

Arts & Leisure

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Duncan's influence on art, and on life

■ With influence on dance and far beyond, pioneer to get a historical, artistic treatment in Orinda

By Janice De Jesus
CORRESPONDENT

As the lull of classical music wafts through her Danville dance studio, Lois Flood — adorned in a colorful, flowing tunic — moves lyrically in tune to the rhythm of the rain outside.

As Flood dances, she said, she is in sync with nature — a philosophy prescribed by the legendary pioneer of modern dance Isadora Duncan, the free-spirited woman known for liberating women during her day from the conventions of ballet and society.

Flood said Duncan's legacy should not be forgotten. To commemorate National Women's History Month, Flood — a lifelong dancer and teacher in Duncan's classical aesthetic dance style — and dance historian Joanna Harris bring Duncan to life on stage in "The Perspective of Isadora Duncan: Life Into Art" at the Orinda Library's garden room on March 15.

As Flood dances to the expressive and fluid repertoire that made Duncan famous, Harris will narrate the highlights of Duncan's life.

Duncan's dances have continually made an impact on Flood's life.

"I'm an expressionist," Flood said as she finished rehearsing a dance to the music of Schubert. "It's a nature dance — it's about expressing the human emotion. If you're not communicating through the dance, if you're not touching someone, it has very little meaning. I believe that's what Isadora Duncan was about. The harmonious movement in her dance is connected with nature."

Since Duncan was born in San Francisco and lived in the Bay Area in the late 19th century, her story is an integral part of local history as well as Bay Area dance history, said Harris, who holds degrees in dance and dramatic arts and founded the dance/theater program at UC Santa Cruz.

It is important for the public to know that not only was Duncan a revolutionary dancer, but an advocate for women and children's issues, Harris said.

"She danced in Greek tunics and wore lightweight material both off and on the stage—to free the body to move more freely than people had moved before," said Harris, whose recently published book "Beyond Isadora: Bay Area Dancing 1915-1965" will be released this month. "People don't know enough about dance history in general. Duncan's life is important history not only for the dancing world. She was so far ahead of her time and we're just now catching up."

"You'll be shocked by how much people know very little about Isadora Duncan," Flood said. "She really changed the way the world viewed art, women, fashion—she was basically a revolutionary. She wasn't afraid to dance the dance of change."

Flood and Harris have taken their program to several colleges, libraries and museums. National Women's History Month is the appropriate time to pay tribute to a visionary in the arts from the Bay Area, they said.

"This program is meant to honor and bring attention to people in our community who Isadora Duncan was and the imprint she left," Flood said.

One quality of Duncan's

"The Perspective of Isadora Duncan: Life Into Art"

WHEN: 2 p.m. March 15

WHERE: Orinda Library garden room, 26 Orinda Way, Orinda

INFORMATION: Call 925-254-2184 or visit www.ccclib.org

was the concept of embracing the woman's body as a timeless, ethereal figure—that not all dancers have to be young and thin, Flood said.

"Some people like to see a mature dancer," said Flood, founder of Diablo Dance Company, who teaches dance to people of all ages. "It gives them permission to do something they thought they may be too old to try."

People should take Duncan's cue — that dance is a serious art form and a mode of self expression. Many of the dances Duncan created mirrored her views on art, politics and her personal life, Flood said.

"One dance is called 'The Mother,' that Isadora created after her children died," Flood said. "Another dance, 'Narcissus,' was created to a Chopin waltz. Isadora created many of her dances based on Greek myths."

Flood said the program caters to women, men and children of all ages.

"It's important for people to know who Isadora was, her great accomplishments and what she left us. The more art we put out, the more positive influence we have on our culture," Flood said. "Maybe people will leave the program feeling it's important to open their minds to experience more art."



CINDI CHRISTIE/STAFF

LOIS FLOOD, FOUNDER OF DIABLO DANCE, rehearses moves from a dance from Isadora Duncan's historical repertoire in her Danville studio on Monday.