



Isadora: A Sensational Life

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Isadora Duncan is considered by many to be the founder of modern dance. Her name is synonymous with originality, spontaneity, drama, and sensuality. Finally, here is a biography that does justice to the life of this unforgettable woman. Never before has Isadora Duncan been so thoroughly explored. Kurth recounts her sensational life -- her many loves, her passion for her art, her sensational performances, and her personal tragedies. Isadora reveals the dramatic story of this passionate artist, set against the sweeping backdrop of Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century.

Isadora: A Sensational Life Details

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Shaina says

I was never so relieved as when Isadora finally got her neck twisted like a chicken's at the very end. It was almost (ALMOST) more satisfying than when Anna Karenina was introduced to the train. I say almost only because Isadora was a real person who really got her neck snapped, and therefore I refrained from fully indulging my schadenfreude.

Book Riot Community says

Have you heard the story of how Isadora Duncan died? I thought it was urban legend, so when Kurth's biography of the woman who invented modern dance appeared, I had to read it to find out the truth. And the truth is even crazier than the story.

Duncan, in the early 1900s, when corsets were still all the rage and dance was ballet, period, burst onto the American and European stages. With her barley-there, Grecian-inspired flowy fabric dresses that allowed the body to breathe – and the watcher to enjoy the form – she transformed forever the way we think of dance. And, while she was at it, Duncan lived her life to the absolute fullest: having affairs with men and women, married and not, making waves with her stance on women's rights. She lived to dance, was constantly in debt, had absolutely no filter, and people loved her or completely hated her.

But back to the inglorious death. Duncan lived, like other cosmopolitan woman of her time, between the US and Europe. Years before her own death, as she was experiencing (yet another) career resurgence and basking in public adoration in Paris, she kissed her children goodbye for an outing with the nanny, and minutes later learned that the car they were driving in had plunged over the banks of the Seine, submerging and killing both children, and the nanny. But did that stop her from returning to the City of Lights? No! Still reveling with men and women of all ages, nationalities and professions, well into her elder stateswoman years, Duncan was flush with one more love affair. Dashing off into a convertible car, wearing her absolute favorite scarf – “two yards long, five feet wide...heavy crepe...the fringes on either end eighteen inches long...” – in this shawl Duncan felt magic. So she wrapped it round her shoulders, jumped in the racy, low, two-seater, and happily cried, “Goodbye my friends! I go to glory!” The car took off; the long red shawl got caught in the spokes of the wheel; Duncan's neck was broken and the formidable, glorious woman was gone.

Verdict: Buy, buy buy!

From Buy, Borrow, Bypass: Biographies of Women from the 1920s, Roaring by Alison Peters:
<http://bookriot.com/2014/12/08/buy-bo...>

Lucinda says

The sensational life of Isadora Duncan told with perfect clarity, as you admire one of the greatest dancers of her time.

Isadora was as beautiful dancing as she was a person, being one of the most remarkable individuals and talented dancers of her time, perhaps of all time. She was the matriarch and patron saint of creative self

expression, by inventing her own physical language to express the spirit that touched the soul with simple but beautiful movement. She was a pioneer in the dance world, being in possession of a name that is synonymous with originality and distinctiveness, a beholder of spontaneity and intrigue. Her tragic death in nineteen twenty seven came as a shock, as she was strangled by her own scarf during a joyride on the French Riviera; that some say was a dramatically fitting end to a remarkable life. This is an incredible biography of a magnificent, generous and gallant woman who was also sadly fated with a life that was full of tragedy (such as with the drowning of her two children). She was plagued by alcoholism and frowned upon at times with scorn, as she did not always act as she should, especially in one particular instance during an American tour in Boston where she expressed no reserve. This account of a most astounding woman and dancer is very detailed and which uncovers the mystery behind the passionate artist, giving the most accurate account of her life.

Complete with stunning photographs, complimented with a beautiful cover, this is a book to treasure. She brought ancient Greek dancing to life with her energy, skill and expressive dancing that was so full of energy and emotions, making one feel as if they were watching something of myth or legend right in front of their very eyes. It also delves into her personal life, loves and the Duncan school in Grunewald that was such a significant part of her life as she traveled between Greece and Berlin. When she then journeyed to America her story really comes alive, in those moments on stage that will always be remembered. Her constant exploring from France to Vienna and England kept a restless soul at peace, as she continued to raise a family and support her husband whilst retaining that deep seated love for dance. Her second school in Bellevue was a turning point in her career, as she takes on the role of a mothering teacher who guides the next generation forwards with love and the knowledge of her craft. Performances such as La Marseillaise spring to mind, as you think of this iconic figure within dance history, who was a pioneer that established the first foundation blocks.

