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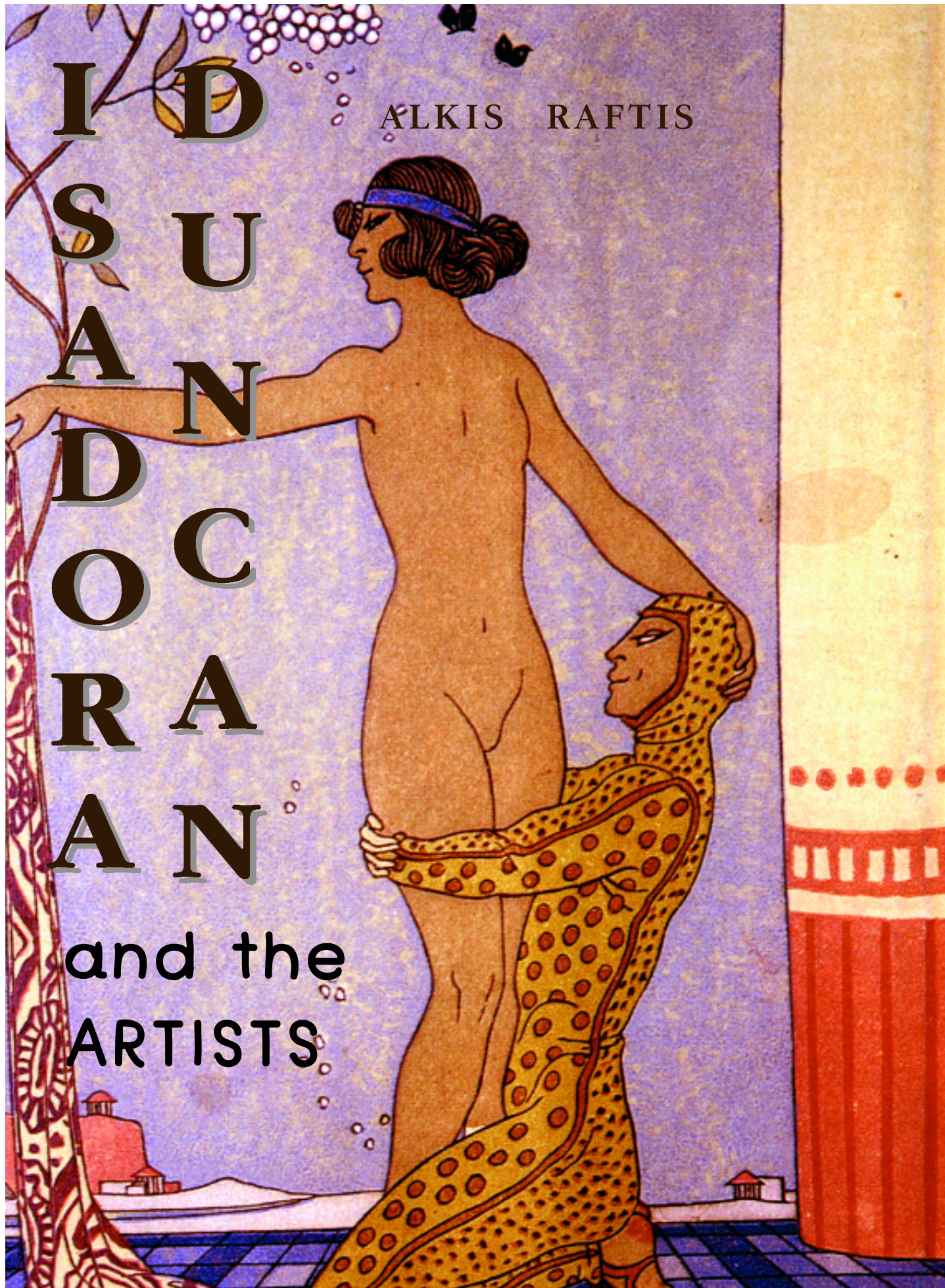
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Alkis Raftis

# ISADORA DUNCAN and the ARTISTS

Way of Life Publications  
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***Perhaps I am La Madonne qui monte le Calvaire en dansant***

**Isadora Duncan**

## INTRODUCTION

**I**n 1903 Isadora Duncan came with her brother Raymond to Athens, where she had dreamed of settling and founding her school, the school from which would spring the first dancers of Modern Dance, inspired by the dance of Ancient Greece.

They started to build a house, which never became the school that Isadora had dreamt of. Today, however, a hundred years later, this memory-laden house, a monument in the worldwide history of dance, has been completed by the Municipality of Vyronas and is already operating as the "Centre of the Study of Dance", open to all the current developments in dance, and we all hope that it will be dedicated to the cultivation of a modern dance that will be as close as it can be to Ancient Hellenism.

This provides the opportunity to present today something that has been missing from international bibliography: an anthology of the works of the important artists who knew Isadora Duncan and immortalised her.

*Alkis Raftis*



## A CENTURY LATER...

From the time of her first appearance at the start of the last century until today, Isadora Duncan has been one of the most discussed people in the history of Dance. An exceptional personality who had a huge influence on artists, not only of dance but also of the other arts. Giving a new meaning to dance and a new "look" to the spectator she was described as pioneer of what is known as Contemporary Dance.

