

Profiles

By Richard Covington

Poldi Orlando

...dancing like the wind

Her arms are in constant motion when she speaks, as if to demonstrate how stumbling the words become by contrast. "Now if I were a surgeon..." Poldi starts to explain, but is cut short by two aides' laughter, and her own. It doesn't have to be said; if she were a surgeon, the patient might end up an interesting abstract, but probably would not be alive to appreciate it. Again with grand gestures, she continues, "If I were a surgeon, I'd have to make my movements short, precise, contained."

Luckily, she is not a surgeon, but, among other things, a dance therapist. People come to her to shake loose the constrictions that their jobs—either as surgeons, lawyers, housewives and so on—and American culture place on them. After all, most people walking down the street don't ripple their bodies like the wind to comment on the weather. Under Poldi's encouragement, they would.

With mercurial intensity, grayish hair askew, this Pied Piper of dance is as likely to sweep her hands skyward (in this case, to sound-proof ceiling board) as to draw them together in a gesture of prayer. You have to be quick to keep pace. She describes a group of emotionally disturbed children she worked with: "At first, they tried to use movement to attack themselves. They'd swing, and made sure they'd swing to hit," she says, swiping an arm. "Then we substituted scarves, and went whoosh, like that," again brushing by. "They loved it."

"No classroom teaches self-exploration," Poldi laments. Instead, "the kids have this free-flowing energy that comes through, and they're told they're clumsy or they're going to hurt something," she observes. Her approach, with children and both healthy and impaired adults, involves "letting the structure go" in movement so that each individual personality comes through. "We have to look inward more," she comments.

Poldi's own dance career began very early in Vienna, where both her parents were dancers. She spent years in training to enter the dance company of the Vienna State Opera and was a professional performer there before, during, and after World War II. Fortunately, she says, she had a balletmaster who encouraged interpretive dance in the style of Isadora Duncan, as well as more traditional classical



Orlando

forms. "There I learned to take the form off like a garment and find my own body," she says, emphasizing, of course, with a rolling motion of head and torso.

On moving to New York, with her husband, an American G.I., Poldi says, "I wanted to fit into his family life, learning how to cook and sew. I could do just what I wanted, which was very good," quite a change from the regimented childhood and performance career of a Viennese dancer. After his retirement, the couple moved to Miami. "And after 10 years, that was enough, I became a little restless and started this studio. Everything mushroomed from then on," she gestures, cloudlike.

What mushroomed were the invitations, one of the first from Jackson Memorial Hospital to work with emotionally disturbed adults, then with children, the blind, and the deaf. Then she was asked to bring her movement therapy to the Gestalt Institute of Florida and on to regional and national meetings of humanistic psychologists until now her current pace has her giving workshops all over the hemisphere. She has explored tribal rituals in classes at Florida International University and found how that movement "moves out sexual energy, natural forces, mysteries of life." And she's even demonstrated to the paralyzed in the Veterans' Administration hospital how to "move through inner imagery." She's also well-known for her Monday workshops at the Unitarian Universalist Church in South Miami.



Blum

This month she returns to Europe and finds it somewhat ironic that she left as a professional dancer and comes back a professional psychologist with a masters degree. Here the M.A. came after practicing dance therapy, but, "in Austria, especially, I would've first had to show a piece of paper to do what I did here," she says.

Alan Blum

...what's up DOC?

No one told Dr. Alan Blum the crusades were over. Or rather, they may have tried, but the good doctor just keeps coming back with more and better ammunition in the ongoing and likely never-ending battle with the powers that be in the tobacco industry, Madison Avenue, junk food empires, and the mixed-up media.

Rounding the 30-year mark, this earnest and outspoken one-man band has made his three years here increasingly controversial. It all started with the creation two years ago of DOC (Doctors Ought to Care), a group intent on preventive health care starting with counter-smoking campaigns like, "You've Coughed Up Long Enough, Baby." DOC members pick-

eting *The Miami Herald* against its cigarette advertising drew an extensive reply from executive editor John McMullan. And Blum's swan song as WTVJ, Channel 4's 11 o'clock doc came with a story on incompetent physicians that news director Ralph Renick refused to run, claims Blum. About his stint at the television station, Blum adds that, "I'm not sure Channel 4 expected me to be as candid as I was. Here I was giving trade secrets out."

