

THE FIVE MOONS



Hightower



Maria Tallchief



Marj. Tallchief



Chouteau



Larkin

In the late 1930s, Oklahoma's five Native American ballerinas – Rosella Hightower, Maria and Marjorie Tallchief, Yvonne Chouteau, and Moscelyne Larkin helped turn a tiny principality into the center of the ballet world. Over the next decade, they all premiered with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo: Hightower - 1938, Maria Tallchief – 1942, Chouteau – 1943, Marjorie Tallchief – 1946, and Larkin – 1948. Each rose to prima ballerina.

Choctaw **Rosella Hightower** (1920-2008) was born in Durwood. She danced with American Ballet Theatre, Original Ballet Russe, and Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas, where she danced with Rudolf Nureyev shortly after he defected from Russia. Rosella founded the Center for Classical Dance in Cannes, France. She was also the director of Marseilles Opera Ballet and Ballet de l'Opera National de Paris. She became the first American woman director of the world-renowned Paris Opera Ballet.

Osage **Maria Tallchief** (1925-2013) was born in Fairfax. Her sister Marjorie (1926-) was born in Denver while the family was on vacation. In 1933, the girls moved to Los Angeles to train with Ernest Belcher, father of dancer Marge Champion, and Bronislava Nijinska. At Monte Carlo, Maria met legendary choreographer George Balanchine. When he founded the New York Ballet in 1946, Maria became its first prima ballerina. Her 1949 role in “The Firebird” catapulted Maria to the top of the ballet world. Her role as the Sugarplum Fairy in “The Nutcracker” transformed the ballet from obscure to America’s most popular.

Maria became the first American to perform in Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre. She danced with Rudolf Nureyev in his American television debut. After retiring in 1966, Maria served as director of ballet for Chicago’s Lyric Opera and founded its City Ballet with her sister Marjorie. She was inducted in the National Women’s Hall of Fame and received a Kennedy Center Honor.

Marjorie Tallchief earned her ballerina status with de Cuevas Ballet at 19. She also danced with American Ballet Theatre. Marjorie was the first Native American dancer to become a premiere danseuse étoile at the world-renowned Paris Opera Ballet. She was also director of the Dallas Civic Ballet school. In 1991, Marjorie was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

Shawnee-Cherokee **Yvonne Chouteau** (1929-2016) was born in Fort Worth and grew up in Vinita. At four, she saw the great ballerina Alexandra Danilova dance in Oklahoma City. Yvonne studied at the School of American Ballet in New York before Danilova recommended her at age 14 for Monte Carlo, where she danced for fourteen years. At 18, she was the youngest member inducted in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. In 1962, she and her husband Miguel Terekhov founded the first full accredited American university School of Dance program at the University of Oklahoma. They founded the Oklahoma City Ballet in 1963.

Peoria-Shawnee **Moscelyne Larkin** (1925-2012) was born in Miami. Her Russian mother personally trained her until she moved to New York. She joined Original Ballet Russe at 15. She and her husband Roman Jasinski founded Tulsa Ballet in 1956. Moscelyne was inducted in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1978 and the Oklahoma Women’s Hall of Fame in 1993.

In the Oklahoma State Capitol, a mural called “Flight of Spirit” adorns the Great Rotunda. It displays the prima ballerinas dressed in white, the shadows of the Trail of Tears behind them. Their life-size sculptures are also on display at the Tulsa Historical Society. “The Five Moons” each had a unique style and left her own legacy.