



photo: Gjon Mili

Kathleen Hinni showing the new virtuosity of the Duncan dancer of today.

# DUNCAN CONGRESS

**Followers of Isadora organize  
to perpetuate Duncan dancing**

by JOY RICHARDS

The Duncan Dance Congress held recently in New York is one of the many wholesome signs of the multiple dance activity that is taking place all over the country.

To have an art worthy of its salt, there must be many camps, many points of view, many diverse expressions all holding forth in mutual respect and good sportsmanship.

The only serious thing that can really happen to the dance is to have one faction get a political edge and suppress all the other expressions. This immediately narrows down dance activity, alienates large groups of the public, ruins budding dance talent, and so completely puts the dance out of focus that eventually even the faction on top finds itself hard pressed to survive.

There is a type of dancing for everybody, and if the dance continues to broaden its scope and give every artist and every dance philosophy a chance, we will soon have a public as large and as heterogeneous as that enjoyed by the movies.

Then, too, each dance expression has certain individual values that it alone can give. Some types are better for children, other kinds more interesting to adults. Some supply the normal expression for rural communities, others satisfy the city folk. There is a dance for this generation and the last generation and something entirely new, fresh and different already brewing for the coming generation.

There is no need for rivalry and conflict between these dance expressions. There's no reason for one laying false claims to another's merits, nor claiming *untrue* kinship to its great leaders.

That Isadora Duncan was one of the greatest figures the dance has produced is now quite universally accepted. That she was an exciting and alluring performer, no one who saw her will deny, that she made an important contribution to dance philosophy, dance technique, and dance choreo-

graphy are facts well established by leading authorities.

This does not mean that the way Isadora Duncan danced is the best way, the only system, or the future goal, any more than the same would be true of Noverre, Cecchetti or Fokine.

What is important is that we save the contributions of each successive leader, intact so that the development of the dance may be progressive, sustained, and as rich as possible.

The first function of the Duncan committee therefore, is to keep intact the philosophical choreographical and pedagogical contributions of Isadora Duncan. The second function would seem to be to attempt to find where these contributions could be best used in the dance today, and help them to prosper and flourish in those places. A third, and extremely important function of a Duncan headquarters, will be to form a nucleus of legitimate Duncan activity and enthusiasm, to publicize this point of view so those who want it and need it will be able to have it.

To properly tabulate the Duncan contribution is not an easy task. But some of the outstanding points might be found in the following:

1. Isadora Duncan approached movement inspirationally and intuitively. With Isadora, it was the thought and the feeling that determined and sculptured the movement. The Duncan dance worked from the inside out.
2. Subject matter of Duncan dancing was human emotion, human experience, and human aspiration. Life, its destiny and ideals, were celebrated. The Duncan dance was never guilty of a trivial, sophisticated, satiric or disillusioned approach. There was nothing acrobatic, mechanistic, or exhibitionistic in the Duncan repertoire.
3. The limited Duncan vocabulary of movement and

gesture is, without doubt, one of the most inspired in the whole of dance history.

4. The Duncan repertoire of dances is both educational and artistic. Should be preserved and passed on for the joy and edification of each coming generation, just as ballet technique has been preserved and passed on.

5. The emphasis on femininity in the Duncan style is a noteworthy contribution. Softness of movement, sweetness of expression is found in all except the heroic dances, but even these are always the heroic woman, the mother, the beloved, the goddess. No Duncan dance ever took a neuter or sexless approach to movement.

6. For technique, anatomical posture and functional movement were basic, not that they were sought scientifically but because the classical ideal celebrated the healthy, the norm, the harmoniousness and proportionate.

7. Ease and fluidity of movement have never known a greater expression than in the Duncan System while the amazing breath control of all properly trained Duncan dancers is noteworthy.

8. As an embodiment of the Isadora Duncan style, we are fortunate in having Maria Theresa still before the public. At times her fidelity to the image of Isadora is so great as to give a perfect illusion of her illustrious teacher. She celebrates the same soft, rich femininity of form, spiritual grace of gesture, and ineffable sweetness of expression. In her tragic numbers she uses the same stylized expressions of the classical tragic mask, that were Isadora's inspiration.

It might be well to take this occasion to lay the ghost that is conjured up at rhythmic intervals by certain modern dance enthusiasts to the effect that Isadora is the forerunner of the modern dance and that the modern dancers are really Duncan dancers of the new generation. Nothing is more false, more confusing, more detrimental to both expressions.

The moderns should be too proud of their own accomplishment to try to falsely prop it up by claiming kinship to a movement to which they were in open rebellion. It was the bad imitations of Duncan that swung the pendulum to the other extremes of movement which produced the vital, new and important development known as the modern dance. No system has everything, nor is it necessary it

should have. A new system is important largely because it expresses fresh approaches, undiscovered techniques, and contrasting values. Let each one be true to its own destiny and be content to shine in its own unreflected glory.

The Duncan congress was opened at the YMHA by a full evening program by Maria Theresa and her Heliocornades including Anastasia, Anatole, Calliope, Nike, Kore.

The next afternoon a very well attended session gave demonstrations by various Duncan classes in the vicinity. These included demonstrations by six groups, introduced by Josephine Petts Bryn Mawr. The first group of children from the Goddard Neighborhood Center was directed by Carol Rossin and Dorothy McDermid. The second group, from the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association and the Stuyvesant Neighborhood House, was directed by Ethel Mandell. The third group of participants included children from Short Hills, Maplewood, N. J., directed by Kathleen Hinni, with child Margaret Dampman, composer, at the piano. The fourth group was directed by Anita Zahn and Rosemarie Beenk. The fifth group was directed by Julia Levien. The sixth group was directed by Lillian Rosenberg.

The same evening a recital of Duncan dances was given by an admirably planned cooperation among a number of Duncan exponents. These included Hortense Dolan, Mignon Garland, Julia Levien, Anita Zahn, Rosemarie Beenk, Dorothy McDermid, Kathleen Hinni and Zara Violl.

It is to be hoped that the Duncan committee will continue its good work and not stop until it has established itself in a permanent headquarters, organized an authentic Duncan school, and presented a seasonal series of Duncan concerts.

Those wishing further information may write the Duncan Committee at 71 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Members of the committee are as follows: Anita Zahn, Rosemarie Beenk, Julia Levien, Mignon Garland, Hortense Dolan, Lillian Rosenberg, Ethel Mandell, Dorothy McDermid, Josephine Petts, Kathleen Hinni, Maria Theresa.

The Duncan organization may well be considered by many other groups in the dance as an excellent way to develop their point of view into a well established contribution to the all inclusive field of the dance. We would like to see many such organizations.

Left: Anita Zahn Dancers in a heroic mood. Middle: Irma Duncan Dancers in "Dance Slav". Right: Pupil of Ethel Mandell in Duncan arabesque. photos left to right: Davidson, Sunami, Mandell

