

ISADORA DUNCAN AND SERGEY ESEININ

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Abstract

This article is devoted to describing of creative work in modern dance by Isadora Duncan. The aim of the article is to provide the reader some material on famous modern dancer Isadora Duncan as woman, dancer, choreographer, dance teacher. The authors draw to the conclusion Isadora Duncan's role in development of world dance art and her love to Sergey Esenin.

Keywords: modern dance, Isadora Duncan, choreographer, dancer, modern dance techniques, Sergei Esenin, poems.

I. Introduction. As with so many artists at the turn of the 20th century, we must take on faith the words that describe Isadora Duncan's power in performance [15; 28]. We must try to understand that for audiences of the Belle Epoque, this woman – her legs and feet bare under flimsy tunics and archaic robes – was first shocking and then stirring. The other great female dance star of the era was Anna Pavlova, best remembered for solos in which she is something other than human: a dying swan, a dragonfly, a fairy doll. Duncan was always human: a woman reliving a story, a woman in league with an ideal, a woman alone with the music. She was keenly aware of history and presented herself and her art, from the very beginning, as a phenomenon on a continuum with ancient Greece, Renaissance painting, classical music, the Pre-Raphaelites and Auguste Rodin. After her, she believed, would come “one who would create the new dance born from the new music”[18; 19; 1; 21].

It is interesting to notice, that the first of a series of videos that will educate viewers about who Isadora Duncan was and the dances she choreographed. The series will teach about Isadora Duncan's dance technique and demonstrate the themes about which she danced [29].

Duncan's life was unconventional, especially for a woman born in the Victorian era. Isadora Duncan (1877–1927) ignored traditional codes of morality and had many lovers of both sexes. Her idiosyncratic behavior wasn't appreciated in her native land and she did little to gain favour by becoming a Russian citizen and, showing her breast on stage in Boston, declaring "This is red! So am I!" She was herself killed in a car accident. Her long silk scarf caught in the rear wheel of the car and, as it drew off; she was partially decapitated and instantly killed. Her final words were: "Adieu, mes amis. Je vais à la gloire. (Farewell, my friends. I go to glory)". The "I go to glory" quote is almost certainly false. For one thing, Duncan wasn't aware she was about to die and so, for someone about to take a short car journey, it makes little sense. What does make sense is what she actually said. Destiny later admitted that she had embroidered the truth and that Duncan's actual last words were "Je vais à l'amour" (I go to love) [26].

II. In this article our ambition has been to investigate theoretical material that is accumulated up to nowadays and to analyze literary and art researches on this theme. To achieve the aim we have defined such *tasks*:

1. Analyze and to learn the theoretical material on this topic.
2. To describe the creative work of Isadora Duncan's innovations in modern dance.
3. To study Sergey Esenin's literary work dedicated to Isadora Duncan.

III. The Results. 'Adieu, Old World! I would hail a New World.' These are the last words of *My Life* [16], a reference to the trip Duncan is about to take in 1921, to newly red Russia, where she's been invited to start a state dance school. Isadora was greatly taken with the social and political revolution that led to the creation of the Soviet Union. Believing that she could contribute to the development of a free and heroic society, Duncan followed her conviction and passion to Moscow in 1921 to make arrangements with the new government to found a new school of dance. Operating the Moscow school with help from Irma Duncan, Isadora experienced one of her most artistically prolific and critically successful periods. Timeless and mature works including *The Revolutionary* with music by A.Scriabin and suite of dances set to Russian work songs communicate her fury at social injustice, her empathy with human suffering, and her faith in the power of

perseverance to overcome obstacles [28]. She has ended the memoir prematurely, drawing a curtain over Moscow, where she entered into her only marriage, a disastrous tangle with the wildly unstable poet Sergei Esenin, 18 years her junior [18; 23].

Isadora Duncan was the fourth of Sergey Esenin's (1895–1925) five wives [2; 10; 17]. S.Esenin was a famous Russian lyrical poet of the Silver Age of Russian poetry [4]. In the fall of 1921, while visiting the studio of painter Alexei Yakovlev, he met the Paris-based American dancer Isadora Duncan who knew only a dozen words in Russian [11; 5], while he spoke no foreign languages. They married on May 2, 1922. S.Esenin accompanied his new celebrity wife on a tour of Europe and the United States but at this point in his life, an addiction to alcohol had gotten out of control. Often drunk or on drugs, his violent rages resulted in S.Esenin destroying hotel rooms or causing disturbances in restaurants. This behavior received a great deal of publicity in the world's press [25].

