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Ph.D. Program in Theatre / Box 355

Graduate Center: 33 West 42 Street, New York. N.Y. 10036-8099

212 790-4464

SAYONARA, YEICHI NIMURA!

In its present form, this survey of the career of dancer/choreographer/teacher Yeichi Nimura was researched and written by Glenn M. Loney, Professor of Theatre, City University, on commission for Dance Magazine. It proved too long for a single article, and the editor did not wish to present it as a series, so it has thus far never been published in any form.

This is an anecdotal survey of the career of the remarkable dancer and teacher, Yeichi Nimura, whose performance career – brilliantly launched in Europe and the New World – came to an abrupt halt when Pearl Harbor was bombed. American tours were out of the question for this Japanese dancer, largely self-taught. Adapting and sharing his skills and vision, he became one of New York's most admired and beloved teachers of dance, a spiritual father to many of dance's most impressive talents.

Nimura's long-time partner and widow, Lisan Kay Nimura, has aided the

author in reconstructing Kimura's world and work. She can also make remarkable photos available. Pauline Koner and others who worked with Nimura also contribute to this homage to a great artist who avoided the spotlight once he began to teach rather than perform in public. His story should inspire dance people; his thought and training should fascinate them.

Lisan Kay Nimura has taken his ashes to Japan, where they are appropriately honored, even though most of his work was done in Europe and America. It would therefore make sense to have an edition in both English and Japanese – richly illustrated – to make Nimura's story known to those who love the world of dance. The present text can be reworked and enlarged. The opening, focused on Pearl Harbor, may seem strong today, but it seems essential to explain at once why Nimura did not achieve fame as a dancer after 1941, given his great success in the years immediately preceding. The cruel, arbitrary, even unconstitutional treatment given the Japanese in America in the wake of Pearl Harbor remains a national shame, one Americans are only now beginning to address responsibly. So this War Trauma must not be ignored, though the initial statement can certainly be rephrased to make it more meaningful to both Japanese and American readers.

—Glenn Loney

SAYONARA, YEICHI NIMURA!

Looking Back on the Career

Of a Distinguished Dancer and Teacher

By Glenn Loney

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, in a surprise attack, Japanese warplanes dumped loads of bombs on Pearl Harbor. In an instant, a crucial segment of America's Pacific Fleet was damaged or destroyed. It was a severe blow to U. S. preparedness for a conflict which had been slowly brewing. But it was a worse blow to American pride. Addressing the Congress the following day, President Franklin Roosevelt repeated that fateful date: "Sunday, December 7, 1941 – a day that will live in infamy."

But the sudden attack by the Japanese wasn't the only infamy that was generated in the clash between America and Japan. Nor were U. S. snips and servicemen the only casualties. There was a rapid backlash of resentment and hatred against the Japanese, especially on the West Coast where many had settled, becoming citizens and having children and grandchildren, born Americans. Ordinarily sensible, sensitive people burned rare Japanese silks, priceless lacquer trays, anything Japanese that they owned. Loyal, patriotic Japanese-Americans were assaulted and abused.

And then fell the worst blow of all. General John L. DeWitt, never a great friend of oriental people, issued an internment order, ostensibly to protect the western shores of the U. S. from any efforts to aid the enemy or subvert the American defense. This meant that many talented artists and highly trained professional people, as well as craftsmen, cooks, merchants,

farmers, and gardeners suddenly found themselves herded into detention centers, such as Santa Anita Racetrack. Stripped of homes, property, and incomes, they sat out the long war in confinement.

They were surely casualties of the Pearl Harbor attack as well. In the East, there was also prejudice, even hatred against the Japanese. And there were casualties, too, though not in cruel internment camps. For the world of dance, a major casualty was the performance career of a remarkably talented, unusually individualistic dancer/choreographer. After five amazingly successful years on tour in Europe, this acclaimed dancer had returned to America, his adopted country, to enjoy an initial triumphal tour of the U. S., Canada, and Cuba.

Yet, when Yeichi Nimura and his partner Lisan Kay began planning a second national tour, shortly before the outbreak of war, they found to their sadness that hostile sentiments about all things Japanese were already beginning to harden. New York City, more cosmopolitan, was less hostile and certainly always receptive to outstanding talent. But even in New York, shadows of the war-clouds in China could be seen. Sentiments against the Japanese and their actions in Asia were growing. So, regretfully and at the top of his form as a dancer, Yeichi Nimura gave his last formal concert on October 12, 1940.

After staging Madame Butterfly for a special production which opened on May 1, 1940, at Radio City Music Hall, Nimura withdrew from public view. Fortunately, he was not interned – which surely would have happened had he been working in Hollywood. He was allowed to continue his work, already begun on his numerous tours, of teaching, training, and coaching. Nimura spent the war years with many grateful students in Carnegie Hall's old Studio 61. Not until December 18, 1945 when Michael

Meyerberg's production of Lute Song – with a Raymond Scott score – opened in New Haven, and later in Philadelphia, bound for success on Broadway, was Nimura's name again prominently before the public. For this memorable, beautiful, haunting show, featuring Mary Martin and Yul Brynner, Nimura had created the choreography and devised the movement throughout. Not only the critics and the audiences certified Nimura's gifts; Mary Martin said, "Nimura is incredible. I saw him do the impossible." Brynner was impressed as well: "He was like a magnificent Samurai of unearthly grace and magnificent masculinity."

Thus, World War II is one of the reasons that many dancers and dance-lovers do not know the work of Yeichi Nimura. It is a very big reason. And that is a great loss, as those who did have the chance to see him dance, to be coached by him, or to dance in a show he was choreographing can testify.

But it wasn't only Nimura's comparative withdrawal during World War II that prevented more people, new audiences, from coming to know and admire his choreography and performance skills. He was, as his widow and longtime partner, Lisan Kay, points out, "one of a kind," a highly individualistic talent. He was not eager to train platoons of young dancers to imitate his solos. Both as a teacher and as a choreographer, Yeichi Nimura was intent on developing what was individually, uniquely best in his students.

As a direct result of this policy, there were no young men prepared to take up the mantle of Nimura the dancer nor to master his impressive collection of distinctive dances. Lisan Kay Nimura, who was not only his partner but also his colleague in the Ballet Arts School he developed at Carnegie Hall, has taught some of his work and is eager to do that again.

Recently, the New York Times headlined a dance report: “Dancers Rediscover the Michio Ito Style.” Perhaps that is a prophetic portent of a rediscovery of Nimura as well. After all, Nimura’s first professional credit was being featured in two numbers choreographed by Michio Ito for a revue titled Ching-a-Ling, which opened January 16, 1927, in Wilmington, Delaware. The following summer, he performed a fan-dance as a pupil of Michio Ito’s, for a Dance Masters of America program in New York City.

Don’t imagine, however, that a Nimura revival will fill America’s dance arenas with highly restrained, refined male dancers replicating the complicated, ritualistic steps of some old Japanese temple dance. That would be the wrong idea entirely. Nimura’s artistic impulse in fact took the best from East and West which he could use effectively. Some exercises with Ted Shawn, for instance, convinced them both that it was impossible for the inventive, dynamic Nimura to duplicate what the rest of an ensemble was doing. “But,” Shawn is reported to have told him, “what you were doing was very interesting to watch.”

“In my dance I use what I have learned from all types of dance technique, athletics, and fencing to express what I see, what I feel, what I believe! The dance should be more than physical movement. It should seek its inspiration in spiritual sources and come only as a result of great convictions within us...”

Those are the words of Yeichi Nimura, acknowledged a master by those who saw him dance and by those who studied with him. But last spring, on April 18, 1979, it was not Nimura who was speaking them. Instead they were being uttered as a testimony to his life and work at a memorial service, held at New York’s Buddhist Church shortly after Nimura’s release from the suffering of illness stoically borne.

