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Review: Nacre's "Revolutionary! Isadora Duncan" @ Skidmore Dance Theater

By Tresca Weinstein

SARATOGA SPRINGS – Isadora Duncan saw dance as “the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of movement.” Both her spirit and her movement came to life Sunday night at the Skidmore Dance Theater, when Nacre Dance Company presented “Revolutionary! Isadora Duncan,” a memoir in dance and monologue. The work weaves together Sarah Pleydell’s script, based on Duncan’s autobiography, “My Life,” with 11 of her best-known dances. Theatrical direction is by Aaron Holbitter, while Nacre director Beth Fecteau restaged the dances, expanding several solos into ensemble pieces.

The heart of the work is Diane Lachtrupp’s portrayal of Duncan, whose life was the stuff of legend, from the moment she opened her first dance school at age 10. There were passionate affairs with artists and millionaires, horrific tragedy when her two children drowned in the Seine, and international renown as she spread her groundbreaking philosophy of dance around the world.

Lachtrupp is particularly delightful when she shows us Duncan’s rebellious side. In an early scene with two young dancers, she draws herself up stick-straight to imitate a European ballet mistress forcing her students into unnatural alignment, then gently sends the girls off to leap and frolic. She can be naughty, too, as when she winkingly tells us about her first husband’s “magnificent proportions.” But Lachtrupp is also called on to embody the fire of Duncan’s oversized ambition, as well as the unimaginable pain of a grieving mother.

The dances are chosen to support the narrative and expand on its emotional quality. “Water Study,” with wavelike gestures and rhythms, illustrates Duncan’s belief that dance should be informed by nature. The sculptural imagery and perfect symmetry of “Tanagra Duet,” with music by J. S. Bach, reflects her fascination with classical Greek art; in their draped tunics, Fecteau and Teresa Visconti could be figures on an ancient pediment.

Duncan’s world travels influenced Eastern-flavored works like “Orientale,” in which the dancers wear jingling coin belts around their waists and whirl scarves through the air. Here Lachtrupp (who is a professional tango dancer) joins the dancers; as they exit, she tosses her scarf over her shoulder and leaves it in a puddle on the stage. For those familiar with Duncan’s demise (she was strangled when her scarf was caught in the wheels of an open-air car), it’s a poignant symbol.

A quintet set to Franz Schubert’s “Ave Maria” accompanies Duncan’s retelling of her children’s deaths. Dressed in floating white tunics, Fecteau, Visconti, Erin Calhoun and Julia Kool are angels softly circling KT Hart’s Madonna.

The choreographer’s edgier side is revealed in two wartime works, “La Marseillaise” and “Revolutionary Etude,” marked by sharper angles and more forceful movement. But the show closes with “Butterfly,” set to music by Frederic Chopin and performed by Kool, who captures the ease and naturalness of Duncan as we remember her most fondly—lyrical, joyful and free.

Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

Review

Nacre Dance Company’s “Revolutionary! Isadora Duncan”

When: 7 p.m. Sunday

Where: Skidmore Dance Theater, 815 N. Broadway, Saratoga Springs

Length: One hour, no intermission