

The Natural Approach

Homeschooling and Isadora Duncan tradition come together.

BY EMILY MACEL

"I'm always rallying for less homework and more art," says **Lori Belllove**, artistic director of the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation. For the past several years, Belllove has put that mantra into motion with a group of dancers she fondly refers to as the Bellloveables (a play on Isadora Duncan's dancers, the Isadorables). Belllove's life's work has been to keep alive the spirit and free-flowing nature of the Isadora Duncan dance technique—which emphasizes the human form, improvisation and emotion—and these students are prime examples of her success.

The Bellloveables are homeschooled and their parents belong to the New York City Home Educators Alliance (NYCHEA). The relationship began when one of the now-Bellloveable mothers contacted Belllove in 2007 to inquire about starting a

Duncan class for homeschoolers. She and her daughter had seen Belllove's company perform and thought that the Duncan style and technique would resonate with families in the NYCHEA community.

"There's this wonderful symbiosis with this homeschooler community here in New York City where these young ladies are able to do more cultural activities than if they were going to school," Belllove says. "I think that when they come from such a background where the teaching style is filled with questions and explorations and possibility, it helps to bring the Isadora Duncan work back to life."

Last year, the Bellloveables premiered onstage along with Belllove's professional company at Judson Memorial Church. In April, the company hosted a gala fundraiser for training workshops for the Bellloveables at New York City Center. This summer they plan to perform at Dance Theater Workshop during the World Dance Alliance, as well as at the Alice Austen House on Staten Island.

Barbara Cohen's daughters Emma, 14, and Lucy, 11, are 2 of the 10 Bellloveables. The benefits that her

daughters get from training with Belllove versus other dance schools are twofold. "First is the essence of the Duncan style and technique. The natural movement doesn't take the child's body where it shouldn't be," Cohen says. The other difference is the way Belllove trains a dancer. "I see her deep trust in the girls to get where they need to be, each one at her own pace. The ages of the Bellloveables range from 9 to 16. That's a big range, developmentally," she says. "I love that Lori's teaching is so distant from a one-size-fits-all approach. I think this speaks to my homeschooling sensibility—the idea that every flower blossoms in its own time and rushing that unfolding is never a good or healthy idea."

Belllove finds that these students are incredibly receptive to the technique. "The homeschoolers are not filled with the same 'don'ts' that come with life in school," she says. "They're much more emotionally mature. They tend to be freer spirits. Their relation to the dance is one of pure joy." **DT**

Emily Macel is writing a book on Erick Hawkins. She lives in Washington, DC.

(L-R in the circle) Bellloveables Morgana Craggott, Rachel Hezlog, Emma Cohen, Samantha Jo Vicens, Glenda and Lucy Craggott. Photograph By: Mark Sadava