Not only did critics pay often ecstatic homage to Nimura's lithe muscularity and shrewd subtlety in his dance creations, but they also felt compelled to comment on his strikingly handsome person. Pictures of Yeichi Nimura in such roles as that of a Javanese Monkey God show him naked to the waist. Jet-black hair frames strong but sensitive features. The arms and torso show great muscle definition, without being in any way bulky or overdeveloped. Instead, there is a lean clarity of body line. Sometimes the waist, hips, and legs are clad in loosely flowing pantaloons. But they also reveal their power and lines in brief tighter costumes.

Quite early in his career, his attractiveness and strength – as well as his gifts as choreographer-dancer – drew exclamations from critics. Hearst's Journal American, for example, had this to say: "The Japanese, Nimura, shows us how magnificent and how beautiful the male dancer can be. His face is serene, more classic than oriental. His body leaps and gleams and becomes exalted in dance portrayals as unorthodox as his technique is unusual... his art is supreme!"

Writing in 1930, the year of Nimura's first formal dance recital, John Martin was also admiring, if more restrained in his praise: "He provided himself with ample opportunity to reveal the fluidity of movement, the balance and muscular control which are so markedly in his technical equipments." Seven years later, Martin was to say: "He has strength, precision, sharpness of attack, agility, and that most important of stage qualifications, the ability to command attention every moment."

A 1937 publicity flyer with daring Art Deco color – clashes of orange and aqua advised the American public – and especially potential bookers of the first American tour of Nimura and Lisan Kay, after five years of touring European capitals – that Nimura was the "rage of Europe," and that he was

often spoken of as “The Nijinski of Today,” “The Dancing Priest,” and “The Omar Khayyam of the Dance.” Today, this may sound like pre – World War II press-puffery, but, in truth, the reviews Nimura and his devoted partner received during their long stay abroad were loaded with breathless superlatives. Reading them now, when it is far too late to ever have the chance to see Nimura move, even as a teacher, one is struck by the unanimity of the admiration, from Budapest to Berlin and from Salzburg to Stockholm. The conclusion is inescapable: Nimura must have been a remarkable talent, very special, highly individual, and not to be duplicated. Those of us who never saw him dance quite clearly have missed a major experience.

The tour flyer is not modest on Nimura’s behalf, however. It flatly states: “Nimura’s first tour represents the most important and revolutionary contribution to the American public since the appearances of Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Nijinski, or Wigman.” Whatever else they may have been to the artists they represented, Dorothy Granville and Paul Stoes – direction and management for Nimura and Kay – were strongly supportive.

So it may be with a grain of salt that one digests the flyer’s news that Yeichi Nimura was “...Born in Japan from an aristocratic line of warriors, statesmen, and priests, who for 500 years maintained the strict Samurai traditions...” Yet that is the gist of Nimura’s origins as he himself recounted them.

Considering how early most would-be dancers are urged to begin training, Nimura found his way to dance quite late, comparatively speaking. This is stressed by choreographer Pauline Koner, who was briefly his first partner in New York. Her great admiration for his ability, she says today, is heightened by the knowledge – gained only later – that he was not 25

years old when she, a mere 17, joined him in concert. He was, in fact, 8 years older than that. It is understandable, of course, that a debutant dancer would hardly want to warn critics and public that he was already past thirty. Miss Koner couldn't have guessed how much older he was, she explains, because he looked so young and moved so vibrantly.

Since Yeichi Nimura is no longer able to describe his beginnings, they must be related by Lisan Kay Nimura: Nimura was born Tomizo Miki in Suwa, Japan, on March 25, 1897. He changed his name to Yeichi Nimura, after coming to the United States in 1918. His father was the Chief of Police of Nagoya. He never knew his mother, although he tried all his life to find out about her. At the time of his birth, Suwa was a small city of about 15,000 people. The population is now 50,000. Suwa is nestled in the mountains, with Lake Suwa, where Nimura ice-skated as a boy, "at the bottom of the bowl."

As a child, Nimura hated school, but he loved Nature. Everything outdoors fascinated him. Rainbows had great meaning for him. His cousin Mitsu told him that he had been born in the fork of a tree. His father, whom he adored, died when he was six, and he was taken in by his father's brother, who had a family of his own. Nimura always felt like a step-child and an added burden.

When Nimura was born, his grandfather, a man of leadership and cultural achievements, was not only the patriarch of the Miki family, but of the town of Suwa as well. He taught the tea-ceremony and he played the koto and the flute in the temple. Nimura was the last, the 16th generation of a family which had begun as Samurais. But the fortunes of the family had declined.

Grandfather Miki was both revered and feared by Nimura. His

discipline was a bit much for a small boy. Nimura recalled his grandfather's insistence that he take only three grains of rice at a time with his chopsticks. He explained that rice was not easy to grow, and food should not be wasted. The fact that Nimura had rarely enough to eat anyhow made this advice almost impossible to bear. Though grateful for the learning he had received from the old man, Nimura was relieved when he died in Nimura's tenth year. But it was the end for the Miki family.

Since he could remember, Nimura had looked up at the mountains and wondered what lay beyond. About this time, he climbed to the top of a mountain which he thought was "the top of the world." To his astonishment, there were many other mountains, as far as the eye could see, and higher, too. He was awed by the endless beauty of nature – and the sense that he was part of it. He saw, as in a mirage, a dream of his future, but without a specific form.

Nimura left Suwa with an uncle when he was about 14. The uncle went to live with a daughter in Hokkaido, but Nimura stayed in Tokyo, where he had some contacts through his late father. He worked first for a lawyer. Then he worked at the Post Office. He went to business college for a year, doing well in mathematics. At that time, he became interested in the Kabuki Theatre. It fascinated him.

There was an uncle, Matsugi Bunkio, who was established in Boston as a Japanese curio importer and dealer. Once when he visited Suwa, he had told Nimura, "You come on over and see me." So September 1918 found Nimura in Seattle, after a sea voyage from Japan. On board, he'd met another boy whose father owned a hotel in Seattle. He stayed there until he could find work. It took him two years to work his way across America to Boston, having no money. He'd learned some English at the

business college in Tokyo, and he steadily improved it. He worked in Chicago for about a year, mostly as a house-boy. The summer of 1919, he met some other Japanese on a lettuce-farm in Minnesota. Times were not good for Orientals in America. Meeting the famous Judo expert, Yamauchi (9th Dan), here was good fortune because his influence later helped Nimura when he arrived in New York.

When Nimura finally reached Boston, his uncle had given up the curio shop and moved to New York to teach oriental history at Columbia University. So in 1920, Nimura also came to New York. He found his uncle. He decided to stay at the Japanese Men's Christian Association, which used to be on East 57th Street. He supported himself as a waiter in a Greenwich Village tea-room. This job gave him valuable leads and contacts for dance study.

Nimura was interested in dance. He saw an ad for a ballet school on West 72nd Street, but he was disappointed in the training that he found there. He'd been attracting attention in dance-halls. People told him he ought to study. The turning point came when he saw a Denishawn program. He was inspired. Miss Ruth's performance was a revelation.

At the time, however, Denishawn was on tour, so Nimura studied with Katharine Edson. He had never really intended to be a dancer but Miss Edson saw his quality and pushed him. She gave him the confidence to pursue a career in the dance. She autographed a photo for him: 'To Nimura, in whom I see the spark of genius.' Katharine Edson had studied and danced with the Pavley-Oukrainsky Ballet in Chicago, so her work was more ballet than Denishawn. She brought him to her summer-school on an island off the Maine coast. They did improvisations, danced to the phonograph after dinner, anything to help him develop, since he was

starting so late. During this time, he also studied ballet with Constantin Kobleff and Ivan Tarasoff, and Spanish with Aurora Arriaza.

Even then, Nimura had a quality of nobility about him – of which he wasn't aware. But others saw it, especially his teachers. He was always totally relaxed, as if depending on a Higher power to carry him through. And yet he belonged to no specific faith.

