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The Dance of Isadora Duncan

A lecture demonstration

Barbara Kane

Summary

Many thanks to EDC for inviting the Isadora Duncan Dance Group to present this demonstration and talk about the dance of Isadora Duncan.

Isadora Duncan is now considered to be part of Early Dance. Yet she also represents the beginnings of Contemporary Dance.

Duncan initially drew her inspiration from Irish and Scottish folk dance, as well as the ballroom dance of the late 1800's in the USA and the Delsartian poses of refined movement.

Isadora Duncan then went on to develop her own style of movement, a style based on a technique which she and her sister Elizabeth formed, a style that freed the body.

Duncan found an impulse from her study of Ancient Greece – its theory, its myths, its statues. She also took inspiration from Botticelli's paintings, which captured movement and meaning, showing the Muses unbound in their movements that expressed universal meaning. Another source of inspiration came from her use of music that was not written for the dance.

The goddess Terpsichore has long been the Muse of dance for the Western world (as well as that of music).

Duncan chose also to create dances based on many of the Ancient Greek myths – Orpheus

and Eurydice, Iphigenia en Aulide and Tauride, Artemis. Throughout, her works are constant reminders of Ancient Greece and of the Greeks understanding of life.

Duncan did not wish to imitate Ancient Greek dance but hoped via her dance and understanding to bring Ancient Greek philosophy into her contemporary world - via the Dance.

Isadora Duncan writing of the Ancient Greek Vases at the British Museum:

'In the thousands of figures which I have studied on these vases, I have always found an undulating line as the point of departure.

Every movement, even in repose, contains the quality of fecundity, possesses the power to give birth to another movement.'

(Art of the Dance)

With members of IDDG (Francoise Rageau and Betsy Field) and two of my child pupils (Laurel and Emmeline Costanti-Crosby) we would like to share some aspects of Isadora and Elizabeth Duncan's technique with you (all are welcome to join in).

Afterwards we would like to perform several recreations of Isadora Duncan's original dances, to which I will give a brief commentary.

Classwork

Use of Solar Plexus/wave like movement/Greek myth/music not used in the early 1900's for dance.

Sholtai/ Tango / Priestess'- excerpts as exercise of three of Isadora Duncan's choreographies created by Barbara Kane.

Plies – Duncan Dance plies may seem similar to Classical ballet plies but have the difference of having little tension – plies are performed for the feeling of the movement as an exercise to strengthen the full body. More a dance than an exercise

Mercury/skirt dance exercise – leg extension forward and back in Duncan Dance has little to do with how high a leg can go but more so of how much the lift and source can display of the full body in movement.

Deer run in two's -- music and exercise developed by Max Metz and Elizabeth Duncan at the Duncan School – an exercise in moving as a twosome relating to the music, one another, using a rhythm with the feet /legs and a fluidity of upper body.

Double skip/swing skip – one of Isadora and Elizabeth Duncan's more difficult but beautiful exercises for the dance. The body is complete and very expressively arched while yet again the legs keep the rhythm of the music.

Tanagra studies in constant movement flow – nothing is ever posed. Movement is in the Duncan way of wave like fluidity, even in repose.

The Dances

Ball spiel – A Duncan Dance study for children

Orpheus
Furies 2 — created by Isadora Duncan in 1910 – this dance shows the change in the creativity of Isadora Duncan – she uses the floor and ugly movements – quite extraordinary for 1910.

Blessed Spirits — one of Isadora Duncan's earliest creations.

Iphigenia's
Air Gai – Lento – Air Gai – (Muse Euterpe – Muse of lyric song double flute – Terpsichore Muse of dance with Lyre).

Knucklebones

Priestess' (Muse Polyhymnia – Muse of sacred song – pensive).

[end of the demonstration]