

SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021

Dance & the Archives: Contemporary Perspectives on Historic Dances

Meg Brooker, Middle Tennessee State University

Registration Cap: 295

Description of Workshop and Overview:

Experience Florence Fleming Noyes's "Dance of Freedom," as reconstructed from archival film and newspaper records by certified Noyes Rhythm teacher and legacy Isadora Duncan dancer Meg Brooker. Performed for women's suffrage leader Anna Howard Shaw's birthday in 1914, the dance depicts women's struggle for freedom, inviting participants to experience a danced journey from physical restraint to freedom of movement. This workshop utilizes archival dance resources to explore the role of dance in social and political advocacy as part of the women's suffrage movement and to generate conversations about the contemporary role of dance as a tool for advocacy.

In March 1913, dance artist Florence Fleming Noyes choreographed and performed in Hazel MacKaye's Suffrage Allegory, staged on the steps of the U.S. Treasury as the culmination of the historic women's march for voting rights. In February 1914, Noyes performed her "Dance of Freedom" for Anna Howard Shaw's birthday party at the Biltmore Hotel in New York. Newspapers narrated the journey of the dance, in which Noyes is wrapped in a large length of chiffon, struggling against the fabric to free herself, as a metaphor for women's fight for equity. The performance was filmed as part of the Pathé Weekly newsreel, and the Noyes School of Rhythm archive recently acquired a copy of the film.

Facilitated by a certified Noyes Rhythm teacher, this experiential workshop revisits Noyes's "Dance of Freedom" choreography, through the lenses of historic dance recreation and reconstruction, in order to explore the progressive impulses of these dancing suffragists, as well as their limits, which in 1913 manifested in a segregated march and perpetuated a legacy of race and class division in the movement for universal suffrage. This workshop invites dancers to learn an historic choreography, narrating a struggle from oppression to freedom, as a means to create kinesthetic, empathetic understanding of the embodied experience of oppression. Resource links will be made available to educators interested in sharing this work with their students. This work is significant to the field because it utilizes archival dance resources to explore the role of dance in social and political advocacy as part of the women's suffrage movement and to generate conversations about the contemporary role of dance as a tool for advocacy.

Educational resource link: <https://www.duncandancesouth.org/dance-of-freedom-project>
Dance Teacher Magazine article about the project: <https://www.dancemagazine.com/florence-noyes-suffrage-dance-2648442196.html>

Workshop Content:

This workshop will primarily consist of movement sessions. Participants will experience Noyes Rhythm technique exercises as a preparation for learning the historic dance reconstruction. Participants will also improvise in response to prompts and engage in reflective writing after their improvisations. Over the course of the three sessions, participants will learn a historic dance reconstructed from archival materials and will also make their own dance phrases using the theme of the historic dance. Participants will share their phrases with one another in breakout rooms, and create final dances incorporating the historical material and their newly choreographed movement.

Because this project models how to incorporate archival materials into creative process, the first session will include the introduction of historical context related to the archival resources sourced for the project, and will also address the following questions:

- What is universal suffrage? Who has access to the vote and who decides who has access? How are voting rights protected?

- What does the 19th amendment actually state?
- What choices did the National American Woman Suffrage Association leaders make in organizing the 1913 parade in Washington, DC? What are the consequences of those choices?
- What can dance teach us about complex historical events? What do we learn from exploring the works of historic activist performers? What do we experience embodying these historic works? How does our embodied experience enable us to analyze and critique these works?

Participants will create original phrase material in response to prompts and will teach each other their phrases in breakout rooms.

Project Resources:

<https://www.duncandancesouth.org/dance-of-freedom-project>

Space/ equipment requirements for participants:

Participants should have access to a computer with wifi and reasonable space for movement. Participants can adapt the movement to fit their spaces. Participants should be willing to turn on their cameras for the collaborative breakout sessions (participation in the collaborative section can be optional).

Participants are invited to work with a scarf or length of fabric as a prop for the historic choreography. Recommended length is 2.5 yards. (This prop is optional).

Schedule:

TIME—all times are in Eastern Time	SESSION
12:00-1:30pm ET	Session 1: Dancing for Suffrage: Introduction to Noyes Rhythm
1:30-2:00pm ET	Break
2:00-3:30pm ET	Session 2: Mining the Archives: Re-interpreting Noyes's "Dance of Freedom"
3:30-4:00pm ET	Break
4:00-5:30pm ET	Session 3: Moving a Contemporary Construction

Session 1: Dancing for Suffrage: Introduction to Noyes Rhythm—includes historical context and introduction to Noyes Rhythm, the movement practice developed by suffragist Florence Fleming Noyes.

Session 2: Mining the Archives: Re-interpreting Noyes's "Dance of Freedom"—includes learning an historic choreography supported by archival documents and dialogue about the choices involved in reconstructing and recreating historic works in a contemporary context.

Session 3: Moving a Contemporary Construction—includes movement composition in response to the themes in the historic dance and sharing in breakout rooms, with closing dialogue and discussion about what we can learn from embodying historic dance works.

Presenter Bio:

Meg Brooker, Associate Professor and Director of Dance, Middle Tennessee State University, stages and performs Isadora Duncan repertory and new choreography in the United States, Europe, and Russia. Meg has presented scholarship for Dance Studies Association, Society of Dance History Scholars, Congress on Research in Dance, National Dance Education Organization, and Women in Dance Leadership. Her choreography on MTSU dancers has twice been selected for American College Dance Association Regional Gala Concerts. A former member of Lori Belilove & Company, Meg earned an Advanced Studies Certificate from the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation, is a founder of the Isadora Duncan International Symposium, and directs Duncan Dance South. She also serves on the Dance Education in Practice Editorial Board, the Tennessee Association of Dance Board of Directors, and as Chair of Dance for the Hellenic Institute of Cultural Diplomacy-USA. In 2016, she received an NEH Preservation Assistance grant for her work with Noyes School of Rhythm Archive and her current scholarship frames Noyes Rhythm as an early 20th century somatic practice.
www.duncandancesouth.org