Through Miss Edson, Nimura had got a scholarship to the Denishawn summer school in 1924. It was held in Studio 61 at Carnegie Hall – later to become Nimura's own studio. But it didn't work. Nimura knew he would never be a good pupil. Later, when Nimura did some of his dances at Jacobs Pillow, Ted Shawn told him, "As a student, you fascinated me. I couldn't take my eyes off what you were doing – but you never followed."

In the mid-1920's, Nimura had a few classes with Michio Ito. But they didn't get along, because Ito kept urging Nimura to be more delicate. Nimura's style was already strong. Ito was teaching at the John Murray Anderson School on East 59th Street. His manager then was Virginia Ice, who later changed her last name to Lee. She'd studied ballet, like Katharine Edson, with the Pavley-Oukrainsky in Chicago and had had her own school in Muncie, Indiana.

Then she came to New York and did well both as a dancer and as a director of shows and films. In films, she'd worked with artists such as D. W. Griffith, Will Rogers, Rudolf Valentino, Marion Davis, and Richard Barthelmess.

Willard Vanderveer, a director/cameraman who had gone to the South Pole with Amundsen, liked Miss Ice's work. They formed a team to make film shorts for Pathé and Paramount. In doing research on Japanese customs for one of these films, Miss Ice met Ito. First, she studied dance

with him. Later, in trying to help his career, her latent managerial ability began to assert itself.

Then Nimura appeared in Ching-a-Ling, choreographed by Ito. The show didn't last long, but Nimura made a definite impression as a dancer. And Virginia Ice began to take more of an interest in Nimura. She was self-educated, rather like Nimura. There couldn't have been a better person to promote and manage Nimura's career. She arranged for Nimura to do a fan dance for the Dance Masters in the summer of 1927.

Louis Horst was to accompany him. Nervous, Nimura told Horst, "Please do not stop, whatever happens." Horst replied, "Nimura, I have been playing for twenty years and I haven't stopped yet!" Nimura finished the dance with éclat – but by some miscalculation, with his back to the audience.

Shortly after that, Nimura again found himself in dance difficulties, but for a different reason. Michio Ito had been invited by the late Louis Ledoux to present a Noh dance-drama in his Park Avenue apartment. He was a wealthy businessman who was a pioneer in the collecting of Japanese wood-prints and costumes. He admired and loved things Japanese. He wanted the opportunity to show his guests his beautiful Noh costumes.

Actually, Ito knew little about Noh techniques, but he needed the \$25 that had been promised him, with another \$25 for a partner. He asked Nimura, who knew even less than he did about the Noh. But Ito was undaunted: "Just follow me," he encouraged Nimura. They had a brief afternoon rehearsal before the evening performance. It consisted mostly of the two dancers circling round and round, while Ito's brother Yugi pounded on a drum. They improvised for about ten minutes and were satisfied that they had something unusual to show Ledoux and his friends.

That evening, however, at one point Nimura somehow dislodged the Noh mask he was wearing. He could see nothing. As Yugi Ito thumped away on the drum, Nimura artfully, slowly, swung around, away from the audience so that he could covertly readjust his mask. Meanwhile, Ito was improvising ingeniously until Nimura was able to join him again. After the performance, they were amused to learn that everyone thought this strategic maneuver was really part of a traditional dance.

Even today, young dancers trying to survive in New York will be able to appreciate what that \$25 meant to Nimura – and a dollar was worth a lot more then. One early Nimura engagement was as a tango-dancer, partnering Tanagra, an American Indian dancer, married to novelist Tiffany Thayer, in night-club stints with Vincent Lopez's orchestra. Nimura choreographed the dance, and the performances generated a lot of publicity for him.

Late in 1927, Nimura appeared in a Spear Episode in a benefit for World War I veterans at the Hotel Plaza. Soon after that, he was billed as a specialty dancer in the musical, Taza, at the Cort-Jamaica Theatre. In May 1928, he found himself among distinguished colleagues at the Manhattan Opera House, where Irene Lewisohn was producing a dance-symphonic event, with the Cleveland Orchestra, under Nikolai Sokoloff. Among the luminaries – if not so famous then – were Martha Graham, Sophie Maslow, Anna Sokolow, Michio Ito, and Charles Weidman. This inventive troupe worked out a hasty choreography for an Ernest Bloch symphony, a dance work which could never be duplicated.

The Spear Episode, or Ambush, as it was later called, was a tremendously telling early Nimura creation. It turned up again in 1928, this time in the framework of a rather unlikely event, an Abraham Lincoln

Memorial Pageant in Minneola, Long Island, with the grand title of Wings of Time. Later in the season, Nimura was signed as featured dancer in a Shubert Theatre production of A Night in Venice. After that, in 1929, he was twice seen at the Roxy, where Leo Staats, of the Paris Opera, was then ballet-master. His performance dancing a ??????? very much impressed Lisan Kay, but she didn't then know who the dancer was – nor could she have guessed that one day he would be her partner, not just in dance, but in life. “Afterward,” she says, “I kept recalling the extraordinary strength and beauty of style.”

Soon after, he was again working, dancing for the Shuberts. This time the nights were not Venetian, but Broadway Nights. They were enacted not on Broadway, however, but on the stage of the Hanna Theatre in Cleveland. The stage proved an enemy to Nimura, as it seldom would be in his future career. He was required to jump, in total darkness, from a seven-foot platform to the stage. Unfortunately, at one performance, a stage-hand forgot to put a shock-absorbing mat in place. The injury forced Nimura to leave the show.

He made a rapid recovery and began preparing for his first recital-concert, to be held at the New Yorker Theatre, on February 23, 1930. Of this, Lisan Kay says that it was a great success, introducing Nimura, partnered by the young Pauline Koner. The reviews bear out her assertion. Despite the warm welcome both dancers received – appearing in solos and as a duo – the partnership didn't last long. Lisan Kay attributes this to a difference of ideas, which seems entirely plausible, given the strong characters of both Nimura and Miss Koner.

But, to learn more about this brief but electric collaboration, it was necessary to talk to Pauline Koner herself. Miss Koner is slight, lithe,

dynamic, and of a timeless handsomeness. She is surely aware of how striking and vital she looks – and is – for almost her first remark is to note that she is 67 years old. Or young, more appropriately. She laughs, admitting she now tells her age, “for shock value.”

Asked about that memorable concert – and a couple that followed it, one in New York and one at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia – Pauline Koner hunts for a huge scrapbook of yellowing reviews. Shards of cracked, broken old newsprint flutter out as the book is opened. Miss Koner finds the glowing review of that fateful Nimura debut. “Yes, here it is! February 23 it must have been, because the review is on the 24th. That means I had to have been working with Nimura already in 1929.

“I’d been touring with Michio Ito,” continues Miss Koner. “Virginia Ice/Lee had worked with Ito, and was now working with Nimura. She had a special thing for oriental dancers. I came back from the tour and walked into Studio 61 in Carnegie Hall. Virginia saw me and said, ‘I heard about you. You’re the girl Ito chose.’ Actually, I’d had only six lessons with Ito, and he asked me to be in his company.

“Nimura’s looking for a partner,’ Virginia said. ‘Sure,’ I told her. I was seventeen. He said he was twenty – five, but he was really fifteen years older. He asked me to do some things. Then he said, ‘Let’s work together,’ Alys Bentley had Studio 61 – with a little apartment in back where she lived. She liked Nimura, so he got the use of the Studio free, when it wasn’t engaged. That meant we couldn’t rehearse until 8, 9, or 10 o’clock at night. I was also taking courses at Columbia, so I’d do my courses. Then I’d hang around the Art Students League, drinking tea, waiting to rehearse. Then I’d go home to my family in Brooklyn.

“The idea was for us to give a joint recital. I was not an assistant.

Virginia had found a sponsor for the recital. We worked on two duets, each doing some solos. The duets we created together, but I did my own solos. Having just come from Ito, I was very Japanese-minded. It was an extraordinary experience.