After meeting with Isadora Duncan and their travelling on tour of Europe, S.Esenin wrote a cycle «Москва кабацкая»: «Вечер черные брови насопил...» [3, 182], «Все живое особой метой...» [3, 142], «Да! Теперь – решено. Без возврата...» [3, 152], «Дорогая, сядем рядом...» [3, 177], «Заметался пожар голубой...» «Мир таинственный, мир мой древний...» [3, 144], «Мне грустно на тебя смотреть...» [3, 179], «Мне осталась одна забава...» [3, 170], «Не жалею, не зову, не плачу...» [3, 149], «Не ругайтесь! Такое дело...» [3, 148], «Пой же, пой. На проклятой гитаре...» [3, 158], «Пускай ты выпита другим...» [3, 175; 12], «Снова пьют здесь, дерутся и плачут...» [3, 154], «Сторона ль моя, сторона!...» [3, 146], «Ты прохладой меня не мучай...» [3, 180], «Ты такая ж простая, как...» [3, 173], «Эта улица мне знакома...» [3, 160], «Я обманывать себя не стану...» [3, 150], «Ты меня не любишь, не жалеешь» [8].

The irony of Sergei Esenin for English speakers is that he achieved a certain celebrity status but never found a translator (as Pasternak, Mandel'shtam, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova and even Mayakovskiy did) who could bring alive his particular poetic qualities in English. Because his poems are formal, relatively simple in diction, with delicate

nuances of imagery, translations often come off as doggerel seeming simplistic and trivial [24; 7; 9; 10]. Sergey Esenin dedicated this poem to Isadora Duncan:

Пуškai ты выпита другим,
Но мне осталось, мне осталось
Твоих волос стеклянный дым
И глаз осенняя усталость.

О возраст осени! Он мне
Дороже юности и лета.
Ты стала нравиться вдвойне
Воображению поэта.

Я сердцем никогда не лгу,
И потому на голос чванства
Бестрепетно сказать могу,
Что я прощаюсь с хулиганством.

Пора расстаться с озорной
И непокорною отвагой.
Уж сердце наполнилось иной,
Кровь отрезвляющею брагой.

И мне в окошко постучал
Сентябрь багряной веткой ивы,
Чтоб я готов был и встречал
Его приход неприхотливый.

Теперь со многим я мирюсь
Без принужденья, без утраты.
Иною кажется мне Русь,
Иными – кладбища и хаты.

Прозрачно я смотрю вокруг
И вижу, там ли, здесь ли, где-то ль,
Что ты одна, сестра и друг,
Могла быть спутницей поэта.

Что я родной тебе бы мог,
Воспитываясь в постоянстве,
Пропеть о сумерках дорог
И уходящем хулиганстве [3, 175; 6].

The marriage to Duncan lasted only a short time, and in May of 1923, he returned to Moscow. There, he immediately became involved with actress Augusta Miklashevskaya and is believed to have married her in a civil ceremony; although it's known he never obtained a divorce from Isadora Duncan. S.Esenin would later commit suicide (28.12.1925). It would be easy to attribute his death, like Mayakovsky's, to the disillusionment that he must have felt when the revolution that he supported failed to live up to his expectation, but the truth is more complex [25; 12].

To conclude, Pavlova was a product of Mariinsky classicism – and thus an artist working within a tradition – Duncan, American-born, mostly self-taught, was attempting to take dance back to its unleavened beginnings in Arcadian pastures and temples, to give it a fresh start, a place of dignity in the pantheon of high art. She drew stylistic guidance for her new language of movement from stillness: the iconic figures circling Grecian urns, the zephyrs and graces in Botticelli, the volumetric musculatures in drawings by Blake [18; 13; 14; 21].

Isadora Duncan's innovations in modern dance are: 1) Duncan was the first American dancer to develop and label a concept of natural breathing, which she identified with the ebb and flow of ocean waves; 2) Duncan was the first American dancer to define movement based on natural and spiritual laws rather than on formal considerations of geometric space; 3) Duncan was the first American dancer to rigorously compare dance to the other arts, defending it as a primary art form worthy of "high art" status; 4) Duncan was the first American dancer to develop a philosophy of the dance; 5) Duncan was the first American dancer to deemphasize scenery and costumes in favor of a simple stage setting and simple costumes. By doing this, Duncan suggested that watching a dancer dance was enough [27; 21].

I.Duncan raised dance from mere vaudeville entertainment to a legitimate art form, laying the foundation for today's modern dance. The first American performing artist to gain worldwide acclaim, she dared to use her medium for political purposes: creating the

first choreography to call people to arms, to express the plight of repressed workers, and to agitate for the freedom of women [22; 20].

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