The historic building that Isadora and Raymond Duncan built on Kopanas Hill in Vyronas in 1903 houses, a century later, the Isadora and Raymond Duncan Centre for the Study of Dance, with the main pivots of its work education, creation and research in the field of dance.

International bibliography and research contain plenty of books that approach the life and work of Isadora Duncan, mainly in a theoretical or anecdotal way. We consider that Professor Raftis comes to complete this material, to enrich our knowledge of the dancer, the woman and the artist Isadora Duncan. Within the pages of this book he opens in front of us a palette of images and reflections of Isadora, seen through the eyes and works of the artists who were inspired by her.

Having the unique privilege of living in the historic footsteps of the Duncans and feeling the challenge that is inherent in the turn of a century, we are deeply conscious of the responsibility but also the need to support similar essential initiatives, which can form the basis for discussion, questioning and new approaches.

***The Mayor of Vyronas  
Mr. Nikolaos Rogakos***

# THE DUNCAN PHENOMENON

**T**he bibliography on Isadora Duncan is enormous, but the writing is almost entirely descriptive. It consists either of biographies recounting the events of her life, or of reviews and impressions of her performances, which inevitably have a large dose of subjectivity. My own position is that of sociologist and historian.

I see Isadora Duncan more as a social phenomenon. I am interested in finding out:

- What reasons led to her emergence and the emergence of other similar dancers at that time, even though these may not have made history?
- What factors shaped her thinking and generally her personality?
- How can society's reception of her be explained? In particular: who formed her public, or rather, who formed her publics, since they consisted of specific and disparate groups? What did each of these groups find in Duncan?
- What was Duncan's "message"? What was the space she came to fill in the society of that time? How did she pass her message on to her public, and how did her public's messages reach her?

## Origin and development

- Middle-class family, artistically educated parents.
- She grew up in deprived circumstances, without a father.
- She left school before she had completed her elementary education.
- She taught herself French and German.
- She taught herself dance and music.
- She studied philosophy, theatre.
- She wore Greek chitons at a time when women usually wore corsets and several petticoats.

## Dance

- She danced barefoot and half-naked, when serious stage dancing was synonymous with "tutu" and "pointes".
- She was the first to use the musical works of great composers that had not been written for dancing.
- She appeared on stage alone; it was only later that her young pupils sometimes accompanied her.
- She used the simplest of costumes, with no scenery.
- She did not perform choreographies; she improvised, or rather gave a spontaneous interpretation of the music.
- She attempted to dance to Byzantine music, a practice so far ahead of her time that no one dared to follow it for a whole century afterwards.
- In spite of the sensual dimension of her dance, the most serious critics insisted that it was not provocative.
- Today's choreographers have begun to take movements and gestures from everyday life. Duncan was ahead of them in this by about 80 years.

## Her impact on society

What were the social groups that constituted her public?

- Royalty and heads of state
- Artists
- Intellectuals and students
- The upper middle class (in Europe and America)
- Workers and farmers (in the Soviet Union)

A list of leaders of state who attended her performances:

- President Roosevelt of the USA,
- The King of Bulgaria, with whom she was said to have had an affair,
- King George I of Greece, who, when he heard of her triumphant performance at the Municipal Theatre in 1903, asked her to perform in the Royal Theatre, where he went with his entire family,
- Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, who invited her to settle in Greece for the second time in 1920.
- The Empress of Germany Augusta Victoria, who saw one of her performances in Berlin and criticized her barefoot pupils,
- Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, leader of the Soviet Union, who showed more enthusiasm than all the others.

## Morality

Sceptics will say that such enormous success could be due to the fact that Duncan offered a very daring spectacle, at the same time covering it with the alibi of avant-garde art. Men in the audience could, without pangs of conscience, feast their eyes on a statuesque body, whose nakedness was only minimally hidden by her classic chitons and expressive movements.

They should recognise however that Isadora Duncan's success led to the appearance of many other dancers with equivalent physical advantages, more sensuous dancing and often more undisguised nudity. Ruth Saint Denis in America, Maud Allan in England, Adorée Vilani in France were among the best known. For many others, dance was nothing more than an excuse for moving their bodies provocatively, though few of them had more to show than their curves.

There was no lack of competition in this field, and Duncan would not have stood out if her body were the main attraction for audiences. Besides, she herself often refused to collaborate with impresarios who offered her tempting fees, if she suspected that they meant to present her as the "half-naked dancer".

The reader might think that I sympathise with the established view that regards sensual dance as inferior. For instance, dancers of all other kinds (theatrical, folk, ballroom) unanimously look down at dancers of "Anatolian dance" (oriental, belly dance, dance of the seven veils, cabaret etc.). This is an unfair and superficial view that should somewhere else be objectively refuted. Sensual dance, in all its nuances, is equally serious, just as artistic and undoubtedly beautiful; it is socially useful, and historically older than other kinds of dance.

