create this bridge between the two jurisdictions, walking between worlds like a liminal deity.



On April 6th 1979, the National University of Ireland presented Joan Denise Moriarty with a Degree of Doctor of Laws, to mark her contribution to Dance in Ireland.

In 1981 RTE commissioned "Reputations", choreographed by Joan Denise Moriarty and performed in studio for a national audience. The performance was met with delight and enthusiasm from viewers and critics.

## I got friends in High places

It is widely accepted that a sympathetic Cork man in a position of great influence was a significant help to the Irish National Ballet and the funding it received: Taoiseach and Cork hurler Jack Lynch.

Jack Lynch served as Taoiseach from 1966 to 1973 and 1977 to 1979 and was a huge fan of Joan Denise Moriarty and the ballet. It was certainly the Cork connection that further deepened this solidarity. Moriarty's personal connections, as well as her hard work, were an important ingredient in the ballet's success and a testament to her influence in Irish society. These connections, and reputation, were the invisible threads that bound these organisations (schools and companies) to each other.

In 1985, the Arts Council, influenced by a critical Irish Government, would pull at the carefully placed stitching and quickly find out how many seams Joan Denise Moriarty personally held together.

In 1980, Jack Lynch was no longer Taoiseach and Ireland was entering into a period of deep recession. At this time in 1980, Charles Haughey famously proclaimed that the Irish 'are living way beyond our means' whilst simultaneously feeding out of the public piggy bank - later revealed in the Moriarty Tribunal in the 1990s.

In Cork, our Moriarty was producing ballets, despite some criticism over standards and artistic direction. However, a new step was taken to embed ballet and dance in Ireland which came in the form of a home. The Irish Ballet Company was flying high on hope, ever increasing standards and invitations to perform worldwide.

The torching of these achievements would bring the roof down.

# A Home for the Irish Ballet Company

## A lucky Detour

In 1979, after a traffic-jam induced detour up the Northside, the Artistic Director discovered the Firkin Crane was up for sale. JDM successfully petitioned the Arts Council for a grant to purchase this part of the old butter factory and in 1980 the work began.

The cost of refurbishing the Firkin was estimated to be £400,000 and the Irish National Ballet received further funding for the project from the government. The future was looking very bright at the end of the 1970s.

## A Malicious Act?

On July 8th 1981 of a Sunday night, a fire devastated the Firkin Crane building. In her letters Miss Moriarty notes that she was awaiting confirmation that the fire was maliciously set. In 1985, a letter from a Mr. Tom Donnelly to a Mr. Tom Reilly states that the Irish Ballet Company had settled a 'malicious damage claim' with Cork Corporation for £50,000. It appears from the correspondence that discussed the disaster, the fire was 'malicious'. However, neither the Cork City Fire Brigade nor the Cork Gardai today could confirm this from their records.

I don't know if you have heard our awful news? on Sunday July 6th The Butter Market was burnt down - ~~the~~ no one knows how it happened- The doors were locked and all light off, we are still waiting to hear from the experts if it was malicious or accidental. This has been a big sad ~~shock~~ shock to all of us, as you know we were looking for £400, 000 now it will be nearer £600,000 - were this kind of money can be found at the moment, in view of the World situation and the shortage of money! How ever we can only look forward - and keep hopping!

Former Taoiseach Jack Lynch was president of a Trust Fund Committee set up in the aftermath of the fire with the objective of refurbishing the building for the ballet and to give the people of Cork an Arts Centre on the North Side of the city.

By 1987, £490,000 had been raised but due to damage and high inflation at the time a further £700,000 was needed to complete the project.

It would take until 1992 until the Firkin Crane was finally finished, an ambition and achievement Joan Denise would not be around to see...

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No. 50,912

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## 'Offensive' treatment of Joan Denise Moriarty



Joan Denise Moriarty

In 1983, The Arts Council of Ireland agreed another rebrand for Joan Denise Moriarty, from 'Irish Ballet Company' to 'Irish National Ballet'. The national status for the Cork based company brought about rumblings that would eventually decentralise the Real Capital from its rightful place at the centre of the Universe: why should the people

in Cork get everything, the Dublin companies complained. The Arts Council had high expectations and the country had higher costs: the money didn't go as far as it used to and neither did the ballet. "From 1980 the board of the ballet company begins to appear as a problem in Arts Council files," writes Ruth Fleischmann and

criticism of the ways in which Miss Moriarty directed the company also were noted. Criticism which Fleischmann acknowledges in 'Joan Denise Moriarty: The Founder of the Irish National Ballet', but which she says the council fails to handle appropriately.

