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By Mickey Friedman

Isadora Duncan, the free-spirited dancer whose uninhibited movement art helped define our notions of modernity, was born in San Francisco 100 years ago tomorrow.

"She opened the door to new ideas of thinking today," says Russell Hartley, director of the Archives for the Performing Arts. Indeed, Isadora, with her rejection of orthodox forms of dance and her insistence on being unfettered both by shoes and corsets on the stage and by bourgeois morality in life, helped strike the death blow of outworn Victorianism.

Isadora found inspiration for her dancing in the movements of nature, such as the rhythm of waves. Dancing barefoot, in a loose tunic modeled on a Greek chiton, she electrified Europe and America.

"I saw Isadora dance. I never got over it," says Sutgwyn Quitzow, whose Berkeley school, Temple of the Wings, teaches dancing in the Duncan tradition. Quitzow's mother went to school with Isadora, and the family attended one of Isadora's San Francisco concerts in 1917. "She seemed to have all the attributes of a goddess," Quitzow remembers. "She was so fluid you could hardly imagine it. There's never been anyone like her."

"The world still can't forget about her," says Mignon Garland, who studied with Isadora's adopted daughter Irma and founded the Isadora Duncan Heritage Society and the San Francisco Duncan Dancers. "She was a product of the American soil, nourished by Walt Whitman," Garland declares. "She didn't fit into existing forms, so she created new ones." Garland says that contrary to popular opinion, Isadora's dancing was not spontaneous, but structured, with a choreography that has been handed down.

To celebrate Isadora's centenary, the Archives for the Performing Arts, 3150 Sacramento St. in the Presidio Branch Library, will have a public "Happy Birthday, Isadora" celebration complete with a large decorated cake. The celebration tomorrow evening from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. will also mark the opening of an exhibition of Duncan memorabilia, including photographs, drawings, newspaper articles, and prints telling the story of Isadora and her family. The exhibit will also contain works of art done in Isadora's honor by local artists. The exhibit will be on display at the Archives until July 23 between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.

On Friday the San Francisco Duncan Dancers will perform a tribute to Isadora in the Colonial Concert Hall of the St. Francis Hotel. The concert, beginning at



Keeping the spirit alive: The San Francisco Duncan Dancers will perform Friday

Examiner photo by Robert McLeod

5 p.m., will include 15 dances choreographed by Isadora. Admission is \$5 and \$7.50.

Although Isadora spent most of her life far away from her native city, there are still a few locations here that can be associated with her:

501 Taylor St. (northwest corner of Taylor and Geary): Isadora was born on this site on May 26, 1877, and a plaque on the building commemorates her birth. She was the youngest of four children of Joseph Charles Duncan and his second wife, Mary Dora Gray. Isadora's father made and lost money in several enterprises, one of which was the Safe Deposit Co. of California, which stood on the southeast corner of California and Montgomery streets. The bank's main vault was decorated with life-sized metal warriors, two of which now guard Spenger's Restaurant in Berkeley.

Old St. Mary's Church, 660 California St.: Isadora was baptized at Old St. Mary's, and the recent discovery there of her baptismal certificate establishes that her true birth date was May 26, 1877, not May 27, 1878, as Isadora herself always said.

Northeast corner, Sutter and Van Ness (present site of the Regency Theater): On this corner stood Castle Mansion, a fine house with a barn in back where Joseph Charles Duncan moved his family in 1893. The move came in a resurgence of prosperity following a period when Duncan had gone bankrupt and separated from Isadora's mother, who took the children to live in Oakland. The barn was made into a theater where Isadora and her brothers and sister performed. Only a year later, Duncan lost his money again, and the family had to move.

Corner of Powell and Market streets, present site of Woolworth's: In 1896, the Baldwin Theater was located on this corner. After a trip to Chicago and New York, when she joined the company of Augustin Daly, Isadora returned here to dance with the troupe in "A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Isadora was not to return to San Francisco for 21 years. She lived most of this time in Europe, and conducted her famous, liaisons with stage designer Gordon Craig, by whom she had a daughter, and sewing machine heir Paris Singer, who fathered her son. Both children were drowned in the Seine River in 1913, a tragedy from which Isadora never really recovered. She returned to New York at the beginning of World War I, and later toured South America.

Geary Theater, 415 Geary St.: In 1917, the Geary was called the Columbia Theater, and it was the scene of Isadora's return to San Francisco. The theater today is essentially the same as it was when Isadora performed there to enthusiastic crowds and assiduous press attention. During her San Francisco stay, Isadora became romantically involved with noted pianist Harold Bauer, and performed an all-Chopin program with him.

During this visit, Isadora stayed at the St. Francis Hotel, and it is on record that she took her mother to lunch at the Cliff House.

The 1917 visit was Isadora's last to San Francisco. She returned to Europe, and in 1921 went to Moscow, where she had been invited to start a school. There, she fell in love with the Russian poet Serge Essenin, 17 years her junior, and married him.

She brought Essenin with her on her last U.S. tour, but they were greeted with hostility and suspected of being Bolsheviks. Isadora left the country in disgust and never returned. She and Essenin later separated, and he committed suicide in 1925. Isadora spent her last years in France, and met a bizarre death when the fringe of her shawl caught in the wheel of an automobile she was sitting in and strangled her to death.

Isadora is still remembered both for her innovations in art and her insistence on freedom in life. In Isadora's centenary year, Mignon Garland's assertion is appropriate: "She was a monumental figure."

