



The Duncan Disciples at Home and at Rehearsal



How the Young Exponents of Miss Duncan's Art Impressed the Casual Observer—Trained to Love All Beauty—Their View of Russian Ballet—How They Helped Select Pupils—The Art of Expressing One's Self—Rehearsing While Expressmen Waited

By CLARE PEELER

WE curled up on one of the couches in their inside bedroom, the Isadora Duncan dancers and I, and talked of many things. Lisa, of the lovely curls and the childlike look; Irma, great-eyed, earnest-faced; Margot, fair-haired, blue-eyed and silent, who, like the parrot, says nothing, but very evidently "keeps up a lot of thinking," and finally Anna, spokeswoman, in her scarlet robe, with an individuality of the kind that would mark her as a leader anywhere, in spite of the dainty beauty of her face and the almost childish outline of her figure.

They are a little at first on the defensive, these girls; it is very evident that they have already learned, young as they are, and sweet as they are, that there are many people in the world ready to misunderstand them and their art. Yet they triumph a little, quite innocently, naturally, and girlishly, at a new evidence that it is winning.

When I arrived, such an evidence of a most amusing kind had just been given them in an invitation to come to see "Good Luck, Sam," and view their dances as the soldiers interpret them. The girls had been dancing at the camps during the whole summer, it appeared, and had many interesting experiences.

Interpreting the Interpreters

"Of course, most of them didn't understand our dancing in the least degree," Anna Duncan said. "They hadn't the smallest idea what it was all about; and while they were perfectly respectful, they were inclined to make fun of the whole thing. Now, it seems, they take their work of representing us very seriously. We've been warned not to laugh at that part of it, while we may laugh at anything else."



George Copeland, Pianist, Whose Artistic Work at the Keyboard Forms So Important a Part of These Performances

Her own laughter and the others' rippled out at the thought. "How do you amuse yourselves generally?" I asked them. "Or is dancing



The Isadora Duncan Dancers, Whose Interpretive Skill Has Delighted New York from Time to Time This Season

such a joy as well as a work that it makes other amusement or relaxation unnecessary?"

"Why, it is a joy, of course," Anna said, seriously, while the others nodded assent. "It's the complete expression of the joy of our lives, or it would be nothing. But we do other things, too, that we have time for. We go to concerts, to plays, to musical comedies—"

"Oh, not really?" I questioned. "Somehow, that seems inconsistent with you."

"Why, shouldn't it?" she said, calmly. "Of, course, some of them are rather horrid and those we don't care about seeing. But we like healthy fun very much indeed."

To which remark all the others sagely agreed; and we found ourselves embarked presently on a discussion of schools of dancing to which one could listen with the greatest interest, as to the opinion of experts, for such these soft-eyed children have been practically since their babyhood.

"We have been together fourteen years," Anna observed, in her pretty voice. They all have the most charming foreign accent imaginable.

"Were you introduced in your perambulators?" I asked, and once more the serious young faces relaxed into a perfectly girlish giggle. "Life is real, life is earnest" with these exponents of the dancer's art, but it has not yet fortunately destroyed all their sense of humor.

"Someone did say about Lisa, after a performance, 'That child ought to be at home in bed; it's a shame to keep her up as late as this,'" Anna smiled. "She's seventeen, but she does look younger."

"But you were saying about the Russian dancers?" I hinted.

Russian Ballet as They See It

"Oh, yes. We were saying that Pavlova represents really the perfection of the ideal of ballet-dancing; that is, ballet-dancing with a soul. The whole Russian schools does; that is why, I think, it has so much of an appeal to the world. It's above all the school of individuality. The Russians took the technique of the ballet which is definite, sharply marked, limited, if you like, and they have used it to speak out their souls with."

A few days later I was admitted to the special privilege of seeing a rehearsal

in their Carnegie Hall studio, gray walled, gray carpeted, with a dais at one side, on the steps of which we sat and chatted, while we waited for Mr. Copeland. They were bare-footed now in their classic dress, and the costume seemed much more natural, somehow, than the street dress which all but Anna had worn on the former occasion. And they hailed me like an old friend. Their courtesy is as absolutely natural, as spontaneously lovely, as their dancing; it seems to make a more elaborate manner tawdry. Anna, spokeswoman again, reminded them separately by name that we had met. Their last names are never mentioned; "Lisa," she says, "I think you have met this lady; and this is Margot; you remember Irma?" and so on. By contrast I was taken straight back to an old Quaker manorhouse of my childhood, and heard a soft voice saying to an elderly lady, "Elizabeth Allen, thee remembers this little girl? She is —'s daughter." It was the same odd effect of cleanliness; of doing away with the unnecessary trappings of intercourse.

We talked of their early days; of the times when Isadora (I hope she will excuse me; they never once spoke of her otherwise) began educating them together, little children as they were; of their European travels.

"We did not always go with Isadora," Irma said. "Sometimes we traveled about while she had engagements; we went to Paris, to Berlin, to Russia. We must have been funny going in a big party, all our governesses and Isadora's sister with us, from place to place."

Selecting New Pupils

"Then later on, after we grew up," Anna chimed in, "we began to help her select new pupils. One time we saw 260 children in Russia, and out of those we picked four. Everyone had said, 'Oh, Russia is just full of wonderful dancers,' but when we came to sift them out they were few enough. Then there would be mothers and aunts, and so on, that would object, after we had picked the child, and all our trouble was for nothing; like once when I found a perfect little genius, an absolute wonder of a dancer ('Dancers are born, you know; you can't make them,' from Irma's corner) and then the mother said in horror, 'How dare you suggest such a thing? My child, dance, indeed!' And the poor little genius stayed in Russia."

We spoke of the military dances, of the Schubert "Marche Militaire."

"We danced that differently before the war," Irma said gravely. "It was just a sort of a show, of flags waving—but now!"

One knew what she meant; her expressive gesture, her features, all of her spoke the difference between tragedy imagined, even by the artist, and tragedy felt.

"Art has no nationality," said one of them sententiously, Irma I think. "And dancing of all the arts especially has none. We have danced since the war in Russia, in France, in Berlin, now here."

"You suggest no nationality to me but

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