1931

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Recommended Citation
Hill, Madge (1931) "Dance Your Shyness Away...," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 11 : No. 2 , Article 9.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol11/iss2/9

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Dance Your Shyness Away...

By Madge Hill, P. E.

SINCE the dance is one of the oldest forms of art and responsible for much of the beauty that surrounds us today, it is only deserving of the greatest respect. It is not new, for it has always been a life force, a heritage common to all mankind. Primitive man danced his very life away. His stories of love, war, religion, nature and all those forces effecting a feeling of self were told through the dance. The body being the only known medium, rhythmical to all mankind. Primitive man danced which followed the dance in its form and part of painting, drama, questionable. It fluctuates from a place of importance to a more intellectual and even takes on a different form. Dance is an art.

With the advancement of civilization other fine arts were born—painting, drama, architecture and sculpture. The dance became less and less significant, and, afloat in a sense the mother of other fine arts, its perpetuation was questionable. Its fluctuation from a place of importance to a place of degradations corresponds to the trend of the times in intellectual advancement and decline. Within the last few years the dance has taken on a more intellectual aspect and has regained its place among the fine arts. The dance, in its various forms, now appears to qualify as an art, a social force, a physical activity and an educational factor.

With such an introduction it is unnecessary to state that an instinct, so inherent and so fundamental, is one which should be remembered. There is the dance in its elementary form—movement purely for movement's sake—that pleasant rhythmical sensation of movement most satisfying to an individual. It is enjoyed by a child as he runs and jumps in his play. After finding and developing these movements an individual becomes conscious of his own vitality as expressed by his body. It is directed into group dances. So-called folk dancing, including old country dances, square dances and clogging fall into this second stage in the development of the dance.

Today ballroom or social dancing provides the same outlet of rhythmical expression that the square dance did a few years ago. Since it is a socializing factor, instruction in ballroom dancing is offered in many schools at present. It is only another means of training individuals to meet the necessary obligations that make up life.

The last stage brings the dance to the truly artistic level where an individual is able to take movement, and with the direction of emotion and intelligence, give a composition to be compared only to a lovely bit of painting or music.

Just as there are different types of music, from the cheap jazz music to the highest classical compositions, there is in dancing, the common, vulgar performance as contrasted to the artistic production. Because of very few artists in the dancing field, many opinions of dancing are formed from the lower, cheaper type of entertainment. Dancing is condemned because of such performances. Therefore an intelligent study and appreciation of the dance as an art is thought to be essential in college curricula.

In the study of the dance as taught in all departments of physical education, there is much more to be gained by the student than just the appreciation of an art. Since the instrument used is the body it must be perfectly tuned in order to do its best work. It must be well balanced and poised. Its flexibility and agility to coordinate and relax are thoroughly tested, and good posture is fundamental.

Music and dancing are so closely allied that it is almost impossible to separate the two. Therefore a study of music—and only the best music—comes with the study of the dance. The various kinds of time, tempo, phrasing, pitch, accent, melody and emotional content of music are studied. With this knowledge, suitable movement is fitted into the composition and a form of the dance results. The instinct of rhythm is brought to life by this concentrated study of music. In some individuals this instinct is much more perfect because of more easily coordinated bodies, while in others it is less developed because of lack of experience in more complicated coordinations.

Since all life moves rhythmically from the setting of the sun to the beating of our hearts, it is an asset to be able to move easily and rhythmically whether on the dance floor or walking across the room.

The dance, in its highest form, is purely creative and offers a medium for any dream of beauty an individual may have. With this comes the expression of individual differences—and the development of personalities. The terms natural or interpretative are usually applied to the form of dancing taught in colleges and universities. The words educational or creative might also be used. No matter what word is used, the dance remains about the same. It is a dance with technical things based upon movements natural to the body. Even the most complex coordinations are based upon those fundamental, emotional movements only by the individual's body. It is a step away from the ballet dance—the older form which was formal and very limiting.