

Shirley Russon Ririe

February 20, 1929 ~ August 17, 2025

Shirley passed away Aug. 17, 2025 at the age of 96. She was born on February 20, 1929 to Genevieve Allien Robertson and Joseph Stanley Russon in Salt Lake City, Utah. She was the oldest of three children: Diane Russon Chatwin and Robert Stanley Russon. She attended Stewart Training School which was based on John Dewey's creativity based education. This was perfect for her personality and she loved every day of school. She later attended East High School, the University of Utah and New York University where she was awarded a master's degree. She received an honorary doctorate from the U of U.

Shirley was a lifetime member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. She choreographed several all church musicals including "Promised Valley", was Junior Sunday School Coordinator and a counselor in the Relief Society.

She studied and performed with most of the originators of modern dance and became an expert of the subject of dance for children. She created over 100 choreographic works. She was a full professor of dance and taught full or part time for 41 years at the University of Utah and BYU. She and Joan Woodbury formed a company "The Dancer's Company" in 1955 and in 1964 created the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company. That year two powerful projects emerged on the National Scene: "Artists in the Schools" and "Dance Touring Program". The company was fortunate to be chosen for both programs. Shirley emerged as the leader in AIS and helped design the program for the next 13 years, and as a result Ririe-Woodbury had more 2 week teaching and performing residencies than any other company. She was also invited as a keynote speaker to many conferences around the world and the country. They traveled to South Africa, Canada, Puerto Rico, Beijing and southern China, Sweden, East and West Germany, London, Australia, Manilla, Singapore, Mongolia and South Korea. She was a Fulbright professor in Hong Kong and New Zealand. She and Joan job shared at the U of U, each getting paid for part time teaching but putting in full time hours. They alternated traveling with the company so that one could stay and teach and be with their families. She inspired dancers and children with her belief that "dance is for everybody".

Some of the many awards she received were: Merit of Honor from the U of U, the Plaudit Award in 1981 and Presidents Award in 1993 from the National Dance Association. East High's Distinguished alumnae award in 1986 and the Governor's Award in 1990. She lobbied with the Utah legislature for 12 years and helped pass the Zoo, Arts and Parks Tax.

She met her future husband working for two summers at the North Rim Lodge of the Grand Canyon where she was infamous for performing "the Chipmunk Dance" for guests. She felt her most important role in life was to be married for 59 years to O. Rhees Ririe (deceased) and to be the parents of four daughters: Robin (Bill Larson, deceased), Megan (Scott Miller), Dana (Ken Harlos) and Melinda (Scott Slighting, deceased) (Karl Wild). 15 grandchildren and

44 great grandchildren. Besides her passion for dance, she was a gourmet cook, curated a colorful garden and performed zany skits for the family Christmas talent shows. She accomplished so much because she needed very little sleep, often staying up til 3 am cooking for parties, sewing doll clothes or planning musical scores for her choreographic works.

A visitation will be held on September 18th from 6 to 8 pm. at Larkin Mortuary, 260 E. South Temple and a visitation from 9:30 to 10:30 and funeral on September 19th at Ensign Peak Ward, 11:00 am, 155 North Sandrun Road, Salt Lake City.

Those wishing to view the service via Zoom can click "Watch Service" or follow the link: https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/Q5-YtwR1MDxdlxSmi3Oveldd0CPb00zOcwW34sO2uB01CXaSV8ZSh6u3BNjFqpYF.