Just exceptionally brilliant and unforgettable this fantastic biography is one that all dance lovers (both Greek, classical ballet and modern dance) lovers will cherish.

JulieT says

Inspiring in so many ways. Life lived large by someone who wasn't afraid to fly her freak flag.

Deirdre Kelly says

This bio of the American modern dance puioneer firmly establishes Issadora Duncan as one of the great pioneering women of the arts. She profoundly infoenced her time as can be called the mother of modernism, in general.

Ivana says

Great read for anyone interested in dance, ballet, women rights, feminism, history

Malcolm Frawley says

What has assisted the Isadora Duncan mythology to endure for 100 years is her refusal to have her dancing filmed. So we have to rely on the word of those who saw her in action. But there were a lot, & they said/wrote plenty, & the majority of it was glorious. Peter Kurth was able to compile his absolutely amazing biography of an absolutely unique artist largely due to the fact that he was able to draw on so much that was written, at the time, to, by, or about, her. Duncan's was an 'artistic' life with no, to my knowledge, parallel & nothing I can add to that will illustrate just how extraordinary it/she was. Which doesn't mean that she was someone I would care to spend any actual time with. Narcissistic, irresponsible, & capricious, she captivated/infuriated audiences around the world &, in spite of the huge amounts of money she often earned, usually lived her life at other people's expense. During a time when the suffragette movement was fighting for a woman's right to vote Duncan lived a profligate, promiscuous, life &, to a large extent, invented her own rules. She came from an eccentric, bohemian, family (no surprise) but raised the bar at an incredibly early life - she opened her first school of dance at age 16 - & is largely regarded as the 'mother' of modern dance. When she died, at 50, she was still dancing but her magic was on the wane. It might have been a blessing that she didn't last any longer because it's doubtful she could have existed if she was no longer able to practise her art. A life story like no other I have ever read. And there have been plenty. Highly recommended.

Josh Boardman says

It took me a while, but it's finally done! The other reviewers have said that it becomes difficult to read about halfway through, because it's like watching a train wreck in slow motion-- that's absolutely right. You fall in love with the woman at the start, and as she slowly bastardizes her beliefs, you just don't want to keep reading. But you do! And by the end, you're very sad that it's over.

To Kurth's credit, I did feel like I came out the other end of this book like a long journey. Although I wasn't a fan of his OVERDEPENDANCE on quotes, and then not attributed every quote in the text (as 50% of the text is made of quotes, it can be difficult...) and his notes section is horribly organized, he did a good job of staying transparent behind his object, and that can be difficult in a biography. Actually, this is the first biography I've gotten through in years. Hooray!

FORGOT TO MENTION THIS BEFORE: the reproductions of art and photographs in this book vary in quality to such a degree that I want to DIE. Sometimes it's like they took a 100x100 image from Google Images thumbnails and blew it up to full page. MADDENING.

Christine says

Why one would write a biography that makes such an amazing and exotic life boring is beyond me. Peter Kurth manages to do this with his dull writing, I felt like I was reading a text book. A really boring one.

Todd Stockslager says

I was sparked to read more about Isadora Duncan based on the mini-bio in John Dos Passos' U.S.A.: The

42nd Parallel / 1919 / The Big Money (Library of America).

Bizarre woman. Passable popular biography, but really strange woman.

Brandy says

story of dancer, Isadora Duncan

I need to stop making Isadora jokes; they really are in poor taste

Mary says

The definitive Isadora Duncan biography. What more to say? Well researched and well written. The second half is harder to get through, just because it's like watching a train wreck in extra-slow motion. Still, her life is a great subject and certainly deserves such detailed documentation.

Miriam says

it took me a long time to read this book... months and months. I started at the beginning, but couldn't get through, so I started in the middle, then got interested so started again from the beginning, to get the background on what I had read in the middle. For me, the time in history is interesting, the art is interesting, some of the names are familiar, and it's interesting to get another perspective on the times. Isadora comes across as a rather difficult and disagreeable person, so you're not necessarily drawn to love her, but the book was still somehow a compelling read.

Ann says

I gave up on this long ago. Sooooo boring

Paige says

Fantastic read. My fascination with Isadora continues...