## Women's rights

Revolutions - like all social phenomena - are a combination of two factors. On one hand the ripeness of circumstances, development to the point where radical change is necessary and feasible. On the other hand, the emergence of one or more people who sense the need for

change, personify it and fight for it until they bring it about. We should see Duncan's revolution in this way.

Isadora declared unequivocally that she supported the rights that should belong to every woman:

- To be married or not.
- To make love to whatever man she wished.
- To have children or not.
- To look after her children herself or not.
- To travel on her own.
- To express her political opinions.

Anyone with a knowledge of the conditions prevailing the start of the twentieth century will realise how explosive such opinions were then.

## Politics

In spite of the fact that she was not interested in politics, Isadora had the instinct and the daring to follow whatever was most progressive in the ideas of her time. We should not be prejudiced by the picture we have today of the those political currents; the important thing is that she espoused the most avant-garde ideas at that time. It took a sharp instinct to choose them and particular courage to follow them.

In Greece, for example, she sided with Eleftherios Venezelos, who was then in conflict with the King. In Russia, at a time when almost all the Russian dancers and choreographers were leaving for Europe and America, she alone moved against the current: she sided with the Bolsheviks from the beginning and worked hard to help the Revolution with her dance. She supported her views not only with words, as usually happens in politics, but with harsh personal sacrifices: when Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky were living in the most luxurious hotels in Nice and Paris, she was touring the remotest areas of Soviet Russia in conditions of indescribable poverty.

## Greek spirit

Isadora and her brother Raymond were not the first people to worship Greece. A hundred years before them, many eminent foreigners had fallen under the spell of the classical beauty of ancient Greece, and had remained faithful to it in spite of the bitterness the actual Greece soaked them with. Once again the Duncans went further than the others: they translated the Ancient World into everyday action, they tried it out on their bodies. They wore chitons and sandals that Raymond had made, they danced trying to bring to life the scenes on the ancient vases.

Most important of all, they actually came to live in Greece. We should not forget that many of the Greek-worshippers before them, starting with Winkelmann, had never visited Greece even as sightseers. The Duncans came for the first time in 1903. It was Raymond who played the main part in this, returning at every opportunity for sixty years.

On two other occasions Isadora attempted to settle in the country, even though this would have amounted to sure professional suicide. What could an international personality expect from the Greece of 1903? A faraway country, small, poor, destroyed by wars and strife, where there were neither dance schools, nor professional dancers, nor even the conditions for the development of theatrical dance. Sikeliianos' efforts themselves twenty years later failed because Greece was too backward to accept them.



## Ecology

Nowadays, eating natural foods and generally living in harmony and contact with nature is something that is supported by ecologists, and it seems reasonable enough. One hundred whole years have passed however, since the days when Raymond Duncan recommended it. Only ten years ago, such ideas were still daring and generally unknown to many people. Imagine how avant-garde such ideas were then. The ecological movement was ninety years behind Raymond Duncan, and still has not caught up with him. For Duncan turned ecology into everyday action: he wove his own clothes on the loom, and he himself made the sandals that he wore, his furniture and his implements. Today's "green" organisations would not dare to advise the public to follow him.

And as if this was not enough, the Duncans went even further. They discovered that there was an ecological kind of music, the "natural scales", which had passed from ancient music into Byzantine hymns. Today's ecologists have not yet suspected this, that there exists a kind of "ecology of music". Isadora dared to dance to this music, and Raymond taught it for decades, but their efforts came to nothing because they were so far ahead of their time.

I mention Isadora more than Raymond because she is the one who became famous. Brother and sister were always close and one influenced the other, which is why we can talk of the "Duncan phenomenon" from a historical point of view. Raymond won no acclaim because he moved in duller spheres and was more down-to-earth. He too, however, was just as pioneering in his own way.

Suffice it to say that he engaged successfully in dramatic art, poetry, painting, weaving, sculpture, singing, sandal-making, building, wood-carving, as well as European and Byzantine music. He taught all these things - and perhaps others that I have missed - first in Athens and later, until his death in 1967, at the "Academy" he founded in Paris, occasionally giving shows in New York. It would be an omission not to mention (as a hint to the present situation in Kossovo) the fact that after the Greek army entered Albania in 1914, he went to Saranda and helped the locals cope with the misery left by the war. Conditions were so bad there that his wife Penelope, sister of Angelos Sikelianos, became ill and eventually died. It is a great injustice that this great philhellene has not been honoured for his wide-ranging service to Greece.

## Dance

There is little need to speak of the crucial importance that the emergence of Duncan had on the development of dance. It is a platitude to say that she is one of the greatest dancers, if only because there is no book on dance history that does not devote several pages to her. Quite a few people would dispute, however, that she was the greatest figure of all. It is worth noting, though, who such people might be.

They are those who stick with whatever technique they were taught and feel the need to defend it. Those who do not have the wide culture or the discriminating sensitivity to see beyond the narrow frontiers of their kind of dance (academic, modern, jazz, character etc.) and to appreciate dance as an art that encompasses all the planet and all ages. In this huge polymorphism, every individual's technique appears insignificant, while Duncan's "non-technique" seems great.

