



Nora Morrison MBE 1917-2016

Ballet teacher

Nora was born at Myrtle Villa, 109 Burford Road, in Hyson Green, where she lived all her life. She started teaching ballet aged 13 and went on to instruct many famous stage and screen performers. At 16 Nora started work at the Midland Royal Institute for the Blind and within a year she set up dance classes for the blind as a volunteer. This started a lifelong relationship with the Institute, raising money for them via her dance shows.

She trained at the Royal Academy in London and, aged 22, along with her sister Tess, she opened her first dance school in 1940 – the Morrison School of Dancing – in a hired room at 63 Mansfield Road. In 1947 the school moved next door to the Bluecoat School, where Nora had been a pupil, and after the Bluecoat moved to Aspley she transferred her dance school to the Blind Institute on Chaucer Street.

When the Institute itself moved out in 1985 she stayed in the now council owned building but moved to the other end of the building to the old concert hall at 32a Clarendon Street. Here she stayed until 2013, when she moved to the Baptist church on Mansfield Road. She was still teaching a few days before her death in 2016. She taught dance for over 80 years.

Nora lived in a house built by their grandfather, Councillor James Robert Morrison. She lived with her two older sisters, Violet and Tess, none of the sisters married. The three women had an extensive collection of dolls and teddies including seven small peg dolls in costume which sold for £9,600. Nora's favourite dancers would be invited to tea to see their collection. After her sisters died, she was cared for by various ex pupils and their families

She was awarded an MBE in 2010 following her nomination by ex-pupil Rachel Grant. Rachel, a former Bond girl, felt Nora deserved recognition for her dedication; others had tried to nominate her over the previous forty years. The nomination papers included a letter of support from former pupil, Jenny Sealy, now CEO and director of The Graeae Theatre Company in London, the UK's leading disabled theatre group which describes how she 'started ballet in 1969 at the Morrison school ... I became deaf at the age of 7 and was going to give up dancing because I could not hear the music. Nora took me under her wing and taught me how to hear music with my eyes and through vibrations. She would not let my deafness get in the way and would not let me be defeated because I was deaf.' Other ex-pupils went on to develop careers in the Royal Ballet, theatre, TV films or set up their own dance studios.

Nora died on 8th February 2016, with a grand send off at St Peter's Church in Nottingham, attended by her dance family. She is buried in the General Cemetery.

Nora wrote an autobiography 'Brick by Brick, Step by Step' (out of print but available at Nottingham Local Studios Library). LW Arts moved into her old studio in 2023 to run dance and music events. Touched by the spirit of Nora they researched her life and with funding through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, recorded over 5 hours of interviews with ex pupils and produced a documentary about her life available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJxNJ8wmQyY&feature=youtu.be>

Full interviews and memorabilia are available at Nottingham Local Studies library.

