

DANCE BIOGRAPHY NOTES OF MIGNON GARLAND

Mignon Garland began her dance studies at age seven, and continued her interest in dance throughout childhood and adolescence. During this period she had several teachers who were inspired by Isadora Duncan's approach to dance for children. She performed in Town Hall, and other concerts halls in the New York area, and as a young adult taught Duncan dancing to hundreds of children at several New England summer camps.

When a teenager In 1927, in response to a telephone call from her first dance teacher who had continued to guide Mignon's artistic development, Mignon went to the Guild Theater in New York to see a recital by Anna Duncan. After seeing Anna dance, she was deeply impressed by the revelation of the infinite possibilities of Isadora Duncan's dance vision, and she decided seriously to pursue its study.

After several years of intensive study of Isadora's legacy, faithfully and beautifully presented by Anna, in studio 61 at Carnegie Hall, Mignon was selected by Irma Duncan to perform a Duncan repertory program on an American tour with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. She also toured with Irma to Havana, Cuba, dancing in several recitals which included the post-revolutionary Russian dances of Isadora Duncan.

The Russian Isadora Duncan Dancers, during their American tour of 1928-29, saw Mignon dance at a private recital in New York. At its conclusion they enthusiastically invited Mignon to come to Moscow and work with them.

Mignon left for Moscow in early 1931 where she lived in the apartment of one of the group. She was associated with the Russian Isadora Duncan Dancers, attending their rehearsals and performing with them at the founding concert of the 20,000 seat Open Air Theater of the

Gorky Central Park of Culture and Rest, during the Summer of 1932. This was the very site that had been picked by Isadora ten years earlier for an outdoor amphitheater.

When Mignon returned to New York in the Spring of 1933 she was active in the formation of The New Duncan Dancers and served as the Dance Editor of the influential New Theater Magazine. Mignon left for Europe in 1935, returning to the United States in 1938.

Mignon, with Hortense Kooluris and Julia Levien, formed The Contemporary Duncan Dancers in 1942, and participated with the Duncan Dance Guild in a concert at the 92 Street YMHA in that year. She also performed at a Duncan Dance Concert at Carnegie Hall with the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leon Barzin, in 1944.

Mignon then concentrated on teaching children who would not otherwise have come in contact with the Duncan tradition. In addition to dances from the Duncan repertoire, her pupils performed to a musical setting of the poem "Down Freedom Road" by Langston Hughes. From 1947 to 1952 Mignon conducted a program of instruction for children, and gave demonstrations and performances at the Teachers Union Center in New York City

In 1952, Mignon, with other members of the original Irma Duncan Dancers, marked the 25th Anniversary Memorial of Isadora Duncan with a concert of her dances at the Carnegie Recital Hall in New York.

After Mignon moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1957, she taught Duncan dancing for a number of years under the auspices of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, producing children's dance recitals.

Persuaded by colleagues in the new Women's Movement, and encouraged by the a new generation interested in both the artistic and the social importance of Isadora, Mignon presented a full program of Isadora's

choreography at a weekend conference on Women in Transition at the University of California's Berkeley campus in 1971. Hortense Kooluris was guest artist with Mignon. For this recital Mignon composed an original composition, Dance Sequence From Women's History, to Schubert's Andante Impromptu. She was subsequently invited by the San Francisco Art Commission, through its Neighborhood Arts Program, to give a course in Duncan Dancing. This course was repeated three times by petition of students. The course culminated in a recital by the Neighborhood Arts Dancers in the Shakespeare Gardens in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. A renewed interest in Isadora's contribution to the dance was steadily growing.

Mignon established The San Francisco Duncan Dancers and opened a studio and office in San Francisco. She began an on-going program of instruction in Duncan dancing and incorporated The Isadora Duncan Heritage Society as a California non-profit corporation. Since the group's founding in 1973, The San Francisco Duncan Dancers have given over 50 performances in the San Francisco Bay area.

At this time Mignon initiated a project to place a commemorative plaque at the birthsite of Isadora at 501 Taylor Street, San Francisco. The plaque was unveiled on May 26, 1973 at a ceremony where Irma Duncan delivered an address and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers participated. Other principals in the event included San Francisco columnist Herb Caen, and Isadora's cousin, George Cabaniss. After a recital in the International Ballroom at 50 Oak Street, Irma invited Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers to Santa Barbara for a week-long workshop. Later that year Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers were invited by the Associated Students of the University of California to give a recital in the Pauley Ballroom at the Student Union.

