



# **Bessie Schonberg: Pioneer Dance Educator And Choreographic Mentor (Studies in Dance)**

*Cynthia Nazzaro Noble*

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Bessie Schonberg was one of the foremost dance educators of the 20th century and was highly influential in contemporary dance. Schonberg taught at Sarah Lawrence College from 1936 to 1975, where she created and directed one of the first autonomous dance departments in American higher education. Founded on the philosophy of progressive arts education, the Sarah Lawrence program served as an important example for other emerging dance programs in the decades between the 1940s and 1970s, a time of significant growth in college dance programs in the United States. Some of her former students became well-known professional choreographers and dance educators, including Carolyn Adams, Elizabeth Keen, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs and Victoria Marks, and several contributed information to this study. Schonberg's life and career were deeply intertwined with many of the most important figures in American modern dance, including Martha Graham and Martha Hill; with historically significant events such as the emergence of the Bennington Summer School of Dance; and with premiere dance institutions such as Dance Theater Workshop, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, The Julliard School and Dance Theatre of Harlem. The book examines her early life in Germany and family background, her years of professional preparation in America as a dancer and educator, and her educational experiences at Bennington College Summer School of the Dance. It also describes curricular innovations that chairperson Schonberg instituted at Sarah Lawrence, and her original methodology for teaching choreography, as observed at Jacob's Pillow and Dance Theater Workshop. This book is "[a] thorough and exhaustively researched volume to help tell the story of a unique twentieth-century American art form and how it came to be."

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