I believe that if dance à la Duncan did not spread as much as other schools or fashions it is due to the fact that it was vehicle for an anti-commercial outlook. It was not a "product" suitably "packaged" so that it would "sell". It did not have "secrets"; it did not have

preordained exercises, nor a framework that a dance teacher could declare to possess in order to attract pupils. Duncan's dancing was based mainly on a deep understanding of dance, of the human body and its expressiveness, of a sense of theatre. Still more, Duncan's dancing was the outcome of a worldview, which is a feature no one could claim for some of the more usual techniques.

Some dance historians throw the blame on Duncan's pupils, asserting that they were not equal to continuing her work. Others use the fact that the "Duncan school" has comparatively few representatives today as a criterion to show that her worth was limited.

I will be in the minority in asserting that Duncan's contribution was not only enormous but also unique in the world history of dance. We should not confuse her with the other dancers, Nijinsky, Pavlova or Saint-Denis: Duncan was something more than a great dancer. We should distinguish her from the great choreographers, Fokine, Balanchine and Graham: Duncan created something more than choreographies.

Isadora Duncan was the greatest because she opened the way for the others we mentioned and for all the other dancers and choreographers. They all came after her, they were influenced by her, and they recognised it more or less. Before her there was only a sterile academic dance, which needed her contribution in order to become fertile again.

She was a complete dancer. The others dedicated their life to dance: she dedicated her dance to life. The others said many things with their dance, but outside their dance they had nothing to say. She, however, brought the revolution to dance and to every other aspect of her life. She set dance on its feet and brought it face to face with the other arts. She stood as an equal with artists and politicians, with philosophers and scholars, having her own point of view, the point of view of a dancer about life and art.

In the pages that follow we try to give a picture of the feeling that Isadora's dance left on the artists of her times.



# ISADORA DUNCAN - HER LIFE

## **1877**

Angela Isadora Duncan was born in San Francisco on 26th May 1877. Her mother was Mary Isadora (Dora) Grey, the daughter of Thomas Grey, who had fought in the Civil War, and had risen to the rank of Colonel. After the War he was appointed a harbour official in San Francisco and finally became a member of the California House of Representatives. Isadora's father was Joseph Charles Duncan, a businessman who was thirty years older than her mother. They had four children: Mary Elizabeth, Augustin, Raymond and Isadora. Isadora was just five months old when her father's bank went bankrupt and he himself disappeared to avoid the consequences. From then on, Mary Duncan started to work in order to support her children, while they grew up in deprived circumstances, unsupervised, in a spirit of independence and with a sense of responsibility. In their family environment they learnt to love the arts, playing drama and music in their home.

## **1887**

Isadora left school when she was about ten years old and started to give ballroom dancing lessons to the children of the neighbourhood, helped by her brothers and sister and with her mother at the piano. From then on, she used to read a great deal, a habit she kept up for the rest of her life. In her dancing she must have been much influenced by the ideas of François Delsarte, which were then finding fertile soil in America. Delsarte was the first who studied gestures and put forward a system based on natural, expressive movements.

## **1895**

She went with her mother to Chicago, where she danced for the first time in public, performing Mendelssohn's "Spring Song". The theatrical entrepreneur Augustin Daly engaged her in his company in New York, where she took several dance lessons with the well-known ballerina Maria Bonfanti.

## **1896**

She started giving individual performances in theatres and at gatherings in private homes, with the music of Ethelbert Nevin, who himself played the piano. The public were amazed that she dared to dance with bare hands and feet, as well as by her unprecedented free and expressive dance.

## **1897**

She took part in performances of Daly's company in London, where she had dancing lessons with Katti Lanner. She continued to give dancing lessons to children.

## **1899**

The hotel where the Duncan family were staying caught fire while Isadora and her sister Elizabeth were giving a lesson. By keeping calm they managed to get all their young pupils out, but all their possessions were burnt. She left with her brothers and sisters for London, where she danced at gatherings of art lovers, coming to know various scholars and artists. She went to theatre performances, and studied the Greek sculptures in the British Museum.

### **1900**

She went with her mother to Paris, where her brother Raymond was already staying. With him she studied the representations of ancient dance on Greek vases and in sculptures of the Louvre. She was impressed by the Universal Exposition, especially by the works of Rodin and the performances of Japanese dance. She danced in salons and gave lessons.

### **1901**

She gave recitals in Monte Carlo and in London, with dances inspired by Ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy and contemporary music. The critics gave her a favourable reception. The dancer Loïe Fuller included her in her troupe travelling to Berlin, Leipzig, Munich and Vienna.

### **1902**

In Budapest Isadora gave solo performances in the theatre Urania, dancing to music by Strauss and Liszt, with great success. It was at this time that she first made love, with the young actor Oscar Beregi. Afterwards she parted from Beregi and went to Vienna, where she recovered from a short illness. She danced very successfully in Munich. Her public, mainly young people and students, adored her. After every performance they dragged her carriage to her hotel, where they sang under her windows.

