

## FOR ISADORA DUNCAN

By HENRY GILFOND

TEN YEARS AGO, on the 14th of September, Isadora Duncan, the Isadora who had set America dancing, stepped into the racing car of a young Italian, waved her red scarf. "Je vais a gloire," she said, the scarf hanging from her neck. The young Italian released the breaks, the car was in motion, the Isadora's scarf tangled in the moving wheels, snapped her neck . . . and Isadora was dead.

There has been much written on Isadora, much sentimental, much ecstatic. Isadora was a legend long before she died in Nice. Boys loaded coal, rode the box-cars to see her, men wept as she sat the lone figure before the footlights, students lifted the horses from out of their shafts and wheeled her through the streets, a city demonstrated with her before consulates for freedom and liberty, the rights of man. Isadora was a cult, a sublime cult.

The cult was the "frank and free life." Isadora not only loosened the strings of her corset, she threw it off.

Born into the gentle tradition, the tradition of William Dean Howells, Richard Watson Gilder and Henry Van Dyke, the

tradition of a colonial culture, she revolted against it. She revolted against the smug and provincial pedestrian itinerary, against the philistine dictates of a people whose tastes were directed and governed by lackey contentment with sham imitation and mediocrity. The idea was to maintain the status quo no matter how still and throttling to the voice of the nation; the idea was to hallow the decay of New England, its capital, Boston, to hermetically seal the four walls of its aping culture against any fresh winds that might come from out of the struggles of a new people in the new continent coming of age; the idea was to keep the curtains clean, and the windows clean, and the front lawn. What went on in the American home was not for public gaze. The world must see the polish and the glaze, not the turbulence of the American mind. Decorum and gentility must be the by-words, our art and our culture comparable with the art and culture of the mother country, the art of the idyllic Tennyson and the culture of Victoria, the Queen.

It was against this, this meanness and meagerness of a pseudo-cultural, priggish,

and corrupt puritan tradition that Isadora Duncan coming out of the cleaner air of the West rebelled. Is it to be wondered at all that she rallied around her the youth of the country, the liberals and the radicals in the arts, the sciences; the great numbers of workers, artists, intellectuals. After all, here was someone who spoke the language of her people. Isadora was the democrat. She would dance for the whole world. Walt Whitman was her spiritual father, Emerson and Henry Thoreau her ancestors.

It is a long way from Isadora's dancing of Beethoven's *Ninth* to Charles Weidman's *In the Theatre*; it's a longer way from Isadora's dance for the Hungarian revolutionaries to Anna Sokolow's satiric *Facade—Esposizione Italiana*. Both Tamiris and Martha Graham had brought a new dance to the theatre while Isadora was still alive, but the art of dance has moved a good distance and quickly since Isadora crossed the Atlantic in a cattle-boat and brought her revolutionary art to the courts and the salons of Europe's crowned and uncrowned gentry. Still it is Graham, Tamiris, Humphrey, Weidman, Sokolow, and the host of the younger modern dancers who carry on and forward her tradition. It should be a sad mistake to believe anything else. The debt of the modern dance is to Duncan, and a long way from a thorough evaluation.

No sentimental emotional out-pourings about the divinity of Duncan will do her justice, no continuation of the Greek-ish figures which the less astute will insist is her contribution to the art. The debt that America, not only its dancers, owes to Isadora must be reckoned in terms that embrace not simply an understanding of technical innovation and brilliance, not simply revolt against the matter and manner of the American provincial scene of her times, but both in terms of the broader significance that comes of a comprehension of their interrelationships.

Isadora Duncan died ten years ago. She is still blanketed in a smoke screen of romanticism, a screen that serves ungenerously to separate the significance and importance of her work from the understanding of our younger people. It would do well for these people to see the lyricism, the extravagant gesture of Isadora through a time-scene focus. Certainly, no figure in the history of arts, culture, has emerged more basically, more dramatically, more significantly from the American soil than its first "modern" dancer, Isadora Duncan.

## The Brooklyn Dance Center

THE Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences has presented the dance and dancers to its public for a good number of years, but never in so elaborate a program as its directors have projected for the coming year.

Four ballet troupes will be presented in their Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Ballet Caravan under the direction of Lincoln Kirstein in their opening gala night, October 14; a comprehensive series of lecture-demonstrations, conducted by John Martin with the familiar leading dancers his guest speakers, will be offered to the dance student and general lay audience; Dance Workshop Groups under the direction of Grant Code will be inaugurated in November, their purpose not only to develop choreography for audience presentation but also to conduct classes in technique for elementary and advanced students. In addition, there will be the

usual more or less unrelated recitals and lectures presented at intervals throughout the season.

There has long been the need for a Brooklyn Dance Center. The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences is to be congratulated and commended on its foresight in undertaking to fulfill this need. Its first program is ambitious, but it has the right materials, the proper direction, and undoubtedly an astute board of directors. The Metropolitan area of New York is indeed blessed with a plenty now. With the Y.M.H.A. at 92 Street and the Institute across the Bridge, there is certainly space enough for New York dance to move about in. The DANCE OBSERVER urges the New York (and vicinity) dancer and audience to take advantage of its two institutions; out-of-town, please note, and copy!