“But neither Nimura nor Ito were what you could call Japanese dancers. They weren’t grounded in Japanese dance traditions. But their work had the quality, flavor, style, and ambiance of the orient. The intensity! The kind of movement orientals have in space. They often seem to glide over a floor. We Americans have such difficulty mastering that. Maybe it’s from sitting on the floor so much? Developing strong thighs? Oriental dancers aren’t limited, as westerners often are by classical training, to the elongated leg. There is instead a bent knee line. Even today, I find it difficult to get my dancers to glide without moving the upper body. We tend to involve the whole body in walking.

“Nimura’s body was beautifully proportioned. He had a marvelous inner intensity, charisma. An inner focus – magnetic! It held an audience. They knew they were seeing, feeling an exciting presence. He had wavy black hair – unusual for a Japanese – and he tried to get it to lie flat and straight. That bothered him a bit.

“We fell in together. He didn’t train me. I had a lot of dance background. I’m a born New Yorker, and I’d studied classical with Fokine, Spanish with Cansino, before I danced with Nimura. When I danced with Ito, I also did solos. And at ends of sections, a trio with Ito and his best student Kohana. We got raves.

“When I joined Nimura, he was dancing as well as he did in his whole life. He was like a Stradivarius. A marvelous instrument. He moved so well in space. He knew how to do with his own body just what he wanted.

He had his own specifics. No wonder he couldn't do what Ted Shawn wanted. On stage, he was really a great presence.

"But Virginia had to sell him to the public. They were starving. My parents gave me lunch-money for Columbia. We'd all three go to the Automat and divvy it up for sandwiches. Then we'd rehearse for three or four hours.

"One of our duets was of two Japanese scarecrows. Let me find the program for the exact title. Here! Nimura drew very well; he designed this program. Here it is: Fantasia. That was the name of the scarecrow dance. We had masks on the backs of our heads, if I'm not mistaken. Our program was very eclectic. We also did a modern suite, Cosmic Poems. First came his solo, Chaos. Then Beginning, my solo, and finally a duet, Primeval – the first time with music, the second, without. It was one of the first dances without music, so telling we had to encore it. I did an East Indian dance. He did his famous cat dance, Le Chat Homme. I did a Debussy, minstrelesque. Sword Ritual – that was his! And what was the one with a spear? Ambush, I think. It was done in silence. He had such a feeling for it. It was very exciting.

"Nimura was quite tall for a Japanese. I don't mean tall-tall, but much taller than I. He was very handsome. People turned round in the street to look at him. And he had such a good mind, very creative. He designed his own costumes, and I did mine. But nothing was very Japanese, not even the scarecrows. They were stylized. But the program had impact. Reviewers didn't quite know what to say about it."

In Pauline Koner's scrapbook is pasted a review by one who had a clue. Perhaps he got his idea from the title of one of the Nimura dances, but he decided that Nimura's dancing was primeval. What the reviewer of

the Jewish Daily Forward had to say is not immediately apparent, unless you can read Hebrew characters, but Miss Koner says that it was most favorable.

Philadelphia also liked the duo, but Miss Koner's thoughtful, protective father had qualms about his daughter's welfare in the City of Brotherly Love. He gave her some money, just in case. A wise move, since the manager ran off with the proceeds during the performance, leaving Nimura and Miss Koner stranded. The parental donation got them back to New York City, wiser in the ways of arts management.

"I worked with Nimura only that season," Miss Koner recalls. "I couldn't continue. I agreed to dance on an equal basis. I had my own identity, and I intended to keep it. I wasn't going to be an assistant. Nimura had a chance to be in a show. I told Virginia I'd like to work with him, but she said it was his engagement, and I'd have to be his assistant. With all my seventeen years and five-foot one-inch, I said, 'Virginia, I'll never be anyone's assistant!' It broke my heart to say it. And I walked out. But that pushed me into proving I could make it on my own. That same year, 1930, I gave my first solo concert at the Guild Theatre. Rave notices. John Martin gave me two columns in the Sunday Times. If that hadn't happened, I might never have had the courage to do it.

"For a long time, I was very hurt. But then I said to myself, 'Don't be angry. It was the best thing that could have happened.' So we resumed our friendship. I even rented his old studio when he moved. If I'd been allowed to perform as Nimura's equal, I'd have stayed on for a while. I liked working with him. But eventually I'd have wanted to be on my own. My area was at that time ballet and ethnic. The oriental was new to me, and modern was really just beginning."

Pauline Koner sighs. “Nimura was so gorgeous. I was enamored of him, yes. Who wouldn’t be?”

“We never worked as teacher and pupil, but I’m sure he was a wonderful teacher. He was so positive, so helpful. He’d do a movement; I’d do a movement, when we were working together, and we’d improvise together. He’d do something, and I’d pick it up. I’d do something, and he’d develop it. That’s also the way I worked with Jose Limon.

“Nimura’s concentration and intensity rubbed off on me. I had some, but not yet focused. He helped me in that. He and Ito both had tremendous magic, in different ways. You are either born with – or without it – but if you have it, then it can be developed.

“Virginia was trying to push Nimura up, and me down. Sharing would have been something else. That’s why I said goodbye. I wish we’d had videotapes in those days. His spear dance was so remarkable. It could have been reconstructed, but it wouldn’t be the same, without Nimura dancing it.

“Nimura called me Miss Pauline, and he appreciated my work. We were good friends over the years. I’ll miss him and his wonderful qualities. Always so courtly, so thoughtful, so concerned – but with a sense of humor, too!

Although Nimura had depended on the kindness of Alys Bentley and loans of Studio 61, as well as the studio of the Whitehead sisters, Douglass and Virginia, who also admired his work, he was already attracting young dancers who wanted to study with him. Virginia Lee invited people to watch Nimura in rehearsal from time to time. And sometimes even Alys Bentley – Alyben – got a bit carried away by the excitement of the work. In the momentary enthusiasm of a Nimura improvisation, she volunteered a

voluminous cape she wore for his use in the dance. But the next day, she demanded, “Nimura, where is my cape?” For a while, he taught at the Roerich Museum on Riverside Drive. Finally, Nimura was able to open his own Lincoln Square Studio, at Broadway and 66th Streets, where the Juilliard School now stands. One of his accompanists at this time was James Quillian, long-time accompanist for Eleanor Steber. He also found time for concerts around New York, and for an appearance in Franz Lehar’s Prince Chu-Chang, as principal dancer, at Newark’s Shubert Theatre.

With the departure of Pauline Koner, he was still looking for a partner. Fortuitously, so was a girl named Elizabeth Hathaway. She had risen from the corps de ballet of the Pavley-Oukrainsky to become a soloist.

After five years with the ensemble, she left it at the close of a Miami season in 1931, to come to New York, prospecting for a partner. Miss Hathaway took an apartment with an old chum from the Pavley-Oukrainsky Summer Camp in Michigan, Iva Kitchell, who was later to win acclaim as a dance satirist. One day, stopping by the Mayflower Pharmacy for a Coke, the new girl in town and Miss Kitchell were surprised to learn that the counter-boy had seen Miss Hathaway dance in Chicago, when he was on tour with a musical version of Lysistrata. He was sure that she would love the work of his most marvelous dance teacher, a man called Yeichi Nimura. He described the dance they were doing in class, to a Liszt-Paganini etude, Nimura, it seemed, was looking for a partner. One he had found had just been injured in a taxi-accident, and would, sadly, no longer dance.

In the meantime – this was the spring of 1931 – Nimura and Ruth St. Denis had appeared at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. St. Denis did “Dances of the West,” with Nimura contributing “Dances of the East.” Then came the

Prokofiev Pas d'Acier performance at the old Met, under the baton of Leopold Stokowski. Nimura's work may not have pleased his choreographer-partner Edwid Strawbridge, but it delighted Stokowski. So much so, that the Maestro, seated at a post-performance reception, immediately stood up and applauded the entering Nimura, rapidly seconded by the others in the room. In May 1931, Nimura had a Roerich Museum concert, assisted by his pupils, with Pauline Koner as guest artist. He also had two summer engagements at the Roxy Theatre again.

