



A Time to Remember: The Magical Years and Lore of Ice Castle

Most everyone who was anyone in figure skating at the time at least made an appearance there. It had many names: The Hollywood of Ice Skating, The United Nations of Figure Skating, The Enchanted Ice Castle, or simply, the place to be. It was the Ice Castle International Training Center in Lake Arrowhead, California.

Carol and Walter Probst had a vision to create the most perfect international training center that ever existed. And they succeeded. From 1987 until it closed its doors in 2013, famous coaches and elite skaters flocked there from around the globe to experience the most comprehensive figure skating training center imaginable.

The legendary Carlo Fassi was recruited to Ice Castle in 1994 to lead the coaching staff with another skating legend, Frank Carroll.


Frank Carroll made quite a statement when he started at Ice Castle. His amazingly accomplished athletes included the likes of Michelle Kwan, Linda Fratianne, Christopher Bowman, Tiffany Chin, and Evan Lysachek -- just to name a few.

Carlo Fassi was the coach who catapulted the careers of elite skaters such as Paul Wylie, Nicole Bobeck, Jill Trenary, and Olympic champions John Curry, Peggy Fleming, Robin Cousins and Dorothy Hamill to the top of their game.

Part of the allure of Ice Castle was its state of the art training facility with incredible access to ice time at two rinks. There was an expansive dance pavilion, a pool, gym, as well as housing offering dorms and other near-by cottages for the skaters and their families to reside in. Michelle Kwan lived and trained at Ice Castle for years making it home to herself, her sister Karen and their parents.

Each summer an influx of international skaters came to live and train at ice Castle to take advantage of the amazing training, practice time and endurance skating at high altitude.

Ice Castle became even more world renowned with its five productions annually, each featuring well-known figure skaters such as Michelle Kwan, Todd Eldridge, Tiffany Chin, Rudy Galindo, Roslyn Sumners, Sylvia Fontana, Cornell George, Christopher Bowman, and more. Many of these skaters not only performed solos but also looked forward to taking part in complex choreographed group numbers which included elaborate costumes and props. This was all part of the Probsts' dream - to also make Ice Castle a mecca of performance at the elite level.



In 1995, Carlo Fassi and Carol Probst enticed Phillip Mills to move from the Skating Club of Wilmington, Delaware, leaving his long-standing position there as the Director of Figure Skating. The allure of working side-by-side with Carlo again, as they had for many years in Colorado Springs and Italy, and collaborating with so many elite coaches and skaters, was just too strong. Phillip and Michelle Mills moved their family to Lake Arrowhead, CA to begin what would become a long love affair – a choreographer’s dream. Along with coaching and choreographing for numerous high-level figure skaters, Phillip was the Artistic Director of Ice Castle. He created 39 stellar shows during his many magical years there.

Every year until the Blue Jay rink in Lake Arrowhead closed, Phillip choreographed unique and innovative shows using the local talent and in coming guest stars as part of Ice Castle's Hot Summer Nights program. Hollywood celebrities such as Bob Hope and Liza Minnelli each had a show crafted around their biggest hits and were invited to sit with the 800 guests who gathered for the glamorous dinner shows. What an enchanted and fabulous time in skating history.

Michelle Mills became the Director of Dance and Rehearsal Director overseeing the details of the many shows over the years. Michelle taught over 20 dance classes each week to all of the skaters, helping to refine their extension and presentation along with enhancing their dance capabilities.

This Camelot of figure skating boasted a coaching staff over the years that became a Who's' Who of figure skating. This amazing list of professionals included the legendary Christa Fassi, Robin Cousins, Irina Rodnina, Marina Klimova, Sergi Ponomarenko, Elena Tscherkaskaya, Pete Oppegard, Evelyn Kramer, and so many more. There were many skaters and coaches at Ice Castle from all over the globe.

In 1995 Walter Probst passed away quite unexpectedly leaving Carol to continue their dream to make Ice Castle the international training mecca it became. Carol continued to grow the program until 2003 when she retired selling Ice Castle to Anthony Liu. In 2001 tragedy ensued when the Blue Jay rink in town collapsed under the weight of a heavy winter snowstorm. This reduced the available ice time to just the Ice Castle rink. In 2013 Anthony moved the illustrious Ice Castle name to a brand new rink in Palm Springs where Frank Carroll spends much of his time in the desert training his skaters.

The legacy of Ice Castle continues on as Anthony offers the spirit of the Ice Castle International Training Center in a much different climate!



Phillip Mills

World and Olympic Figure Skating Choreographer

www.phillipmillschoreographer.com