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Love, Isadora, California Stage

Review: This one woman show is a whopping show stopper of non stop dance and poetry interwoven with the elaborate personal memoir of Isadora Duncan, the inventor of modern dance.

Everything about this solo production, lights, sound effects, minimalist but meaningful Janis Stevens has captured the essence of modern dance—extreme freedom of movement and carefree improvisation, supported by free-flowing costumes, and the huge, yet deliberately sparse, set that lets dancer/actress Lori Russo move about with the utmost freedom. No physical constraints at all. The only props are a swing and a champagne bottle and glass. Oh, and a long red scarf whose purpose is only disclosed at the denouement.

Love Isadora is all about the famous dance teacher who grew up in poverty in San Francisco, and went on to great, even fabulous heights in New York, Paris, Moscow and Kiev. Playwright Rick Foster manages to fit a ton of juicy tidbits into a brilliant collage. I don't think I dropped a single fact into my lap.

Isadora learned to dance all by herself listening to her mother playing classical piano. Never one to fit in to the sometimes stylized rigormortis of classical ballet, Duncan practically single handedly invented modern dance. And choreographer Tracy Eisenberg is really inspired to get flowing movement going and going.

Duncan was at least two decades ahead of Agnes deMille, and at one time just after the turn of the twentieth century, had thousands of students all over the world. And, she recounts joyously, many a lover and philanthropist. By the time of her accidental and tragic death at the height of her career, she had captured the imagination of many a bohemian, including my mother, who took her mother and very conservative father, to see a performance of Duncan's at the ripe old age of nine.

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There are moments of extreme tragedy, like when she says her daughter and her lover drowned. But the play quickly and gracefully moves on to yet another triumph of the dance.

Russo whirls and pirouettes around the stage, never dropping the tiniest bit of pregnant dialog. You can hear every word even when the actress is stage left and facing the back wall, and you are stage right. California Stage's SPACE may be big, wide and barnlike, but this show takes great advantage of these very long sightlines.

This play has really been around and received accolades bigger than mine. So, if you really like modern dance, this performance will fill in all the gaps of your knowledge, and have you searching Wikipedia for more clues about this elegant, meaningful and all too short life of Isadora Duncan.

The ending was not a bit saccharine or over spoke. Russo just flings her long red scarf down onto the floor of the set, inviting someone else of a dancing inclination to pick it up and carry on the story.

- Robin Aurelius

Review: This is one of the finest theatre pieces I have ever seen. Incredible writing by Rick Foster. He has captured the essence of this wonderful dancer/lover/teacher. Lori Russo was truly magnificent. At times I was so caught up with the story that I forgot that I wasn't actually seeing Isadora Duncan. Lori "became" Isadora. Kudos to the magnificent direction by Janis Stevens, the elegantly simple set by Mark Reddick, and the complementary lighting by Jesse Talbert. Go see this play, you'll laugh and you'll cry. Bravo,
- Penny Meagher

Review: This show brought me to tears numerous times. Not all due to sadness. Sometimes it was just the beauty of the language, story and dance mixed together. There is so much to be learned about Isadora Duncan. I knew very little about her and now I feel a very deep connection with her. The show is inspiring because we watch Isadora traveling around and having to deal with prejudices simply because she was in Moscow. The show is more than just about her or the dancing. It's about finding who we are and not allowing ourselves to be put in a box with a bunch of other people. Isadora often questioned different cultures, including America. She received criticism in America for "being red and a communist". She was ready to respond to such criticism in a powerful and memorable way. Lorri Russo had a complete grasp of this show. The

dedication to every movement and every word was absolutely outstanding and breath taking. Rick Foster has done it once again! He has such skill for writing plays. He is able to create something that is breathtaking, entertaining, edgy, and at the same time, you learn so much. With a great script, a great actress, a great director... What can go wrong? Janis Steven's directing was fluid and natural. It seemed that she took a lot of care, when directing, to be sure that the story resonates with each and every person in the audience, on a personal level. The detail in her directing is incredible. I felt like I could actually hear Isadora's thoughts as well as hearing her spoken words. This is the mark of a talented group of people. Bravo to all involved. I was touched by this show. It is a MUST see.

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