Elizabeth Hathaway, aware of his increasing reputation as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher, finally found her way to the Roerich Museum studio, where she met Virginia Lee. Miss Lee said she could audition by participating in a Nimura class. Miss Hathaway remembers being fascinated by the work – and by Nimura – but full of doubts regarding her ability to do what Nimura wanted.

Doubts persisted through the summer, but in October 1931, when Nimura had moved into his new Lincoln Square studios, she had made up her mind. She joined the classes, “caught on fast,” and was an assistant teacher in a few months. Her first opportunity to be Nimura's partner came in December, when she and Marta Terazzi, both Nimura pupils, partnered him at the Waldorf-Astoria. Both girls were shortly to change their professional names, Elizabeth Hathaway to Lisan Kay and Marta Terazzi to Martha Manners.

Today, Lisan Kay Nimura recalls that first dance he choreographed for this engagement: Chi'en Niu and the Spinning Maiden. “It was a beautiful fantasy. Not so much of an oriental dance, as a dance with oriental influences. Actually, there were two Chinese dances. The other was The Dream of General Wong. This is a picture of it; there I'm a

sorceress hypnotizing General Wong to give him victory in battle. On tour, I was the lone sorceress, but at first both Marta and I were sorceresses. Both these lovely dances stayed in our repertoire. You see? Even pictures of Nimura dancing are like a performance. He didn't like movement for its own sake. There had to be motivation. Even in his abstract dance you could always find a theme or a story in it."

"Nimura was just then much taken with Chinese Opera and composed several numbers on it, but in his own style. There were also some studio recitals, in which Marta Terrazi, Raya Keen, and I danced his Life Perpetual, while Nimura sat at one side, playing on a drum. The drum with its tympany-head, as played by Nimura, had a mystic, hypnotic effect and greatly inspired us. I also learned the Liszt-Paganini etude the counter-boy had so raved about.

"Nimura asked Pauline Koner to teach me Primeval. I was thrilled to learn that dance. It is more than a dance – it is a transcendent experience! Nimura also taught me his choreography for Lacuna's Malaguena. The music is popular now, but it was little known then," Lisan Kay Nimura recalls.

The end of 1931 came – actually December 30 – with a concert divided between Nimura's work and that of Carola Goya. This was organized by Lucile Marsh, former editor of Dance magazine. 1932 began with classes and some recital work, fairly uneventful, considering the great change in Nimura's career which was about to happen.

In the spring of that year, Sali Lobel arrived in New York, looking for outstanding teachers of different dance styles to come to the historic Buxton Opera House, in Buxton, England, for the First International Congress of the Dance, planned for that summer. She was impressed with

Nimura's work and signed him up as a teacher. His specialty was to be contemporary innovation, not oriental dance, appropriately enough.

Lisan Kay planned to stay in New York and cover some of his classes for him. But the Dancer's Club had organized a nation-wide contest to pick a "Most Promising American Dancer," the prize being an all-expense-paid trip to Buxton for the Congress, including passage on the Cunard Line. At first the bait excited no interest in the future Mrs. Nimura. She felt that she never performed well in auditions and would surely repeat that history in this contest.

Ruth St. Denis was announced as Dean of Judges. And Miss Ruth announced that she intended to have a personal interview with each of the contest entrants. Lisan Kay remembers she had always wanted to meet the famous dancer, so for this reason, despite her fears and with no hope of winning, she reluctantly entered. On impulse, she and Virginia Lee went to a meeting of a spiritualist church in the Lincoln Square Building. She wrote on a slip of paper her wish for some indication of her future. The medium eventually found her request, held it, meditated, and then said, "There is a clergyman here, standing, holding an open book on which is written the word, Victory!"

Far from New York City, Lisan Kay/Elizabeth Hathaway's Episcopal clergyman father had died six months before she was born. She was amazed, "It gave me a sense of mystery and destiny," she now says, "which I have never lost." She chose a dance, Introduction to the Chinese Theatre, which Nimura had taught his students in class. Drawing lots, she got number 11, which she considers lucky for her to this day, since she won the contest and was able to go to Buxton with Nimura.

And so did the ubiquitous Virginia Lee, who, though she wasn't

dancing or teaching, arranged to go to Buxton as Nimura's manager. In a few months she was to prove invaluable to the launching of Nimura's European career. She was, by all accounts, a tenacious manager, always fighting for Nimura's rights and needs. And for his recognition by critics and public alike.

Predictably, Nimura's talents and personal charm made him a great favorite at the Congress. At its closing, Nimura and Lisan Kay performed together at the Faculty Gala. But, considering that Nimura had been completely outfitted by a generous patron – including white-tie and tails – for the trip, the trio of Nimura, Lee, and Kay thought they ought to take opportunity and see Paris. Miss Kay had a letter of introduction to Walter Wagner's sister, Nadja, who held a salon in Paris, and both Nimura and Miss Lee had contacts there.

Virginia Lee got right to work. Soon Nimura was dancing the Prologue to a new Japanese film, Nippon. This was under the patronage of the Japanese Ambassador, in the Theatre Folies-Dramatiques on December 10, 1932. Huge posters showing Nimura's face were plastered all over Paris. There were also concerts with Lisan Kay – still dancing under the name of Elizabeth Hathaway – as his partner in the Theatre du Vieux-Colobier. There, unbidden, impresarios flocked to see Nimura, offering to plan tours for him.

The winner in the impresario race was the OTE, or Office Theatral Européen. It handled such artists as Milstein, Piatigorsky, Horowitz, Chaliapin, and the Ballets Russes. Its representative, Mme. Natalie Bouchonnet rapidly arranged a tour of Poland for Nimura and partner. In Paris and on tour, Nimura gave lecture-demonstrations of his work. When and as he could, assisted by Lisan Kay, he taught and coached.

On January 20, 1933, Lisan Kay was billed as Nimura's partner for the first time, an association that was to be broken only by death. Paris audiences and critics alike were enthusiastic about Nimura's highly original dances. Encomiums poured in, from reviewers and from no less a personage than Prince Pierre Volkonsky. As if to match the imagery of Nimura's dance in critical phrases, Valerian Svetloff, of La Renaissance, enthused: "His noble movements were inspired, bringing to my mind the volcanic majesty of the land of his birth!"

The Polish tour was a critical success – and a monetary one as well, though the Latvian impresario who accompanied them constantly complained about their taking daily baths. Not because it was not the custom to bathe daily in Poland, but because water was so costly there.

At that time, there were border difficulties between Poland and Lithuania. Nimura was engaged to perform in Jaunas, Lithuania, after his Polish appearances. The travelling impresario, one Jules Borkon, urged Nimura and Lisan Kay to go directly on to Kaunas, while he obtained the necessary work permits. He stayed behind in Poland with all the money, saying he would join the dancing duo in three days. Unfortunately, he couldn't get a permit to come through himself. Nimura and his partner were stranded, virtually without cash. This time it was harder to get back to Paris than it had been to return to New York from Philadelphia.

Vera Nemtchinova and Anatole Oboukhoff, whose company was then performing at the Kaunas Opera were most hospitable and helpful. Nimura also got an engagement to dance at the Hotel Metropole. Eventually, both he and Lisan Kay got back to Paris, but separately. And their unfortunate accompanist returned to Germany.

As though to apologize for this mishap, the OTE management

blocked out a tour the following season which was mainly royal opera houses in national capitols. Again, the reviews were glowing, gratifying. In distant Riga, in Latvia, a critic was ecstatic: “Yeichi Nimura. He is a conqueror, a wizard. When he is stretching the bow and the invisible arrows are flying through the hall, the heart stands still for Nimura has conquered you!”

And this from a Paris critic: “Gong! No music. Only the sound of the gong proclaiming mysteriously in the silence – absolute silence – of the electrified audience; a mystical scene of beauty as dreamed by Nimura... This miraculous Japanese is really a son of that ‘World of the Sun,’ and the sound of the gong expressed better than anything else that affirmation... the Infinite of Beauty.”

