



Sandra L. Burton

Hancock, MA

When Sandra Burton was four, a talent scout spotted her potential as a dancer and urged Sandra's mother to enroll her in dance lessons. Sandra recalls that episode as the first time she recognized her own identity and talents. She knew she was meant to dance.

At eight, Sandra enrolled in NYC's Mission Society Camp Minisink programs, which guided her toward performance. After graduating from high school, Sandra worked as a Minisink assistant. There she met Chuck Davis, a rising star in dance. Sandra joined Davis' class for young dancers, rising to apprentice, and then to company member. She danced with the Chuck Davis Dance Company for 12 years, while earning her BA in dance from the City College of New York.

In 1983, Sandra became Coordinator of Dance for Williams College's Dance Program, now the Dance Department. During Sandra's tenure, the program grew to include more faculty, academic courses, and four student dance ensembles. Sandra is now Lipp Family Director and Senior Lecturer in Dance. In 1987, Sandra earned her Masters of Fine Arts from Bennington College, and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts awarded Sandra an honorary doctorate in 2012.

Sandra is deeply involved with dance and cultural events in the Berkshires. She serves on the boards of Jacob's Pillow and the Clark Art Institute, and she co-chairs the Arts Advisory Council for the New England Foundation for the Arts. She is also a dance/movement consultant to the Williamstown Theatre Festival. With her late husband, historian Don Quinn Kelley, Sandra helped establish the Lift Ev'ry Voice Festival of African American history and culture in Berkshire County.

Early in Sandra's career, Thelma Hill, a founding dancer of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, urged Sandra to serve dance in multiple ways. Sandra accepted the challenge. While her responsibility to dance is "still unfolding," Sandra is committed to dance as "a way of anchoring self, releasing self, and knowing self, and a way for communities to connect with the past, be present today, and aspire for our future."

Photography: Igor Greenwald

Words: Mary Ellen Czerniak