### The Brinson Report



The council were not experts in dance and felt an external and objective commissioner would be the best option. Mr Brinson sat down with Miss Moriarty over just one afternoon to interview her about her work. Ruth Fleischmann notes that Peter Brinson provides 'no artistic justifications' for his conclusions.

After reading the report and learning that the Arts Council had accepted it without critical evaluation, Joan Denise Moriarty resigned as Artistic Director of the Irish National Ballet. Aloys Fleischmann also resigned in protest.

In 1984, The Arts Council commissioned Peter Brinson to write a report on dance in Ireland which he entitled 'The Dancer and the Dance'. The title comes from a poem by W.B Yeats which Brinson himself either misunderstood or was experimenting with.

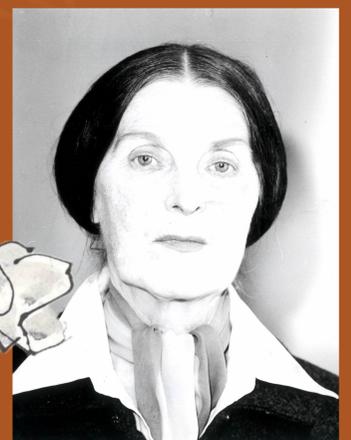
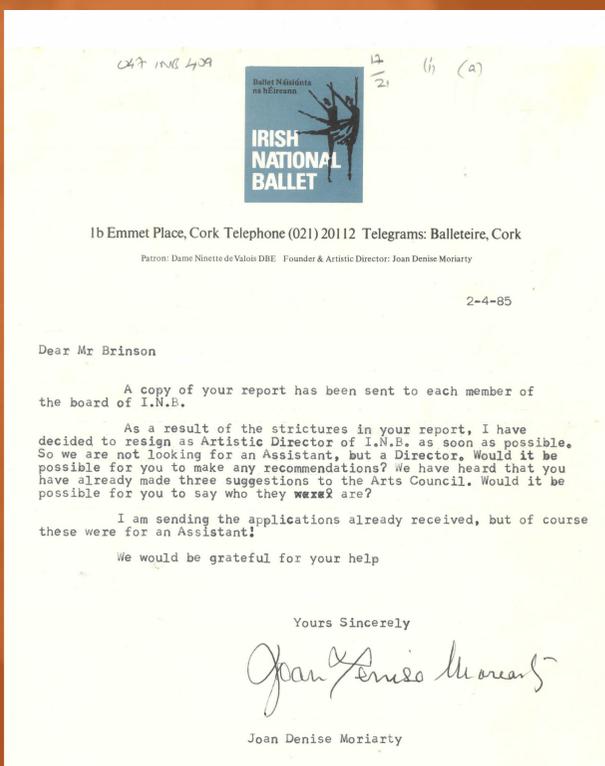
Brinson recommended replacing Joan Denise Moriarty as artistic director as soon as possible.



### Fleischmann resigns!

There is certainly a feeling of loss and grief surrounding this decision which is seen through the outpouring of letters she received from the general public, the articles written at the time in her defence, and the personal accounts of those near her when the news finally reached the papers

no alternative to RESIGN



*"I remember going into class and she was there...she wasn't a person who would...you know? But I felt, she needed to be loved, to be hugged"*

-Monica Gavin

*"My name, my work & my capability have been smeared and degraded"*

-Joan Denise Moriarty (written in private notes)

They say that sometimes it takes a while for a wheel to stop turning, such was the momentum of its driver.

After her resignation the Arts Council found it difficult to find an Artistic Director to fill the role. Remuneration and conditions were noted as deterrents for potential candidates.

It would take several years before the Irish National Ballet would close down and the music fade; yet, for many years after Joan Denise Moriarty's resignation, there was a feeling that it was coming and a real sense of loss fell over the country. In 1988, funding for the Irish National Ballet ceased.

