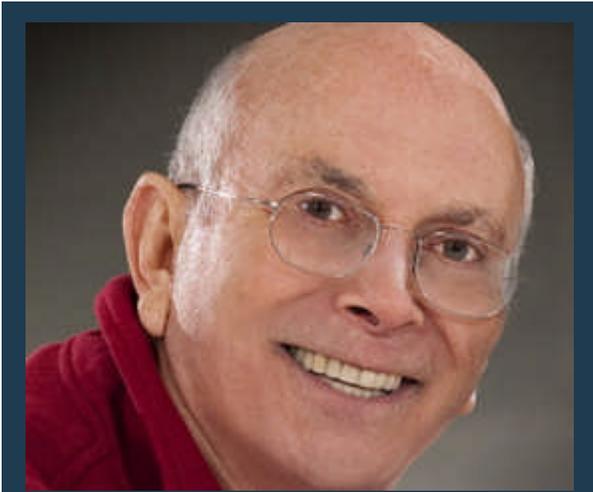


Former *Ice Capades* director enters Hall of Fame

Robert Turk influenced both professional and amateur skating



Robert Turk is one of the 2010 inductees to the U.S. Figure Skating Hall of Fame. (David Sadleir)

By Lois Elfman, special to icenetwork.com

(01/07/2010) - Among the inductees into the U.S. Figure Skating Hall of Fame class of 2010 is Robert Turk, director of *Ice Capades* from 1965-1986.

He also performed in, choreographed, produced and directed numerous other skating shows, including a huge production that went to Havana, Cuba, in 1949 starring Belita, a legendary professional skater.

"She was probably the greatest skater, bar none," Turk says. "She did double jumps. She invented many things that aren't even done anymore. She was incredible."

Although he realizes the Hall of Fame honor is largely because of his extraordinary contributions to the world of show skating, he personally attributes it to work he did with eligible skaters such as Peggy Fleming, who he worked with from the time she was around 11 until she won gold at the 1968 Winter Olympics.

"For me personally, a lot of what I'm accepting the award for with great gratitude is the work that I did prior to doing *Ice Capades*. What I contributed on the ice in movement and style," says Turk.

Turk, who also trained and performed in dance, worked with Fleming as well as 1956 Olympian Catherine Machado and numerous other skaters on style, line and extension.

"I created a class I first did on the floor," Turk notes. "They would be on the floor for 45 minutes. I would do all kinds of exercises and things that would give them lines, strength and balance. Then I'd go on the ice and give them the same class on ice. I did that for years."

Turk, 84, grew up in Hollywood, Calif. His own skating began after a beloved family friend took him to see Sonja Henie at the Polar Palace, a famed ice rink. He says it lit a fire under him, and soon after he returned to the Polar Palace on Saturday mornings to skate. He largely taught himself until the mother of U.S. men's champion Eugene Turner asked him if he ever thought of joining a skating club.

"I said, 'I've never even heard of that,'" Turk says. "I joined the Los Angeles Figure Skating Club and started learning school figures. I went up to my fifth test before I left amateur skating. I won senior pairs in the Pacific Coast."

He competed until 1941, when he had to enter the military in World War II. When his military service was done, he felt it was time to earn some money, so he turned professional.

His first job was with *Ice Capades* as an understudy for Bobby Specht. Turk found he didn't really like the gypsy lifestyle, so he gravitated to the hotel ice shows, which were very popular at the time. He skated in shows at the New Yorker Hotel in New York, the Stevens Hotel in Chicago, the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans and the Netherland Plaza in Cincinnati. After the show in Havana, he began doing more and more choreography.

"When I performed, although I enjoyed it I really wanted to be a choreographer more than anything," Turk says.

To improve his skills, he immersed himself in studying dance. He was a student of Eugene Loring at the American School of Dance in Hollywood. He also had Russian teachers and other dance influences.

"I wanted to create something more than just skating," Turk says, and in 1965 that chance came with *Ice Capades*.

"I conceived it. I choreographed it. I worked with the musicians to create the arrangements of the music. I worked with the costume designers telling them what I wanted," he says.

When *Ice Capades* expanded to more than one company, he began hiring young choreographers to choreograph, one of whom was future Emmy Award winner Sarah Kawahara, who Turk had first hired as a young skater to perform.

Through connections he'd met doing work in Las Vegas, in 1967 Turk was hired to conceive and direct shows at the Club Lido de Paris in Paris. He balanced those shows with *Ice Capades* for many years and continued to work with the Lido after his ice show days ended.

In the late 1980s, Turk moved to the Palm Springs area and studied classical piano. He retired about a decade ago, but did return to the ice to direct the "Legends" show in Long Beach, Calif., in 2004. He's hoping to find someone to remount a 15-minute ice ballet he created for that show.

He's looking forward to the *Ice Capades* 70th anniversary reunion in Las Vegas in June. Perhaps former skaters will take to the ice en masse as they did at the 60th reunion to perform the "Turk-step," a combination he'd find a place for in every show.

"I had the most magical, mystical career that anybody could possibly have," Turk says. "I was part of an era that doesn't exist anymore."