### **1903**

She danced in Berlin and gave her famous lecture on the subject "The dance of the future", in which she presented her ideas. The text circulated widely in various languages, and is still considered the manifesto of modern dance as well as of the women's liberation. She returned to Paris, where she gave several less successful performances at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre. The critics found the dancing charming and interesting, but not serious enough. She was offered a new tour of Germany, but refused.

### **1903**

Her brother Raymond organised a family trip to Greece. From Brindisi they arrived in the island of Lefkada, and from there they went on by caique to Kravasara (today called Amphilochia) where they disembarked and knelt and kissed Greek soil. They called at Agrinio, Missolonghi and Patras, and arrived in Athens. There they bought a stretch of land on the hill of Kopanas (today in the Municipality of Vyronas), which was then open grazing land, and started to build a house, using plans inspired by the Palace of Agamemnon. They wore chitons and sandals and studied ancient Greek art intensively, under the guidance of the archaeologist and scholar Alexander Philadelphus. They discovered that the ancient Greek music had survived in Byzantine chants, and formed a choir under the direction of Constantine Psachos. Isadora danced in the Municipal Theatre on the 28th of November, where the public, mainly students, gave her a standing ovation. By royal invitation, she gave a second performance on the 11th of December, this time in the Royal Theatre before King George I and all his family, the French writer Pierre Loti and the cream of Athens society. She left for a period in Europe with her choir under the direction of Panaghiotis Tzaaneas.

### **1904**

Her performances were intended to lead to the revival of ancient tragedy, but the public wanted something lighter than Aeschylus's "The Suppliants". In vain Isadora gave long



talks before each performance, introducing the subject. After performances in Vienna, Munich and Berlin, she disbanded the Greek choir. Her impresario urged her to do a tour of Germany where success was assured, but she preferred to settle down in Berlin, where she was learning German and studying philosophy, especially Nietzsche. Cosima Wagner suggested that she should dance at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth. She danced the lead in "Tannhäuser", accompanied by ballet dancers. Public response was disappointing, but the critics found it an interesting experience. She did a tour in Germany. In Berlin she fell in love with the stage designer and theatre innovator Edward Gordon Craig, son of the great English actress Ellen Terry. It was this year that she went to Russia for the first time and gave a performance in Saint Petersburg with music entirely by Chopin. The public and the critics gave her an enthusiastic reception.

### **1905**

She returned to Russia and danced in Moscow. She watched ballet performances and met the great dancers Anna Pavlova and Mathilda Kschessinska, the stage and costume designer Bakst, the producer Diaghilev and the choreographers Marius Petipa and Michail Fokine. Fokine admired her and found her an inspiration for his future choreographies. She danced in Kiev and Moscow, where the public, mostly students, artists and intellectuals, received her with enthusiasm. She returned to Berlin and founded a school with her sister Elizabeth. Twenty young girls were selected from many candidates to be boarders, and, in addition to the usual programme of school subjects, attended lessons in free dance, music, singing, elocution, painting and pottery. The Empress Augusta Victoria attended one performance by Isadora and her pupils, but found the sight of their bare feet unacceptable, out of keeping with the strict morals of the age.

### **1906**

A period with Craig in Germany, Belgium and Holland. She visited the Scandinavian countries. She danced with success in Warsaw and in other Polish cities. It was in Holland in September that she gave birth to her first child, Deirdre. She continued in Holland, until she finally collapsed with exhaustion. She went to Florence, where Craig was doing the sets for "Rosmersholm" with the famous Italian actress Eleonora Duse in the lead.

### **1907**

Craig had tired of his stormy life with her and left her so that he could work in the theatre without distraction. After a period of recuperation in Nice, Isadora danced in Holland, Sweden, Germany and Switzerland. The continued successes brought her plenty of money, but her expenses were always huge: she stayed in the most expensive hotels and was supporting Craig, the baby and its governess, her mother, her sister and the school and its pupils. At the same time, she always received less than was due to her, because of her inability to handle financial matters. She continued her tour: Holland, Warsaw, Munich, Russia. In Moscow she became close friends with Constantin Stanislavsky.

### **1908**

She gave several performances at the Gaieté-Lyrique theatre in Paris, but without success, since public attention was focussed on the concerts of Russian music that Sergei Diaghilev was organising then. She started a tour in the United States, but seeing the indifference of the public, she cut it short and returned to New York. There she met Walter Damrosch, the conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, and gave a

recital with the 80-member orchestra at the Metropolitan Opera House. The programme included excerpts from Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis", Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, and Wagner's "Tannhäuser". It was a great success, which was continued at performances in other cities.

### **1909**

Instead of exploiting her triumph in America, she returned to Paris, where her pupils now were. She again gave performances at the Gaité-Lyrique theatre, despite the fact that Diaghilev's Ballets Russes were appearing triumphantly in the same season and were monopolising the attention of dance lovers. Famous artists such as Jean-Paul Lafitte, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, Jules Grandjouan and Antoine Bourdelle were inspired by her performances. She began a relationship with Paris Singer, a 42-year-old American millionaire with five children, son of the founder of the sewing-machine manufacturer. She gave performances in Russia and in America.