### **The dancer stops**

After the curtain closed on Miss Moriarty's time with the Irish National Ballet, true to form, she picked herself up and continued directing in her Cork home with the Cork Ballet Company. For the first time in her life, she went on holidays- a thank you gift from the dancers and those who worked with her. She travelled around Europe watching ballets and circus performances which were a long time fascination of hers.

In 1988, a surprise party was thrown for JDM to celebrate her life and achievements. In her speech she paid tribute to the many people 'who have done so much to help me fulfil the burning desire I have had all my life- to share with as many people as possible...the wonderful art of movement and dance'

She made two wishes at this speech in 1988; one was the continuation of the ballet in Ireland and to create Irish artists in Ireland who didn't have to emigrate to perform. The second was that 'before I leave this planet' she would live to see the opening of the Firkin Crane as the home of Cork ballet.

By 1990 Joan Denise had suffered several bouts of illness. She was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. There are no letters in her archive extending beyond 1991, but in personal correspondence in 1990 and 1991, her health was a big topic for those writing to her.

On the 24th of January 1992, Joan Denise Moriarty died after a long illness. She didn't live to see the Firkin Crane open just three months later.

In 1993, the final performance of the Cork Ballet Company took place and the last steps of Joan Denise Moriarty's dancers would be heard in the Cork theatres.