The American Bicentenary of 1976 was marked by Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers with a recital given in honor of Isadora's great-great grandfather, William Duncan, who fought in the Revolutionary War. Isadora's centenary, 1977, saw Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers give a commemorative recital at the historic St. Francis Hotel Colonial Concert Hall. On the occasion of this centenary dance recital the Mayor of San Francisco, George Moscone, issued a Proclamation declaring May 26, 1977, "Isadora Duncan Centenary Day," Later that year, Mignon led a group of Duncan dancers to several countries of the Soviet Union in commemoration of Isadora's Russian years.

In 1977 and again in 1978 The San Francisco Duncan Dancers received grants from the City of San Francisco to help carry on its work. In 1978, the International Year of the Child, Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers staged a Duncan Dance Happening, with children performing, in Golden Gate Park. In 1980, Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers presented a recital, In Memoriam to Anna Duncan, at the Outdoor Pavilion of the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco.

One of the many distinguished people whom Mignon attracted to her activities was Florence Atherton Dickey, the first American pupil (1914) of the Isadora and Elizabeth Duncan School in Tarrytown, N.Y., and granddaughter of the California novelist Gertrude Atherton. Mrs. Dickey contributed her reminiscences and commentary on the work of The Isadora Duncan Heritage Society and introduced Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers at their Palo Alto Community Theater Recital in 1981.

In 1982 Mignon and The San Francisco Duncan Dancers were established in a spacious studio at California Hall, 625 Polk Street, San Francisco, their current quarters. There they gave frequent recitals, including one in honor of Rosalind DeMille, Professor Emeritus of Dance, of Smith College.

Also in 1982, Mignon was invited to Tokyo, Japan to give a solo recital, classes, workshops and lectures in the Yamada Dance Performance Center on the art of Isadora. Out of these activities a Tokyo branch of the Isadora Duncan Heritage Society was formed. It was headed by Mary Sano Chapman, a Japanese protege of Mignon, and a member of The San Francisco Duncan Dancers. In 1985, Mignon returned to Tokyo with Ann Cogley and Mary Sano Chapman to perform at the third annual Modern Dance Festival at Musashimo Cultural Center. Mignon and her two proteges then gave a full recital of Isadora's choreography at the Ichibankan Dance Theater in Tokyo. These activities were widely reported, with photographs, in the metropolitan Tokyo media. 1986 the Tokyo branch of The Isadora Duncan Heritage Society mounted a recital, directed by Mary Sano Chapman. International Women's Day was celebrated in the City Hall Rotunda in 1985 by the San Francisco Duncan Dancers. This performance was widely noted and photographed in the press.

In 1987 Mignon and the San Francisco Duncan Dancers were invited by The Society of Dance History Scholars, who were holding an international conference on Isadora Duncan at the University of California, Irvine, to give a performance of Isadora Duncan choreography. Mignon was selected for a panel on Isadora Duncan choreography, and directed the performance of eight dancers from The San Francisco Duncan Dancers,

In 1988 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors considered a proposal to rename a number of San Francisco streets in honor of San Francisco authors and artists. Mignon made a presentation supporting the renaming of the street adjacent to Isadora's birthsite on Taylor St., north of Geary St, as Isadora Duncan Lane. Several months later when the new street sign was unveiled, Mignon delivered a speech on the significance of Isadora's contribution to San Francisco and world cultural history at a ceremony marking the event.

The San Francisco Duncan Dancers 1989 recital was given in the spacious Vorpahl Art Gallery, and included many styles of Isadora's choreography. The program was attended by Isadora's biographer Fredrika Blair, and other writers and well-known figures from the Duncan world. For the past 18 years Mignon has conducted an ongoing program of instruction and performance in the Isadora Duncan Heritage. Many visitors from all over the world seek out the Isadora Duncan Heritage Society studio to view The San Francisco Duncan Dancers in many aspects of their devotion to Isadora Duncan's dance creations taught to them by Mignon Garland.

San Francisco, CA

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