### **1910**

Although she was pregnant, she left again, this time together with Singer, for a series of performances in America with Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Orchestra. Her advancing pregnancy worried the public, and made it necessary for her to cut her tour short. After a cruise on the Nile on Singer's yacht, she returned to the French Riviera, where she gave birth to a little boy they named Patrick. Singer insisted that they should get married, but she refused to betray her convictions about the freedom of women. She tried to make a quiet life in Singer's property in England, but the tedium drove her into the arms of her pianist André Caplet, although in fact she considered him particularly ugly.

### **1911**

She went to live with her children in Paris, and gave two recitals at the Châtelet Theatre. She gave a tour in the United States.

### **1912**

She was reconciled with Singer, but their relationship remained stormy, with frequent quarrels. Together they planned the building of a theatre where Isadora and her brothers could present ancient drama with Craig, Duse and other great artists they had come to know. But disagreements between the architect and Craig did not allow the plan to proceed.

### **1913**

She gave a series of performances in Russia with the pianist Hener Skene. It was in this year that her two children were drowned in the Seine. After a happy family meal, they had sent the children home in the car. On the way the engine stalled and the chauffeur got out to start it with the starting-handle. But the handbrake gave way, and the car rolled and plunged into the river.

### **1913**

For a change of environment, she went to Corfu, from where her brother Raymond and his wife Penelope, sister of poet Angelos Sikelianos, were helping the Greeks in North Epirus to re-establish themselves after the catastrophes of the Balkan War. She made a short journey with Penelope to Constantinople, and then returned to Paris. She stayed in the house of Eleonora Duse in Viareggio in Italy. Duse persuaded her to return to dancing in order to forget the death of her children. She met a young Italian sculptor and had a short erotic adventure that helped her to recover her spirits.

## **1914**

Singer bought her a hotel building in Paris, with 200 rooms and 80 bathrooms, so that she could fulfil her old dream - a dancing school. They called it Bellevue, because of its view of the Bois de Boulogne. She selected fifty children of eight or nine and entrusted their education to six of her old students who had come from the school her sister Elizabeth was running in Germany. With Stanislavsky's help she also brought ten children from her school in Moscow. She did little teaching herself because she was pregnant after her affair in Italy. Her child died immediately after it was born. In August the First World War broke out. Isadora handed over the school building to be an army hospital and left for Normandy to convalesce. She attempted to commit suicide by walking into the sea but was saved by her doctor, with whom she cohabited. She left for America. In New York, her six oldest students gave a performance in the Metropolitan Opera House, with Schubert's "Ave Maria".

## **1915**

At her next performances she danced the "Marseillaise" and made fiery speeches urging the Americans to come into the War on the side of the French. She tried to raise money to support her school, but her performances were very expensive. In "Oedipus the Rex", in which her brother Augustin played the main role, she used 80 musicians and a choir of 100. Her financial difficulties forced her to leave.

## **1915**

She arrived with her students in Naples, and from there she went on to Switzerland, and finally to Athens, where Raymond was. The house in Kopanas was still half-finished, so they stayed in the Hotel d'Angleterre. Greece was undecided about entry into the War. Prime Minister Venizelos was on the side of the Allies, while King Constantine sympathised with Germany. Isadora moved the crowd to enthusiasm by singing the "Marseillaise" in Constitution Square, and with a dance led a march to Venizelos' house. She returned to Switzerland, where she left her students, and went on to Paris.

## **1916**

In vain she tried to support her students by giving performances in Paris and Switzerland. She set out with her brother Augustin for a period in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. The pianist Maurice Dumesnil accompanied her. She returned alone and deeply in debt to New York. Singer, in spite of the fact that they had separated, helped her financially. She gave a triumphant performance at the Metropolitan Opera House.

## **1917**

She returned to her homeland California after 22 years' absence and gave performances with the pianist Harold Bower, with whom she had a love affair. She left for London. Her six students now gave performances in New York without her, something which particularly worried her.

## **1918**

She returned to Paris. She fell in love with the English pianist Walter Rummel, who was ten years younger than she was. They lived happily together and gave performances. When the war ended, she wrote to her students asking them to come to France to dance with her. She tried to find money to restart her school. She could not manage it, and had to sell the Bellevue building to the French government. Incapable of negotiation, she accepted a comparatively insignificant sum, with which she bought a house in Paris.

## **1920**

Full of happiness and optimism as a result of her affair with Rummel, she decided to realise her old dream of settling in Athens. She hurriedly repaired the house in Kopanas, and went to live there with Rummel. He however fell in love with her student Anna. Isadora had promised the Greek government that she would prepare a thousand dancers for a "Festival of Dionysos", and held rehearsals every day in the Zappeion - which prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos allotted her - with music from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and the Scherzo from Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. But there was a change of government and Duncan found herself without support. She had to leave for Paris and from there went on to London. Three of her students decided to go to America. In London she met the great writer Bernard Shaw. It was said that she suggested that he should have a child by her, a child who would be exceptional since it would inherit his mind and her body. Shaw is then supposed to have replied, "What if it should inherit my body and your mind?" But Shaw later denied this celebrated anecdote, saying that he could not have said any such thing, since he particularly respected her for her brain.