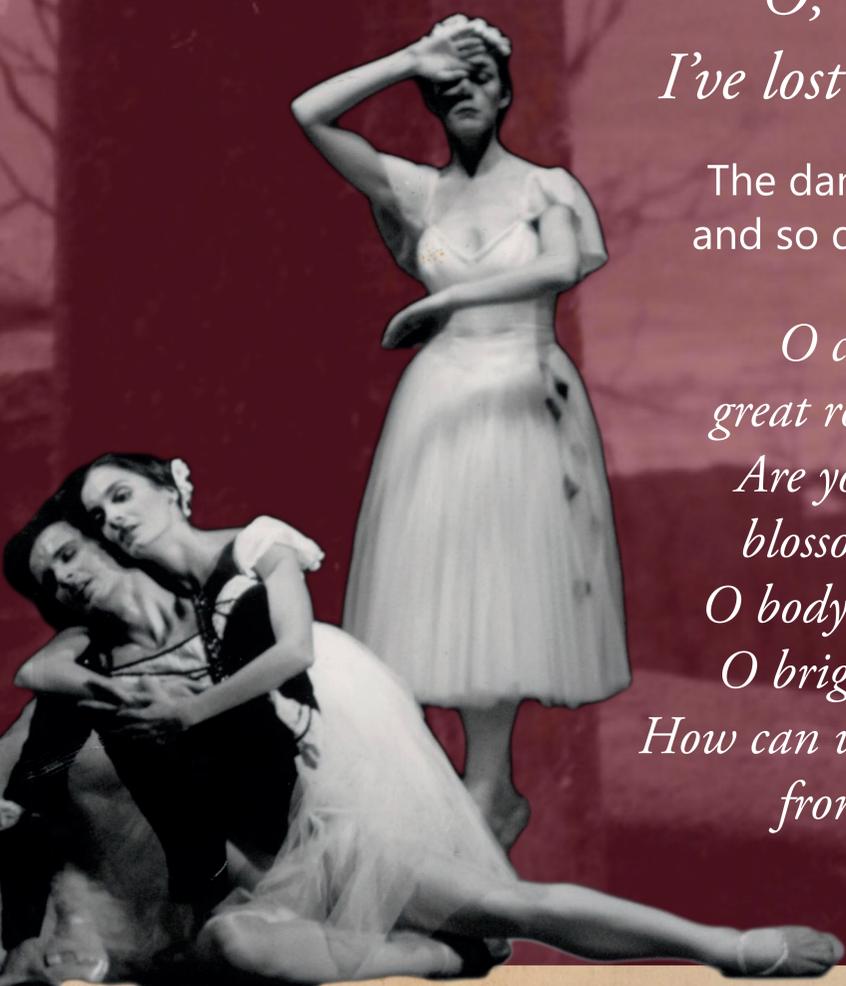
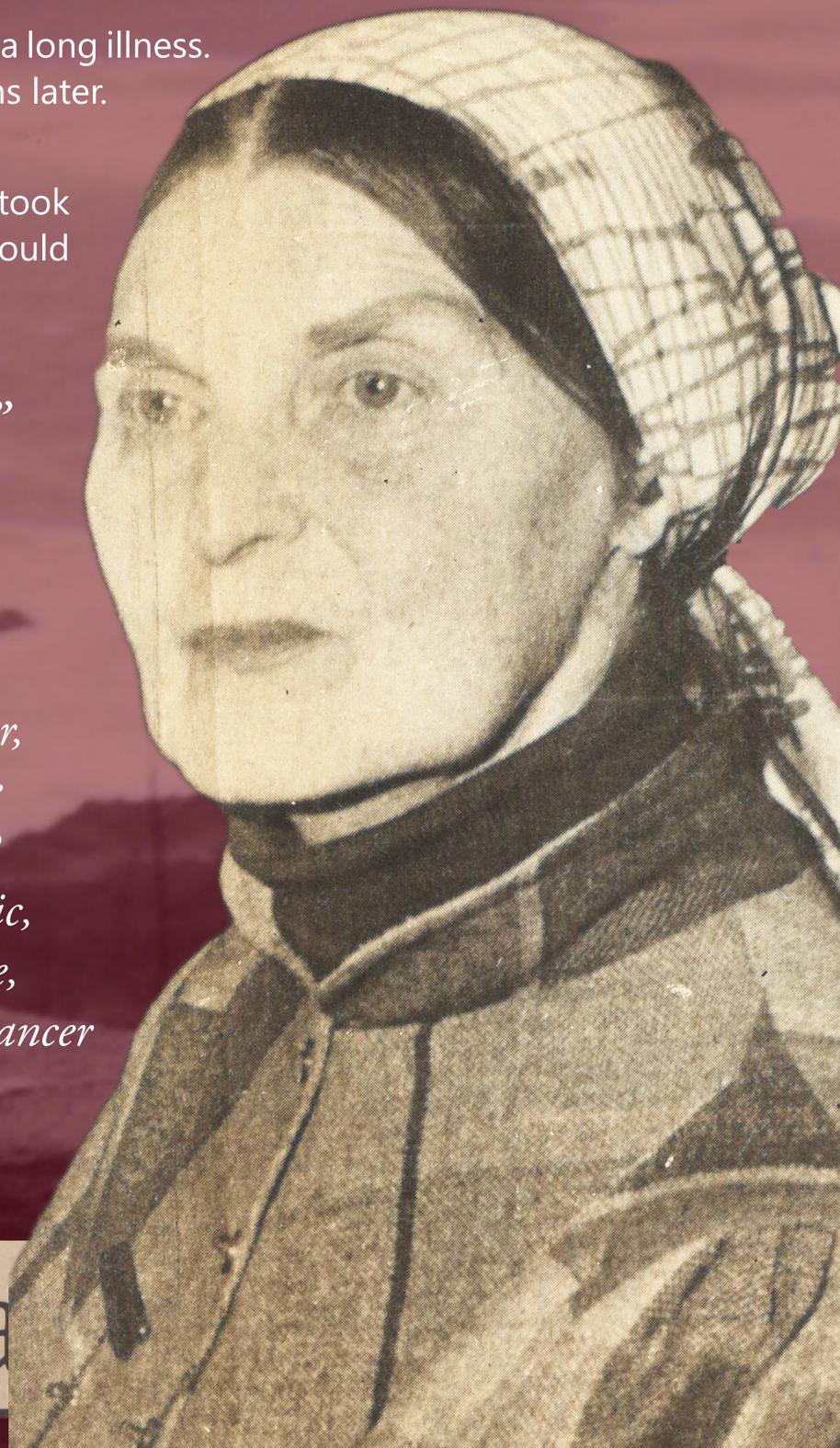
*"O, my grief,  
I've lost him surely"*