Since Nimura always traveled light and never had a great deal of money, he could hardly have arrived in Paris from Buxton with a gong of requisite resonance and dimension. But Virginia Lee knew how to manage that. As Lisan Kay Nimura recalls, “We found a large one in a music-store, but it was much too expensive. Virginia persuaded the man that it would be an honor for him to allow us to use the gong – and she promised him tickets. We did make a modest down-payment on it. We got the gong, and the man was impressed enough with the performance to permit us to keep it!”

To give some idea of the concert-recitals which Nimura and Lisan Kay were performing all over Europe, here is program of the Gala de Danse offered Geneva audiences at the Theatre de la Comedie in May 1934:

Premiere Partie:

1. La pluie a Yedo (Lisan Kay) – a young girl walking home through

the streets of old Tokyo is surprised by a sudden shower.

2. Ceremonie "Tribute des Armes" (Yeichi Nimura) – a samurai warrior, mortally wounded in a tournament before his Doimyo, hides his wound until he can die out of sight.
3. Rituel de Sabre (Yeichi Nimura) – a warrior kneels before the altar of his god, asking victory; the spirit of the god descends on him, and he acts out the drama of battle and victory.
4. Scherzo (Lisan Kay) – no comment.
5. Waldesrauschen (George Bernard, piano accompaniment) – the Franz Liszt composition.
6. Poeme Cosmique:
 - a) Le Monde est un Tambour (Yeichi Nimura) – representing the vain struggle against fate, with the conclusion that it's not possible for Humanity to escape Destiny.
 - b) Primeval (Yeichi Nimura and Lisan Kay, w/o accompaniment) – Man and Woman become aware of their Fate.
7. Impression Javanaise (Yeichi Nimura) – the first celebrates the beauty of the four seasons in Kyoto; the second, in a slow, graceful rhythm, symbolizes a long life spent in happiness.
8. Deux Danses Japonaises de l'Eventail (Yeichi Nimura) – the first celebrates the beauty of the four seasons in Kyoto; the second, in a slow, graceful rhythm, symbolizes a long life spent in happiness.
9. Fantaisie Orientale (Lisan Kay) – no comment.
10. Prelude (Yeichi Nimura) – modern version of Toltec Indian ritual

dances.

11. Valse (Lisan Kay) – romantic evocation.
12. Le Chat Sorcier, “Nekomata” (Yeichi Nimura) – from old popular Japanese beliefs that men may be possessed by evil spirits in the form of a witch-cat.
13. Danse Russe de Petrouchka (Georges Bernand, piano) – Stravinsky.
14. Impression Chinoise (Yeichi Nimura and Lisan Kay) – the legend of the celestial lovers, the twin stars in the Milky Way, or Chi'en Niu and the Spinning Maiden.
15. L'Embuscade (Yeichi Nimura) – in a civil war, a lone soldier is surprised by enemies and must defend himself.

Lisan Kay choreographed her two solos, Valse and Scherzo. The rest of the dances were created by Nimura. But what of those works and his performance of them? A Prague critic describes The Wizard Cat: “...one can really talk about perfect body control. A cat might well study with him to learn his movements... His trunk stands like a steel axis, which can elevate itself, so to speak, out of itself...” Of Nimura’s London performances, Arnold Haskell said: “Nimura is thrilling! He combines the athletic qualities of the West with the intellectual dance of the East. This is male dancing at its most virile...”

Looking back on the experience of dancing with Nimura for a decade, Lisan Kay recalls: “Nimura was transformed while performing; he seemed more spirit than human. This amazed and inspired me, whether I was dancing with him or watching. Accompanying him on tympany and gong for his Spear Episode and The Earth Is a Drum was of breathless intensity and tremendously exhilarating! The Drum dance was very simple in

design. It was Nimura's manner of execution that made it so effective. He carried a drum which represented Mankind, and the large 21" gong that I played symbolized Destiny. The two were in harmony or conflict throughout until at last the Man falls wearied. As the gong continues its beat with varying dynamics until it dies away, he slowly raises his head and turns his gaze upward. It was poetry in motion, and you never forgot his eyes in that last moment. It showed Man undefeated; realizing and accepting his role under God, and hopeful, knowing that he is capable of perfection. We were continually surprised, and mostly pleased by the various interpretations given Nimura's Cosmic Dances by reviewers and audiences.

"Dancing with Nimura was always fresh and exciting. We never performed any dance twice alike. Varied audiences and our own changing moods determined the performance. The rapport between us enabled me to sense what he was about to do always, and to follow.

"Once, we become entangled in a long rope-like strand of material that we were working with. And this at stage-front-center! My reaction was elation, rather than panic. And, sure enough! Nimura moved decisively and we came out of it as though it had been intended. Neither of us ever missed a performance because of any kind of indisposition. Nimura always said his sense of responsibility made him oblivious to anything else but performance when he was on the stage. And luck was with us, too. Once, in Bulgaria, he hurt his foot in a hole in the floor, during his Drum dance. He finished the dance, and the rest of the program as well, without anyone knowing he was in pain.

"Before our Yugoslavian tour in 1934, we had to make some costume replacements. I found we had to leave two inches of 'give' in Nimura's

costumes, to allow for the expansion when he danced. Nimura made most of his props himself, as well as several head-dresses, including his ornate one for Javanesque. All of his choreographies have included ideas for the costumes. He considered a dance in its entirety.

“His great emphasis in dance was on the quality of movement. Not what you did so much as how you did it. Some of his own dances were quite simple, but he did all of them like tours de force. He gave a simple dance the stature of greatness!

“In our first dance ever, it was like he’d turned on an electric current in himself. He got a quality of movement out of me I didn’t know I had. Moving with him in the dance, I found it like dancing not on the floor, but above it. It was like being possessed of some spirit in a primitive dance. Exactly like that!

“Nimura always had charisma and projection. But he couldn’t follow. Col. de Basil once asked him to come down to Monaco and do Petrouchka with the Ballets Russes. And a ballet with Baronova. For some reason, Nimura understood that he could dance Petrouchka his way, not following the set choreography. It was ridiculous to think that could work. But Danilova befriended him enroute to Monte Carlo and while there. People liked, admired him. He had this god-like quality. One critic said he had a body that would send Phidias into raptures. But he also had a spiritual quality in his physical being!”

In the five years Nimura and Miss Kay toured Europe, from East to West, and from North to South, they made a number of repeat visits to some capitals in which Nimura’s work had been especially well received. But everywhere they performed, they made friends, were invited to stay with patrons of the arts and artists as well, and often ran into other dancers

on the road in Europe.

The booking which brought them back to the United States – Nimura's first – and, as it turned out – virtually his last North American tour – was arranged by Dorothy Granville, who had seen the duo perform in Vienna in 1936. Before returning to America, however, Nimura and Miss Kay went to Palestine, where they played the Tel Aviv Opera House, the Edison Theatre in Jerusalem, and other more remote outposts. In Herzilia, for instance when the piano was opened, a flock of nesting swallows flew out. No matter, only six tickets had been sold, so the concert was cancelled that night.

As a result of the success of the subsequent season's concerts in Cuba, Canada, and the United States in 1937, a second American tour was planned, with twice the number of performances. There were also offers of a South American tour, and a return tour in Europe. But war clouds were ever more menacing, and anti-Japanese sentiment was mounting. So the second tour was truncated to some engagements in the eastern U. S. and in Canada, in the winter and spring of 1938. Engagements were mainly in New York in 1939, including a class demonstration for members of Japan's Takarazuka Theatre, then performing at the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows. The immanence of war was unsuspected by many in a predominantly isolationist country, Anti-Japanese attitudes weren't yet strongly focused. So Nimura was able to give two concerts in Hawaii in October 1939, where racial intermingling had long been the rule.

