

**DANCING WITH HELEN
MOLLER: HER OWN STATEMENT
OF HER PHILOSOPHY AND
PRACTICE AND TEACHING**

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Dancing with Helen Moller: her own statement of her philosophy and practice and teaching by
Curtis Dunham

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CURTIS DUNHAM

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MOLLER: HER OWN STATEMENT
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Dancing with Helen Moller

Her Own Statement of Her Philosophy and Practice
and Teaching Formed upon the Classic Greek
Model, and Adapted to Meet the
Aesthetic and Hygienic
Needs of To-Day

With forty-three full page Art Plates

Edited by
CURTIS DUNHAM

And with an Introduction by
IVAN NARODNY
Author of "The Dance," Department Editor of "The Art of Music"

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TO THE READER

An Invitation from the Author.

Throughout the text of this book I have used the impersonal pronoun, "we," in proper acknowledgment of the fact that the basic ideas expressed therein are already accepted by a large number of the healthiest, the happiest and the most contented inhabitants of this and other countries. They are of all ages, from six and seven years up to sixty and seventy. They are not all "Greek Dancers," by any means; yet, owing to the natural and wholesome lives they live, in common with us who dance with the Arcadians, doubtless some of them will feel the impulse to celebrate their hundredth birthday in that way.

It is possible that you are one of this constantly increasing multitude of the healthy, the happy and the contented; if not, you are cordially invited to join us; not necessarily in our dancing—although that is the best and most efficacious way—but as an active enemy of all that is false and ugly and a practicing advocate of whatever enters our lives that is true and beautiful.

Halaukoller —

The Temple,

New York,

New Years Day,

1918.



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Many of the photographs reproduced in this book were taken by the author herself. For the privilege of reproducing other fine examples of the photographer's art, she desires to express her grateful acknowledgments to Moody, to Maurice Goldberg, to Charles Albin and to Underwood and Underwood; also to Arnold Genthe for the plate on Page 36; and to Jeremiah Crowley for his admirable arrangement of the entire series of illustrative art plates.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book, "Dancing with Helen Moller," is a new message of beauty to modern civilization. Besides attempting to lay the foundation for a new movement of terpsichory, she appears as a priestess of an ancient yet neglected truth: the return to nature, spontaneity, simplicity, health, grace and happiness by means of dancing. In doing so she goes wisely back to the fundamental principles which are the bases of all folk-arts, particularly of the folk-dances, and the ancient Greek dances.

As she so eloquently expresses in her series of philosophical essays on the subject, her "dancing is Greek plus American adaptability and creativeness." We find that no Athenian festivals ever were celebrated without dancing. The Pythian, Marathon, Olympic and all other great national games opened and ended with dancing. The designs with which the gods used to adorn the shields of heroes represented the dances contrived by Daedalus for fair-haired Ariadne. Socrates danced with Aspasia and Aristides danced at a banquet given by Dionysius of Syracuse. Thus the Greeks danced always and everywhere. They danced in the temples, in the woods and in the fields. Every social or family event, birth, marriage, and death,

gave occasion for a dance. Theseus celebrated his victory over the Minotaur with dances. Apollo dictated choreographic laws through the mouths of his priestesses.

The best Greek dancers came from the Arcadians. The main aim of the Arcadian dancers was to contrive the most perfect plastic grace in the various poses of the human body, and in this, classic sculpture was their ideal. It is said that the divine sculpture of Greece was inspired by the high standard of national choreography. Dancing in Greece was performed by men and women alike. In some of these dances they wore a loose garment, keeping their arms and legs bare, in others they danced perfectly naked. Through dancing the Greeks developed such beautiful bodies that they disliked to hide their plastic lines with any garments, therefore they preferred to appear naked, and more so in the temples and theatres than in their homes or in society. The fact that Greek sculpture is mainly nude can be attributed not so much to any abstract art ideals as to the actual custom of the time.

Helen Moller's ideal in dancing has been the same that actuated Rodin in his immortal works when he said: "To produce good sculpture it is not necessary to copy the works of Greece; it is necessary first of all to regard the works of nature, and to see in those of the classics only the method by which they have interpreted nature." Helen Moller says: "I am by no means copying the dancing of Greece. I am only learning from the ancient Greek art to regard the essential laws of symmetry and rhythm, Space and Time in nature. The ideal of my art is the

simple, majestic image of nature in all its simplicity and grace. Not tricky acrobatics, spinning whirls and spectacular technique, but soft, spontaneous expressions of Mother Earth have inspired my dancing."

In her efforts to inspire universal love of dancing, Helen Moller follows the fundamentals of all the folk-dances. All folk-dances have their peculiar psychology which varies according to racial temperament, climate and other conditions. Races which are notable for quickness of intelligence display similar racial characteristics in their folk-dances. For instance, we see vivacity and love of orderly design in the French, pathos and pugnacity in the Irish, sentimental reflectiveness in the Germans, spasmodic vehemence in the Hungarians, the passion of the Slavs, etc. The vigorous races of Northern Europe in their damp and cold climate developed dancing as a special function of the legs. The Scandinavian folk-dances betray more heavy and massive movements, while those of Spain, Italy and France give an impression of romantic grace, coquettish agility and fire. The folk-dances of the Cossacks are usually violent and acrobatic, as is their life. Energy and dreaminess, fire or coolness and a multitude of other racial qualities assert themselves automatically in a folk-dance. In the Far East, in Japan, Java, China and India, dancing consists in movements of the hands and the fingers alone.

As with all other arts, thus with the art of dancing: we have wandered far away from the vigor of naturalness. We have neglected the subjective issues of spontaneity,