Among those to draw Blum's wrath and fire are the "pimps" at the American Cancer Society and the Heart Association for spending donations on research instead of educating the public in ways to prevent the diseases in the first place. Enemies to the left, partisans to the right, please.

Blum recollects accompanying his father on Sunday house calls around Far Rockaway, N.Y., and it was his father who suggested that young Blum, as editor of the high school paper, should pen his first editorial vaunting the 1964 Surgeon General's report on the dangers of smoking. This was a few years after Alan, at age 11, plunged into journalism with his own publishing venture, the *Dodger Teletype*, begun just when the Brooklyn baseball club moved to Los Angeles.

He can still quote Robert Frost from his days as an English major at Amherst College, where he earned part of his livelihood performing magic at parties. In those days, before deciding to attend Emory Medical School in Atlanta, "I envisioned myself as a medical reporter covering all the new technological breakthroughs," he says. But now, the media's fondness for "breakthroughs" and "seeing doctors either as miracle workers or incompetents" gives him shivers.

After a year in Montreal, Blum and his wife came to another bilingual city—Miami—and made a study of local history. And he decided to make a little of his own. Blum's "The Doctor Show" Sunday nights on WNWS was recognized by the American Medical Association as the best medical radio show in the country and he was selected for a journalism fellowship with the AMA headquarters in Chicago. In Miami, Blum acted as chief resident in the department of family medicine at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

One area he's sure to approach while in Chicago will be the misguided, overly competitive nature of medical schools. "Med students don't get out of the hospital," he complains. "And you're never taught how to explain anything to the patient in simple terms, but only how to regurgitate what you've learned in the past three weeks." For emphasis, Blum launches into an animated doctor-patient give-and-take about blood pressure. "It took me three years to come up with that," he says.

"My personal interest," Blum continues, "is in the health of teenagers. We've abdicated to Madison Avenue, given kids the disco decade, and don't let them decide what to do on their own. Why, I've been a junk food victim three times this week. There may not be anything such as junk food, but it's made junk if it's eaten 12 times a week."

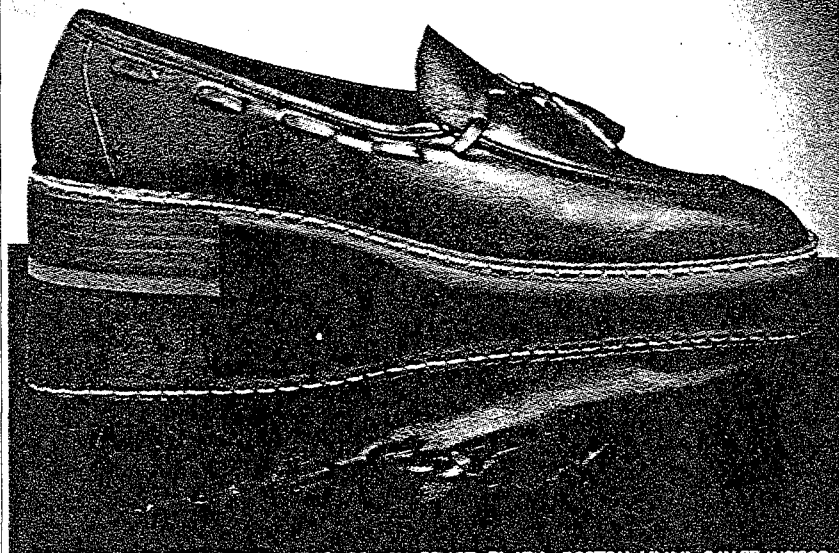
With one foot on the soapbox and a jaundiced eye on the media, Blum may just have a point and a following.

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