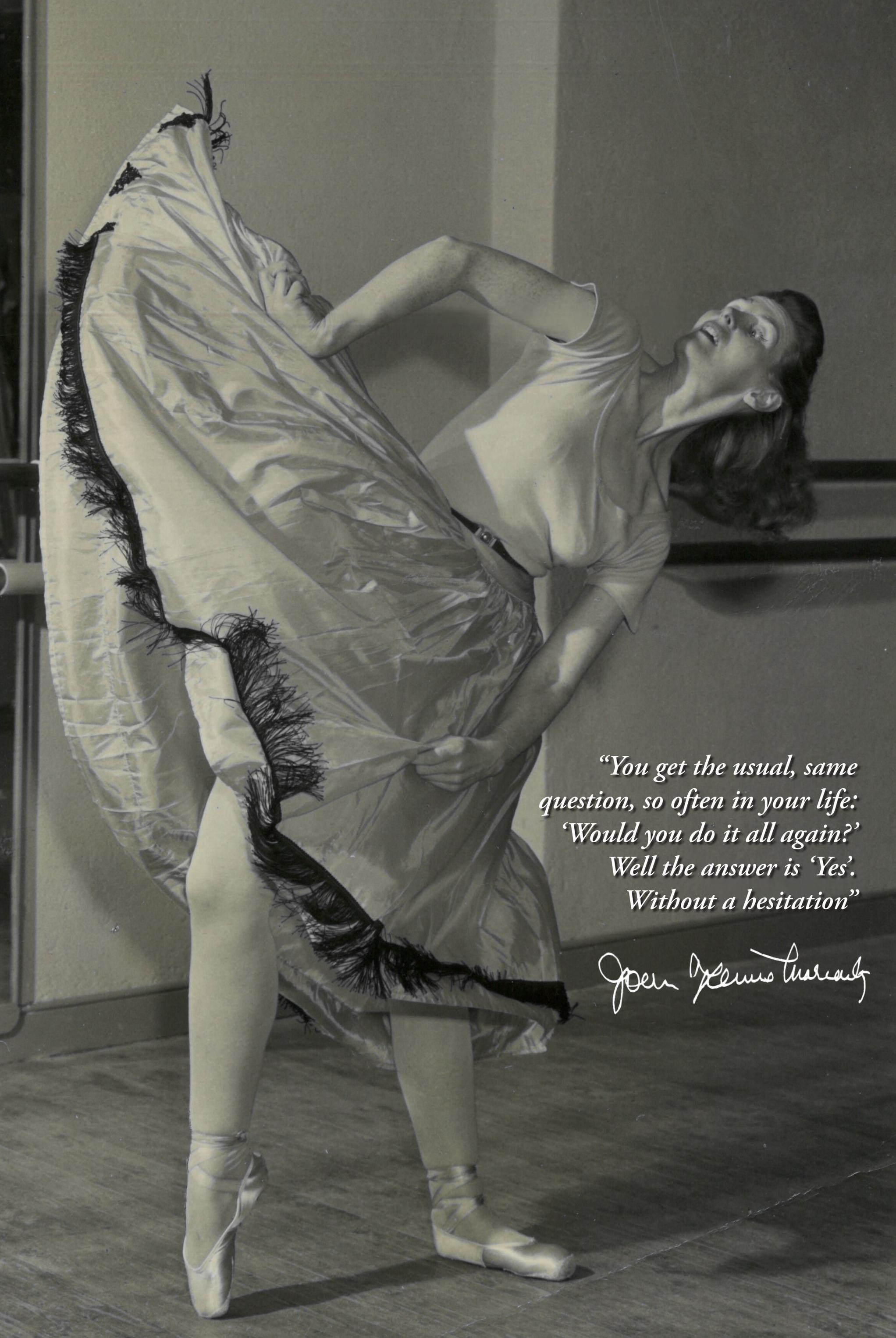
The dancer stopped  
and so did the dance.

*O chestnut tree,  
great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the  
blossom or the bole?  
O body swaye to music,  
O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer  
from the dance?*

-W.B. Yeats

the end of an era





*“You get the usual, same question, so often in your life: ‘Would you do it all again?’ Well the answer is ‘Yes’. Without a hesitation”*

*Joan Kennedy Murray*