

[E-BOOK] Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942

# Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942

*Ellen Graff*

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## STEPPING LEFT



DANCE AND POLITICS IN NEW YORK CITY, 1928-1942

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**Ellen Graff : Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. When Communism was cool By Red Ree This book gives an interesting and vivid portrait of the left-wing dance scene in New York City in what was perhaps my grandparents' time. A confluence of all kinds of dancers, ranging from modern to agitprop, from fine art to mass street sensibility, from ballet to ethnic, existed in the same small area. They learned at each other's studios and performed in each others'

shows. There was an atmosphere of political idealism and perhaps insurrection, that permeated much of the dance scene as well as other art worlds. Many of the artists portrayed in this book were themselves Jewish immigrants, as were my grandparents (although mine weren't into dance at all). I recognized only a few names like Martha Graham... she had her own approach and yet also worked with many other artists of quite a different stripe. Written in a clear and readable style, this book appears to be very well-researched and sympathetic but not biased either politically or artistically. The descriptions of the very different aesthetic inspirations and the general creative approaches used by each of the dancers presented really made the descriptions come to life. Lots of archival photos, too. It was a window peeking into another world, one that I previously had no knowledge of.

*Stepping Left* simultaneously unveils the radical roots of modern dance and recalls the excitement and energy of New York City in the 1930s. Ellen Graff explores the relationship between the modern dance movement and leftist political activism in this period, describing the moment in American dance history when the revolutionary fervor of "dancing modern" was joined with the revolutionary vision promised by the Soviet Union. This account reveals the major contribution of Communist and left-wing politics to modern dance during its formative years in New York City. From Communist Party pageants to union hall performances to benefits for the Spanish Civil War, Graff documents the passionate involvement of American dancers in the political and social controversies that raged throughout the Depression era. Dancers formed collectives and experimented with collaborative methods of composition at the same time that they were marching in May Day parades, demonstrating for workers rights, and protesting the rise of fascism in Europe. Graff records the explosion of choreographic activity that accompanied this lively period when modern dance was trying to establish legitimacy and its own audience. *Stepping Left* restores a missing legacy to the history of American dance, a vibrant moment that was suppressed in the McCarthy era and almost lost to memory. Revisiting debates among writers and dancers about the place of political content and ethnicity in new dance forms, *Stepping Left* is a landmark work of dance history.

*Stepping Left* is the first extended study of the origins, development, influence, and legacy of the radical dance movement that emerged in the United States during the 1930s. Quite simply, this book will change how the history of American dance in that decade is written. Lynn Garafola, author of *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*