## **1921**

She gave successful performances in London and Brussels with Rummel at the piano, but finally he went out of her life together with Anna. Isadora accepted the invitation of the Soviet government to found a dance school in Moscow. Her friends did what they could to dissuade her, having heard the most frightful things about the Bolsheviks and the situation in Russia, but she was full of enthusiasm for a new start. She arrived in Moscow accompanied by her student Irma and discovered that the situation was indeed dramatic. The Minister of Education Anatoly Lunacharsky promised her every help. Her first appearance was at the Bolshoi theatre, with 3,000 seats, and in the presence of Lenin. She danced Tchaikovsky's "Pathetic" Symphony and the Slavonic March, finishing with the "International", which brought the audience to their feet, singing enthusiastically. Lenin himself stood up and applauded, singing and shouting "Bravo".

## **1922**

She fell passionately in love with the already famous 26-year-old Russian poet Sergei Essenin, with whom she always communicated by means of an interpreter, since he spoke nothing but Russian. They married and left for Berlin and then for Paris. Isadora asked that 25 students should come from her school to perform with her, but the Soviet government would not give them permission to travel. They left for the USA, where the reception was negative from the start, on account of the anti-communist hysteria of the time. She began a series of performances in the bigger cities. The artists worshipped her but the public were discouraged by the long speeches in favour of Russia that Duncan insisted on giving after every performance. Essenin was often drunk and created serious scenes. They returned to Europe.

## **1923**

After an absence of fifteen months they returned to Moscow. Isadora started tours in the Soviet Union, while Essenin disappeared with another woman.

## **1924**

Isadora continued her tours, under great difficulties on account of the poverty and disorganisation of the country, but with enthusiastic reception by the public. In Moscow, she taught in her school and gave magnificent performances in stadiums with the participation of hundreds of dancers whom she had trained in expressive dance. She

left for performances in Berlin, leaving the management of her school in Moscow to her pupil Irma. She settled in Nice, making frequent visits to Paris, where Raymond had created a school and handicraft workshops on the ancient Greek model. His pupils regularly wore chitons and sandals, ate natural foods, wove on the loom, and performed ancient drama.

### **1925**

She heard news of Essenin's suicide. She continued her efforts to bring dancers from her school in Moscow to Nice, and hired a hall in Nice where she gave a few performances. She continued to face financial difficulties, and lived on contributions from her friends and admirers. She turned down Cecil de Mille's proposal to make a cinema film of her life, and so today there is no live documentary of her dance. But she needed to find money to live on, and she agreed to write her memoirs. These were published in many languages after her death, with the title "My Life", but with serious distortions by the publisher.

### **1926**

The nervous strain from the continuous effort of facing her difficulties made her ill with internal haemorrhages. She had to sell her house in Paris, but in the end never received the money.

### **1927**

She gave a triumphant recital at the Mogador theatre in Paris, with the Padeloup orchestra under the direction of Albert Wolff. She danced to music by Franck, Schubert and Wagner.

On 14th September, she was killed in an accident in Nice. The long scarf she was wearing tangled in the wheels of the car and wrapped itself round her neck. Her funeral in Paris was attended by a crowd. Her body was cremated, and her ashes placed next to those of her children in the cemetery of Père Lachaise.





## F. van Saanen Algi







*Pencil drawing, from the cover of a small undated album published in Paris.*  
F. van Saanen Algi. Dutch architect.

## Alexander Anderson



*Painting titled "Isadora Duncan", combining 200 bronze keys. Russell Hartley, The Archives for the Performing Arts.*



## Yurii Annenkov



*Constructivist portrait of Isadora, Moscow 1921(?).*

Yurii Annenkov (1889-1974), Russian painter, known for his geometric art and for his portraits of cultural and political figures, in geometric style. In 1924 he moved to Paris and continued to design stage and film sets, and to exhibit widely.

