



New York Theatre Wiresm

Theatre Dance Performance Art Music
Alternative and International Theatre

Jack Anderson

The Pleasures of Isadora Duncan

Lori Belilove and the Isadora Duncan Dance Company

Judson Church Theater, 55 Washington Square South, Greenwich Village March 11-15, 2009

Wednesday through Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 3 and 8 p.m., Sunday at 7 p.m.

In advance \$30, \$20 students and 65+; at the door \$35, \$25 students and 65+

Tickets: (212) 691-5040 or www.isadoraduncan.org

Reviewed by Jack Anderson, March 14, 2009



Lori Belilove. Photo by Vladimir Lupovskoy

For me, it is ever thus at performances of Duncan dancing. At the first sight of women skipping barefoot with loose costumes and loosened hair, I smile and think, "How sweet. What a nice peek into dance history. But isn't all this just a bit naïve?" Then, especially if the performers are as capable as those Lori Belilove has assembled, my condescension vanishes, and I'm hooked, finding Isadora Duncan's choreography ever-satisfying to behold without apologies.

Duncan did more than cast off corsets and toe shoes, she removed clutter from choreography and filled the stage with artistic fresh air. Here was a program of short works to music by Schubert, Chopin, Gluck, Brahms, and Scriabin connected by sometimes rather stuffy-sounding bits of taped narration. Although the dances to orchestral and vocal scores had recorded accompaniment, those to piano pieces were graced with live music sensitively played by Anastasiya Popova.

As a choreographer, Duncan had a remarkable sense of rhythm and dynamics. She could devise innumerable variations on such basic movements as walks, skips, runs, and gallops; the steps may have been simple, yet the theatrical results they produced were complex, and music and movement were always in harmony. Beth Disharoon emphasized the subtle contrasts between retardations and accelerations in "Narcissus"

(Chopin). The three dancers in "Morning Star" (Gluck) appeared to be pushed gently about by the music. Duncan often made movements seem suspended in time and space. In the Gypsy waltzes from "The Many Faces of Love" (Brahms), Belilove danced with a scarf, holding poses just tantalizingly long enough before dancing on to the next alluring pause. Here, and in other works, she and her dancers knew how to punctuate galloping passages with brief pauses that created suspense and gave each subsequent burst of activity new excitement.

Group movements became especially exhilarating in "Scherzo" (Schubert), in which the dancers seemed intoxicated by the music as they surged forward on diagonals. In contrast, the "Dance of the Furies" (Gluck) gained its power from its many shifts in movement quality, Duncan making marvelous use of weighty, dragging steps, furious paroxysms, wild sprintings, and moments when dancers had to move with hands locked behind their backs.

There were brief appearances by Belilove's children's group, the Beliloveables. If that name sounds coy, historical precedent can explain it: Duncan's own children's ensemble was dubbed the Isadorables. Looking confident and happy, the Beliloveables moved with a sense of freedom that surely would have made Isadora smile.

Who knows how she would have regarded Samuel Humphreys. In theory, Duncan championed dance for everyone, and because many of her dances lack specific characters they presumably could be performed by men as well as women. But she choreographed them on women's bodies and had them danced by women. Seeing Humphreys alongside Belilove's women in a few pieces made me conscious of their differences in height and weight, and Humphreys tended to overpower the women with his physical presence. The problems of how, or even whether, men should dance the existing Duncan repertory remain unsolved.

Adding to this concert's appeal was its setting: the beautifully restored sanctuary of the Judson Memorial Church, a high open space with Corinthian columns at its sides. Here was ample room for Duncan's lofty choreography to live and breathe. Although this was a secular concert, I left the church feeling spiritually as well as aesthetically refreshed.