Then came 1940, with Nimura's final concert on October 12. And in May 1941, Nimura's production of Madame Butterfly at Radio City Music Hall – with an American, Lt. Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, featured as the villain, taking advantage of a trusting, innocent Japanese girl. Not a happy

choice, perhaps, with the Pearl Harbor disaster waiting in the wings. But that was Nimura's last public venture until Lute Song opened in late 1945.

An artist of Nimura's gifts and energies, however, could not sit out the war doing nothing. Nor could he afford to. Fortunately, Alys Bentley wanted to retire, so Nimura took over her studio 61 in May 1937, as a base from which to work. In 1940, the Nimura Studio became the Ballet Arts Studio, but also retaining his Nimura Studio name. Virginia Lee made herself the Director of Ballet Arts, using her forcefulness to promote the Studio and Nimura's teaching. Lisan Kay was a co-teacher, with Nimura.

After Nimura stopped dancing in 1941, Lisan Kay continued performing on her own. But, as she now says, "It wasn't like working with Nimura, and, in time, I lost interest. Our Ballet Arts School became much more important to me. So many distinguished guest teachers were launched from there."

One of Nimura's first choreographic victories, on his return to the U. S., had been the creation of a "Dance of the Seven Veils" for diva Marjorie Lawrence to perform in a Metropolitan Opera production of Strauss's Salome, on February 4, 1938. What impressed the critics especially – and Mme. Lawrence as well – was how effective the dance seemed even though the much admired soprano was in no way a dancer. That suggested to a number of performing artists that Nimura might be the kind of a teacher and coach who could help them move better on stage, even though they had had little prior dance training and were certainly not planning a career in dance. The need for effective stage movement and some dance skills, considering the popularity of musicals on Broadway, was not lost on fledgling actors, actresses, and even operatic sopranos. Among those who profited from working with Nimura were Patricia Neal,

Dorita Morrow, Eleanor Steber, and Elaine Malbin.

An old ad from Musical Courier, coupled with a feature titled "The Dance Owes Artistic Debt to Carnegie Hall," today recalls the main attractions of the Ballet Arts School. Nimura and Lisan Kay are listed as teachers of Modern Ballet, Oriental Dance, and Drama Dance. Igor Schwezoff is credited with expertise in Classic Ballet, Character Dance, and Opera Ballet – whatever that may have been. In those distant days, 1941-42, a month of daily classes with Nimura and his former dance partner cost as little as \$40.

Virginia Lee and Lisan Kay made a list of those who studied at Ballet Arts – or were coached there – from 1937 on. It is formidable; here is a sampling of names – though not all worked with Nimura personally: Alicia Alonso, Jean Arthur, Ina Balin, Talley Beattie, Irina Baronova, Yul Brynner, Leslie Caron, Lucia Chase, Jacques d'Amboise, Gemze DeLappe, Agnes DeMille, Katherine Dunham, Mildred Dunnock, Madge Evans, Ron Fletcher, Bob Fosse, Frederick Franklin, Helen Gallagher, Nana Gollner, Valerie Harper, Rosella Hightower, Zizi Jeanmaire, Lydia Joel, Nora Kaye, Michael Kidd, Shirley Knight, John Kriza, Harold Lang, Shari Lewis, Viveca Lindfors, Bambi Linn, Bruce Marks, Alicia Markova, Sophie Maslow, Ethel Merman, Allyn McLerie, Veronica Mlakar, Dorita Morrow, Patrice Munsel, Daniel Nagrin, Patricia Neal, Julie Newmar, Sono Osato, Lori Peters, Roberta Peters, Roland Petit, Vera Hruba Ralston, Don Redlich, George Reich, Jerome Robbins, Donald Saddler, Dorothy Sarnoff, Jimmy Savo, Zachary Solov, Eleanor Steber, Maria Tallchief, Edward Villella, Violette Verdy, Sallie Wilson, and Vera Zorina – among many others.

Some of these also worked with Nimura as instructors. Among the guest teaching and coaching talent were: Anton Dolin, Vera Nemtchinova,

Boris Romanoff, Agnes DeMille, Bronislava Nijinska, Antony Tudor, Angel Cansino, Alexandra Danilova, Rosella Hightower, Vladimir Dokoudovsky, Pauline Koner, Dean Crane, Nina Stroganova, Bhashkar, Edward Caton, Mia Slavenska, Eugene Loring, Walter Nicks, and Paul Szilard.

He was an unforgettable teacher. One student, Allyn McLerie, testifies: "...I remember being struck dumb with admiration. He was quite the most exotic and majestic figure I had ever been close to. His way of moving ... strong, lithe, delicate, surprising, extremely musical, delighted and awed me. I never tired of watching him.

"As a teacher, he was as gentle and full of humor as his work was demanding. I was greatly honored to be found fit to work with him on a ballet, alas, never finished because I went into a show. I still remember the beginning of my variation. One thing that always delighted me was his description of a hand exercise: 'First finger say how-do to thumb; second finger say how-do to thumb; third, fourth finger say how-do... all finger say goodbye. All this in his charming accent!"

Another student, Ron Fletcher, says this of his teaching: "To study with Nimura was enlightenment... physical, spiritual, and emotional.... To work under his direction artistically fulfilling, each performance a joy and a pleasure because you could grow and develop as an artist within and through his work... To watch him move was awesome, a lesson in manly grace and style. Exotic yet natural, eloquent, economical, and disciplined.... One of the greats... and I'm grateful to have had him in my life for more than thirty years. Nimura-san had an old and knowing soul.... I think it's been here a few times before, and I hope that mine meets up with his again on the next go-round."

Lisan Kay's friend Iva Kitchell didn't get to study long with Nimura, but

she says his teaching has been a lasting influence on her career. As she notes: “Attending his classes in Carnegie Hall was a privilege of another sort than the unforgettable one of seeing him perform. In class, we students could watch him at close quarters. He would perform miraculous slow turns on one foot from a bent knee position to a straight knee and slowly go back to the bent knee, while controlling changing arm movements as he revolved. Then, from settling into a balanced off-balanced position, he would suddenly be in the air, remaining there momentarily and come to earth without the least jolt or thud. ‘Now you do it,’ he would say. It was impossible for us, of course, but Nimura would remain perfectly calm and imperturbable through our efforts, class after class. ‘Why you not move like music? You must listen to music; you must be music! His classes were a great experience and, indeed, the most stimulating dance classes I ever attended.”

Bambi Linn looked back into her diary to find notations on her work with Nimura. When she was rehearsing in Oklahoma!, she didn’t know yet how to cope with some of the strain, disappointments, and catty remarks backstage. Nimura had some sound advice: “Stay above the girls; always have in mind higher goals, and never be lazy.”

Although, she says she never really mastered Nimura’s technique, she worked hard to do so. Other teachers she had had, she remembers, “...managed to make me feel young and foolish and that I would never reach that plateau where I could feel secure within and outwardly, movements-wise. Mr. Nimura did not treat me in such a manner. When I entered his class or rehearsal, it was always as a person come to work – hard – with integrity. I felt that I was respected. That was very important then. It is still important, and is many times lacking in professional

encounters.

“His very being was an education to us young people. I can’t even remember him losing his temper. His patience with us was very rewarding. He would pull me from a tired or discontented mood into a feeling of working and enjoying. He made us see that with time, and being meticulous with details, we would realize what he asked of us. I would wish every young dancer a Mr. Nimura in his life! ...We worked hard and never thought of time. We worked until it was right. Of course, we were so critical, it was never right. Many times, Miss Lee would have to come in and make us go home. She was the one who kept us all going and coming. She knew just what to do and handled us beautifully.”

As Bambi Linn worked at the Nimura technique, it became easier and easier. She notes: “It helped me use other parts of my body and made expression so much simpler, and, all important, it made me break away from the fixed structure that is ballet. I am eternally grateful for those years! The warmth, dedication, and friendliness of the studio at that time in my life was equal only to my wonderful family life at home...”

