

ANDROSMAX

NOTE TO DESK: PLEASE DATE THIS COLUMN FOR JUNE 1, 2003. PHOTOS OF ANDROS AND BROTHERS WILL BE SENT BY MAIL. THANK YOU. MAX.
SLUG: MAXANDROS

NEW YORK – Gus Dick Andros of Oklahoma City was running the Club Ichiban of Tokyo, the largest enlisted men's club in the Pacific Theater, as a sergeant in the U.S. Army back during the late 1940s, when Madeline Green of the San Francisco Ballet joined the staff. She taught him to dance, and they started doing performances together.

He was known primarily as the younger brother of Plato and Dee Andros in those days. Plato, an All-American guard at the University of Oklahoma in 1946, was playing for the Chicago Cardinals at that time. Dee also was a star lineman at OU and eventually would become head coach and athletic director at Oregon State. Gus, as he was called at that time, was a strong young man at 6-foot-1, but he had shown an interest in cultural events as a teenager, and he had studied art at OU and Oklahoma City University.

When he returned from the Army, Gus decided to go for the big leagues in his own way. He joined the San Francisco Ballet and made the performing "team" within six months. After dancing in San Francisco for three years, he drove to New York with \$100 in his pocket.

"Walt Disney's 'Cinderella' movie was showing at that time with a cute and charming fat little mouse called Gus Gus," Andros recalled. "Suddenly I was no longer Gus but Gus Gus. No one knew my name in New York, so without thinking I introduced myself as Dick. I told my mother and my aunts that I was to be called Dick from that time on, and they politely smiled with: 'If that's what you want, Gus.'"

Now, after 56 years in New York as a dancer, choreographer, teacher and writer, Dick Andros is still active at 77. He teaches at Ballet Academy East on New York's Upper East Side, produces a regular newsletter called Dancers Over Forty, Inc. and is working on a book. His website at <http://michaelminn.net/andros> provides a history of ballet back to 1489. He works his students hard, and I found myself chuckling when he demanded perfection with remarks such as "If it isn't pretty, it isn't correct," and "Why not stab a dagger into my heart?" after his students made mistakes.

"That was the Dee in me," he said, referring to the successful coaching of his brother, but there is no question that Dick Andros is a recognized big leaguer in his own profession. He has taught some of ballet's greatest dancers and movie stars over the last five decades, and he has choreographed dancing for national television shows and Off-Broadway productions. He also taught at the New York School of Ballet for 11 years. He has taught at the Steps on Broadway school and the Broadway Dance Center, which produce dancers for Broadway shows and at the 92nd Street Y. He has taught at the Ballet Academy East for the last 20 years.

"My first celebrity student was movie star Veronica Lake," he said, "and I later taught Joann Woodward. My students have included two Oscar winners and three or four Tony Award winners, but it's far more important to me that I have taught such ballet greats as Cynthia Gregory, Ivan Nagy, Sean Lavery, Royce Fernandez, Jacques D'Amboise and Carolyn George."

All this goes back to his boyhood among immigrant Greek families on the east side of Oklahoma City. His father, who was born Demitrius Andreopoulos, came to

Oklahoma City and became known as Gus Andros. He operated a restaurant known as the Post Office Candy Kitchen on NW 4th St. and later joined his brother Nick to operate the Andros Brothers Café in Capitol Hill. When Gus Dick Andros was born in 1926, his birth certificate said "Baby Andros," and his parents called him Gus. His cousins included Louis, Theo and James Antonio and baseball pitcher Cot Deal.

His blond hair set him apart from his dark-haired star athlete brothers. He felt he was treated differently by some extended family members, but his father gave him affection, and Dee became his protector and teacher. Dee taught him things like swimming and riding a bicycle by showing him how and then leaving him on his own. "His ability to teach was innate," Dick Andros said, "and I have adopted his technique in my own teaching." Meanwhile, the younger Andros responded to encouragement in cultural events by an aunt who took him to events such as Ballet Russes performances. When asked what he wanted for his 16th birthday, he replied that he wanted two tickets to see the great Marion Anderson. His mother Harriet didn't understand, he said, but she gave him the tickets.

Andros graduated from the Central High School in 1944 and earned two-and-half years of credits at OU before switching to Oklahoma City University. He taught ballroom dancing at Koche's dance hall to pay his expenses until he enlisted in the Army, where he was taught to shoot a mortar and a water-cooled machine gun in basic training. He had listed his interests in art and dance, and that paid off at Fort Lawton in Seattle.

The Army sent him to a special school of the Transportation Information Program to prepare him to work in Special Services. He worked on a ship's newspaper as a cartoonist en route to Japan, where he was placed in the Special Service Division of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's Headquarters Company. That led him to Club Ichiban, where he started painting murals on the walls with Japanese artists.

"I had no idea what I was doing," he said. "I felt the job was over my head, but I did my best to learn and got the job done. I was promoted to program manager, and when the officer-in-charge was discharged, he recommended me to replace him. At 19, Andros was promoted to sergeant. He was in charge of 10 soldiers, 80 Japanese employees and a four-story building with a ballroom half the length of the football field hosting 700 to 1,000 men every night. When he procured an orchestra for the Chinese Ambassador, he was the only enlisted man invited to a party attended by Gen. MacArthur.

Despite all this, Andros often was known as "Plato's brother," because Plato was playing with the Cardinals at that time. That changed when he established his own identity as Dick Andros in New York. He went to the American Theater Wing and then studied at Ballet Art on the G.I. Bill. He had significant teachers, such as George Ballanchine and Catherine Littlefield, and he fell in love with New York.

To help pay his expenses, Andros also worked as a waiter at the Upstairs at the Downstairs Club with Louis Antonio, who became a famous director of movies and TV shows. His career blossomed as he began to choreograph dancing with the New York City Ballet, the American Ballet and the Gary Moore and Arlene Francis shows on television. He also operated the Greenwich Village School of Ballet for six years.

He also choreographed Off-Broadway shows such as "Oklahoma", "Bye Bye Birdie", "Pajama Game", "South Pacific" and "Can Can" over the years. He served as a guest teacher for Ballet Oklahoma during the late 1970s, and he traveled as a guest teacher at the Bat Dor Dance Co. in Israel and the Edinburgh Festival. At one point, he

also started a bookkeeping career at R.C. Allen Business Machines, but he pointed out some corruption and found out he wasn't wanted. The firm was going out of business.

He has received the Cardinal Service Award from the Oklahoma City-County Historical Society and Central High School. In recent years, Dick Andros has slowed his work after six mini-strokes. He has recovered except for some problems with his equilibrium, and he carries a cane, but he crosses town by bus from his West Side apartment to teach at Ballet Academy East. It's the continuation of a remarkable career in for Dick Andros of Oklahoma City in the major leagues of dance in New York City.