

Comments from dance review Dottie Hayes on *Preludes: Duncan, Sand & Chopin*

To see the emotionally complex, exquisitely executed dance/theater/music work, "Preludes: Duncan, Sand and Chopin" is to be amazed at the way the legacy of modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan can be taken to a new and higher level.

Performed by the Word Dance Theater, a Washington D.C.-based dance troupe founded in 2000 by dancer Cynthia Word, "Preludes" was conceived by artistic director Word, who artfully combined all 24 of the short dances Duncan had choreographed and performed to Chopin's piano preludes. Most of these dances had not been performed since the 1940s.

Although Duncan was killed in 1927 at age 49, in a bizarre accident, her break from the European classical style of ballet adopted by America, still stands as a major milestone in the evolution of modern dance.

When "Preludes" was performed at the Piccolo-Spoleto International Arts Festival in Charleston, S.C. in spring of 2011, the three Word Theater dancers in *Preludes*: Jeanne Bresciani, who is not only a superb dancer, but also demonstrated through her facial expressions that she is an accomplished actress; the physically most compelling of them, Ingrid Zimmer, whose quicksilver floor work and masterful grace reflected her experiences dancing all over the world, and the beautiful Cynthia Word, whose powerful presence and control reminded one of the goddess Athena, all held the rapt attention of the audience.

Also, director Word made non-dance enthusiasts aware that even though Duncan broke the strict rules of classical ballet, shocking audiences by replacing toe shoes with barefeet and substituted loose, flowing gowns for tightly fitted tutus, that she had great respect for the classics.

Chopin's music provided her with a great deal of inspiration for her dances, as she transferred into her body the spirit of his music.

As the three dancers integrated themselves into the love story between Chopin and a prolific female French writer who adopted the pen name Georges Sand to gain access to publishers, each appeared as Duncan at various stages of her life, which she chose to spend dancing and teaching dance in Europe.

Playwright Mary Hall Surface wrote the script, based on Sand's letters to Chopin, and talented actress Maia DeSanti portrayed Sand. She performed spellbinding monologues describing the decade Sand lived with Chopin, and the sadness Sand felt when she learned she was not his Muse, or the main inspiration for his compositions.

Pianist Carlos Cesar Rodríguez, who impeccably performed Chopin's music on stage, shed an incandescent light on this emotionally complex, forward-moving interpretation, melding imaginative, heart-felt dancing with philosophically resonant writing and acting to demonstrate the incredible legacy of Isadora Duncan.

(Dottie Ashley has reviewed dance for South Carolina newspapers for 32 years and twice won fellowships to the American Dance Festival; was awarded a USIA fellowship to study techniques of the Vaganova method of ballet in Moscow and Tbilisi, Georgia and was selected as an exchange journalist to Cali, Colombia, S.A. for two month-long visits observing and reporting on South American arts and culture.

She lives and writes in Charleston, S.C.