“To speak of Mr. Nimura as a teacher is one thing, but I also remember him as a dancer, and I tell you, that was very special. His body was beautiful and moved as no one I had ever seen move. So very, very exciting and strong-soft at the same time. What always got to me was his fantastic plié, and his musicality was a revelation!”

Of Nimura’s teaching at Carnegie Hall, Lisan Kay Nimura says: “I helped him codify it. He never wanted to train others in his style. He wanted them to develop their own style and feeling – to create individual artists. He didn’t want imitators. Everyone, he thought, was different... Nimura told his students: ‘You must mold your work. Be aware of your

bodies. Mold your body as a sculptor molds clay. Your work has to be orderly, as an architect builds a house. Otherwise, it will fall down. I say build with bricks, not with straw!”

Lisan Kay Nimura is writing a book about Nimura and his technique. Nimura’s own account of his work, Jiden, is on file in the Library of Congress and in the UCLA Library collections on the Japanese experience in America. The Nimuras also made a lot of films, as yet unedited. Lisan Kay Nimura says she intends to deposit these in the Lincoln Center research collections. Nimura himself described his technique as a synthesis of western methods, rooted in eastern philosophy. He preferred students to be trained in ballet, seeing his own class-work as an expansion of that training. His concept of molding the body was also called plastique.

Nimura’s technique developed a continuous flow of movement, with accents and great contrasts in both form and time, providing elements of surprise,” explains Lisan Kay Nimura. There had to be a down to have an up, though he generally worked away from gravity. And, although he stressed movement flowing into movement, he valued pause and stillness. these latter sustaining vitality. Sometimes silence and stillness are most telling, relating to the sound of a gong, followed by its reverberations and dying echo – all part of the same movement.

Hip-control was important to Nimura. There was expression from the diaphragm, but control came from the hips. They were to be like a table. “Always the center,” Lisan Kay Nimura emphasizes. “Move off-center, but don’t lose control of the hips. Have complete freedom of the torso. Ron Fletcher, a student of Nimura’s who is now teaching in California, says this is similar to the Pilatus Method, for dancers who’ve had back injuries and need to get back into shape. It’s the Pilatus Method of centering.

“Nimura’s barre required artistry. Or at least the student had to move like an artist. After the barre the first exercise in center was rising on the toes with a gradual intake of breath. Expand your lungs and chest, always lifting. Then, as you come down, you have to keep your lumbar spine vertical. With movement from here – “she demonstrates” – the shoulders and arms, slow and graceful. Your eyes have to raise and look out into space. No blinking! And then do down again. This far focus is difficult. That’s a theatre discipline – exercises in looking far out, despite the wall in between. All Nimura’s exercises were done in a relaxed manner. That’s the paradox of good dancing; it requires complete relaxation – and, at the same time, complete control.

“Nimura also had a series of ten arm exercises. They are very precise in terms of positions of hands and arms.” Lisan Kay Nimura demonstrates some of them. One requires the student to imagine holding a globe, a perfect sphere. “Many dancers don’t imagine, but a good dancer is a good actor, or should be! Imagining, visualizing, paying attention to details are also ways of relaxing.

“Nimura’s attention to detail was not for its own sake, but only as it contributes to the Whole. The whole artistic vision. Nimura was intrigued by the idea that, if you threw a stone in the water off the Battery in Lower Manhattan, it could cause ripples, vibrations, which could go round the world. He was always ‘tuned-in;’ he kept his mind open. And he insisted that his training wasn’t just for the body – it was for the body, the mind, and the spirit!”

Although Nimura didn’t relate his ideas to Emersonian Transcendentalism, they were, in fact, similar in some ways. He viewed the act of creation not as his own, but merely that of his discovering what

God had already created. Emerson, as he noted in his essay on the Oversoul, thought that all great works of art already existed in perfection in some realm or Universal Mind beyond our world. All man needed to do was to open himself to these ideas, pushing his own cares and prejudices out of the way to free his mind to receive the inspiration from beyond. Nimura, in creating, spoke of reverting to a state of “Nothingness” or subconsciousness. He listened intently to music or to some inner idea, allowing its eventual expression to be as pure as possible. This, for him, was “Root-and-Flower.” Without the root of intuition, there would be no flower of dance creation.

Curiously, though many dancers and choreographers have no kind words for dance critics, Nimura was often grateful. He believed those who were observant and thoughtful really helped him to understand what he was doing. Because he worked so instinctively, his choreography was not highly intellectualized nor calculated for effects. Critics, by telling him what they saw in his dances, opened up new speculations for him. Perhaps that was another reason why he kept changing his dances, never doing them the same way twice.

Yet, when the occasion called for it, Nimura could work with great speed and precision to achieve a highly orchestrated effect no one else could have imagined – or designed. When he was working on Lute Song, for instance, he needed only an hour to arrange a complicated, spectacular procession. As Lisan Kay Nimura, who was in the musical, recalls: “The illusion of intricacy was given because each of the characters, or groups, had its own style and steps, and these were counter-pointed in both pattern and rhythm. Everyone was caught up in the feeling that here was a master at work... It grew to be Nimura’s show, for he arranged scenes and

coached the actors' movements in detail for all of it. The style was incredibly beautiful.”

In the 1960's, Nimura, still hard at work with classes and coaching at Ballet Arts, created some new dances for outstanding students. One of these, Tropic Etude, danced to the Villa-Lobos tone-poem “Uirapuru,” outlined the continuity of life from morning to evening in a South American jungle. In it, a Bird of Prey overcomes and devours a caterpillar-like Creature, re-emerging as an idealized Bird Image. Four dancers represented plants, three impersonated the Creature, and one was the Bird of Prey. Walter Terry spoke of “... a style of action which suggested the lovely, inexorable growth of vegetation or the beautiful unstudied movement of birds and animals.... The work was characterized by an imaginative interweaving of adagio action, sensuous, pictorial, and unashamedly theatrical.”

An Ondine pas de deux was created for Dean Crane and Veronica Mlakar, set to music by Saint-Saens – his Third Symphony. “A mood of mystery, wonder, and longing, elusive as a dream,” commented one critic, helping Nimura to understand how his choreography had been perceived. A Changing Wind was based on the music – and the plot – for Rashomon. The dramatic impact of the story, said P. W. Manchester, was retained by the skillful fusion of narration and dance action. He also called it one of Nimura's most important works.

In 1969, the Order of the Sacred Treasure was awarded to Nimura by the Japanese Government for his contributions to international cultural understanding.

After a long life of hard work and dedication, Nimura at last retired. He retained an interest, of course, in dance and the careers of students

and friends. But time and illness were taking their toll. Now, as she looks at the vessel holding Nimura's ashes, which she is soon to return to his native land, Lisan Kay Nimura sadly sums up his stoicism: "He was a gentleman, a wise man. He always said, 'I never show bad part.' He thought, with pride as a human being, he shouldn't show temper, sickness, sadness. So the last two years of his life were difficult for me. I didn't realize how ill he was. He never showed his suffering. He thought only of others. His death was a terrible shock..."

But now he can have no more fitting memorial than the loving memories he inspires in so many students – and in the fulfillment of their careers. How pleased he was for their successes, and never more so than when that success was the gaining of some new insight, of greater self-control, of some deep inner peace.

And he could have no better epitaph than his dance credo, which was shared at the memorial service for him: "In my dance I use what I learned from all types of dance technique, athletics, and fencing to express what I see, what I feel, what I believe! The dance should be more than physical movement. It should seek its inspiration in spiritual sources and come only as a result of great convictions within us. In the East, the dance is symbolic of spiritual thought. The West has developed greater scope for outer form. In my school, the Eastern and Western ideals and techniques are molded into dance forms at once artistic and philosophical, Oriental and Occidental, ancient and modern. This, I believe, is dance fully realized for the New World, cherishing as it does the best in the past, a belief in the present, and infinite aspirations for the future!"

Sayonara, Yeichi Nimura!