## Gabriele D'Annunzio



OH, ISADORA,

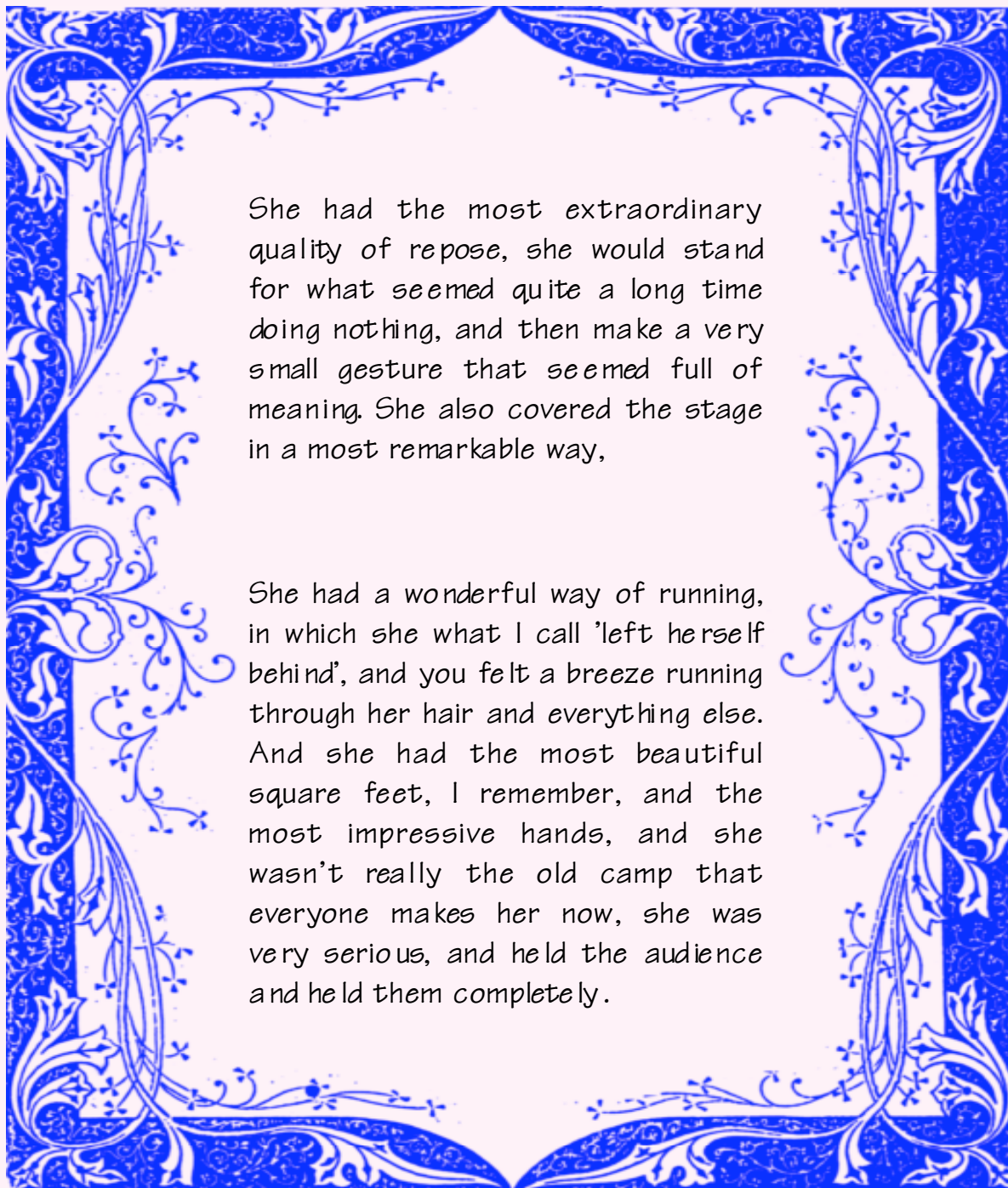
IT IS ONLY POSSIBLE TO BE ALONE WITH YOU  
IN NATURE.

ALL OTHER WOMEN DESTROY THE LANDSCAPE,  
YOU ALONE BECOME PART OF IT.

YOU ARE PART OF THE TREES,  
THE SKY, YOU ARE THE DOMINATING  
GODDESS OF NATURE.

*Duncan, Isadora: My life. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1927.*

Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), Italian poet, dramatist, daredevil and politician.



*Vaughan, David: Frederick Ashton and his ballets. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.*

Sir Frederick Ashton (1904-1988), English choreographer. He took ballet lessons with Leonide Massine, Marie Rambert, danced with Bronislava Nijinska, and he began choreographing for Rambert, then for Ninette de Valois. From 1963 to 1970 he directed the Royal Ballet, and afterwards he continued making ballets for the company.



## Aspell

29 April 1913]



*(Courtesy, Russell Hartley, The Archives for the Performing Arts)*

*Sketches published in 1898. Russell Hartley, The Archives for the Performing Arts.*

## *To Isadora dancing*

*See the tints of morning break  
Where the deep of night has been,  
Meads, forgotten verdure take,<sup>9</sup>  
And from out their lumbers wake  
Nymphs, by mortals long unseen.*

*Fair they dance, their lissom feet  
Moving all in melody.  
Swift or slow the ground they beat,  
Scarce the trembling blossoms meet,  
Care-worn crowds stand still to see*

*Harps long mute are stung again  
(Oh! the winds! the flow'r (...)  
New old songs are sung again,  
All the world grows young again,  
Lo, An age of gold begun*

Stockholm, 6 May 1906

*A poem published in English in a Swedish newspaper, Stockholm, 6 May 1906. From the archive of Gedeon Dienes, Budapest*

## Leon Bakst

It's good, if you like it, because it's new and, one could say, pregnant with the future, but I would think that she [Isadora Duncan] has little of the feu sacré in her. In places Chopin's presto is beautiful. She herself, however, is more like an inebriated, crazy Amazon.

*Excerpt from a letter to Alexander Benois written in 1903.*





Leon Bakst (1866-1924), Russian decor and costume designer, born in Belorussia. The portrait of Isadora Duncan (Oxford, Ashmolean) in brush and ink, dates from her Russian tour in 1908. He was made famous by his work with the Ballets Russes.