



# Lori Belilove Brings **ISADORA DUNCAN** to Life

By Joy Held

Photo: David Fullard

Spirit of Isadora, dancer Lori Belilove

*How and when did you discover dance?  
Briefly describe your training.*

As a young girl growing up in Berkeley, California I was certainly exposed to dance and all the arts. So, in this environment, I was taken to ballet class at age 5 and I thought it was very stupid. I remember dismissing myself early and waiting for my Mom to pick me

up outside where I played with bugs and flowers in the garden. By the time I was 11, I was interested in yoga and we had a college student living with us at the time who exposed me to both yoga and modern dance. We had lessons out on the lawn.

The big "ah-ha!" moment was when my whole family traveled to Europe for four months camping and hitting every country and every museum and church. From London to Greece we explored all the highlights as well as the off-track places because we were "car camping" in a Volkswagen bus.

In Athens we were told to look up my brother's piano teacher's dance teacher Mr. Vassos Kanellos. He met Isadora Duncan and her Duncan clan of a family when they came as a pilgrimage to Greece. Isadora taught him along with other young Greek boys. He had a lock of Isadora's hair in a frame with her picture. He asked me to come to Athens and study with him. I went home and immediately read Isadora's autobiography *My Life*. There was no Duncan dance available anywhere that I could find in the San Francisco Bay area. I was not thrilled with the modern dance classes I found, except for Anna Halprin's work, which was deeply imaginative. From high school I traveled to Greece to study with Mr. Kanellos.

I made my way home to Berkeley to discover that through an article about me, a woman, Mignon Garland, contacted my family saying she was a Duncan dancer and she would love to meet me—a young girl so interested in the work! I met her and began studying privately with her.

***Was there a particular moment when you knew that dance would be your career?***

About age 18, after I had explored and devoted many years to it, it was clear to me that I had the body and passionate determination to be a dancer. My mind was clear in that I saw a vision of myself performing, creating, and teaching. It all worked for me.

***Who was the single most important influence on your choice to become a dancer?***

Isadora Duncan.

***What is missing in the students you see coming to New York to pursue dance? What is their greatest strength?***

I think they are missing the Isadora experience which is the only way to describe it. There is lots of pressure

on the absolute technical precision. Now don't get me wrong, I love beautiful line and clean turns, but the artist has to be developed all together. If there is never any relief from the pressure to be technically perfect and on the count prescribed by the teacher, some dancers will get stuck there. I always teach a section of improvisation in my classes to keep that part alive in dancers.

The strength in modern dancers today is that they have access to high level teaching and creativity through the modern dancers pouring out of the colleges all over the country. They are actively pursuing choreographic dreams and pushing boundaries, sometimes to expressive and extraordinary levels and, well, other times to dismal experiments, but they are not afraid to try. That is a great and important strength and I do attribute it to the roots Isadora laid down in her manifesto on how to be a creative dancer!

***What was your contribution to the formation of the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation?***

I am the founder and artistic director. I started it when the directors of Isadora Duncan Centenary Dance Company & committee disbanded. I wanted to carry on the work for the future and I invited the "Duncan elders" to help me as advisors and coaches. That was in 1979. I felt there needed to be a center for the technique to be taught, for the repertory to be performed on an ongoing basis, and for there to be a forum for the creation of new works based on Duncan technique. To that point, many modern dancers, teachers and historians today do not know that Isadora left such a legacy of material. There are over 70 dances!

***Does anything in your life and career parallel that of Isadora Duncan's?***

You could say that I love and have loved whom I wanted to, when I wanted, and that I freely dance when and where I want to, but I see myself as a contemporary woman enjoying the freedoms that Isadora fought hard to have for herself. A few parallels between myself and Isadora are that besides being born and raised in the San Francisco Bay area, I had an early awakening and inspiration living in Greece. I started to teach children at an early age like Duncan and have a great passion for teaching. I have danced the same dances in many of the



Dance of the Furies, dancer Lori Bellove

Photo: David Fullard

same venues she performed, including the Urania Theatre in Budapest, where she had her first success.

***How does studying Duncan technique and life contribute to the development of today's dancers?***

Musicality is a big piece—just learning to be on the beat without killing it. In my Duncan classes you learn how to feel the impulses of the rhythms and to go with the musical flow. Secondly, I would say that the art of gesture is important, and using movement with clear intention. Many dancers today don't think about the way their palms face as being very important or meaningful. In Duncan, the palm facing is hugely expressive. Everything in the Duncan technique is deliberate. I have often said that learning Duncan dance is like learning the "art of spontaneity." It looks easy, natural, inviting and warm, yet there is a lot of artful technique and discipline in the art form.

***You have a new show called "The Every Woman Series: The Red Thread." Explain what it's about.***

The "Every Woman Series" is my exploration of what women feel, long for and struggle with, and it draws on universal themes in Isadora Duncan's dance movements put into my own voice. Using movement from Isadora and a variety of other sources, I seek to express the feeling of the contemporary woman and the universal soul of all us.

Root experiences of the female psyche have held a fascination for me for a long time. My mother was a Jungian psychologist trained in gestalt therapy, and one book that altered my life was Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Feeling the undercurrent, the common denominator of human experience, is what drew me to art and to dance. This new work, "The Every Woman Series: The Red Thread" is my perspective on the inner life and psyche of young girls, young women, teens, women, mothers, mature women and our elder wise women.

***What do you do to stay creative and fresh as an artist?***

I have to laugh—I have wondered this myself, and I think there really is no answer. I was born vivacious and wild and I love people, so they feed me. Other times, when I am reclusive, I pour myself into reading and studying art and literature. Museums are great. Taking walks is great. Taking risks and traveling on adventures is nourishing. I seek experiences in life that I hold onto in my inner imagination. I have a journal that I pour everything into. Some people call it my "worry book," but it works for me because it helps me let go of little hurts and problems. I love to look back and see how I have grown a little bit and have a better perspective later on. I bring this up because obstacles of all kinds hinder an artist, and we need to have a place to look at our concerns and work to unraveling them. It keeps me fresh.

***What is in your future as a dancer and a choreographer?***

I will continue to perform, especially solos and dances that I am suited for and I will probably create more works. I always seek the inspiration first. I may do the "Every Man Series" as that has been on my mind. I have a few projects that I would like to explore.

***What advice do you have for young dancers?***

Yes, experience Duncan dance! Come to it with curiosity and give your body, mind, spirit and heart a chance to feel how alive and contemporary it is!

***How can people contact you?***

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