

Obituaries

Madeleine Lytton



MADELEINE LYTTON, who played a key role internationally in the postwar revival of the Isadora Duncan repertoire through her stirring performances and her exceptional teaching, has died at her home in Castres, France at the age of 94.

Born in Neuilly, Madeleine was the daughter of the English painter Neville Lytton and Alexandra Fortel Lytton, who came from Burgundy. Neville, who settled in France, had seen Duncan dance and was eager for Madeleine to begin classes at the age of six in Paris with Lisa Duncan, one of

Isadora's adopted daughters (nicknamed the Isadorables). The natural quality of authentic Duncan style that Madeleine exhibited in her performances in the UK during World War II and exemplified later in her masterclasses in the US and Europe, can be glimpsed even in a charming home movie of Madeleine dancing as a child.

Neville's father, Robert Lytton, had been Viceroy of India and his grandfather was the novelist Bulwer-Lytton. When the Germans occupied half of France during the war, Madeleine and her parents went to live in her French grandmother's house in the small town of Rambert-en-Bugey, where she taught dance to local children. Winston Churchill, however, sent Neville a message, predicting that the Germans would occupy the rest of France and urged him to return to England.

In 1941 then, 20-year-old Madeleine took her budding career in the UK in a new direction. The March 1943 issue of *Dancing Times* still showed her as a Duncan dancer, but Madeleine sensed that wartime audiences

regarded Duncan dances as overly light fare. Instead, she turned to Russian and Spanish dances, which she studied with Elsa Brunelleschi in London. John Masefield wrote a poem about her and she performed at the Criterion Theatre in 1946. She was proudest of her tours entertaining troops as a member of ENSA (Entertainment National Service Association) in 1942 and in France in 1944, when she also performed for General LeClerc's soldiers.

Neville died in 1951, four years after Madeleine and her parents returned to Paris. Duncan was out of fashion and Madeleine was invited to research and "reconstruct" medieval and Renaissance dances which she toured with early-music ensembles. Still, she went to Greece in 1951 (pictured left), dancing works by Isadora, Lisa and herself. To Madeleine, Isadora was never just a legend: When the international dance world rediscovered Isadora at the 1977 centennial of her birth and set off the still-active Duncan revival, Madeleine found herself understandably in demand

as a Duncan expert along with the more numerous American disciples.

Robin Howard invited Madeleine to The Place to dance in 1978 and to teach in 1979, and she also performed and gave lecture demonstrations in Europe and the US. She danced in a 1988 film about Isadora, *Movement from the Soul* and the 2008 Cinémathèque de la Danse documentary *Madeleine Lytton, une danseuse du 20e siècle*.

Wilfride Piollet and Jean Guizerix, Paris Opéra stars, asked her to collaborate. There was a time when sceptics claimed there was no real Duncan repertoire and no durable Duncan technique. Madeleine's masterclasses were a revelation: they proved that the early Duncan dances taught by Lisa in France were the same as those of the American-based Isadorables. Separated by an ocean for 60 years, the Duncan legacy on each side of the Atlantic was clear. Madeleine leaves behind her devoted daughter, the singer Eleonore Lytton-Pistorio.

ANNA KISSELGOFF

Madeleine Lytton, born August 28, 1921; died November 13, 2015.