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**Review of *Reclaiming Charles Weidman (1901-1975): An American Dancer's Life and Legacy* By Jonette Lancos**

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*Reclaiming Charles Weidman (1901-1975): An American Dancer's Life and Legacy.* By Jonette Lancos. Foreword by Sondra Horton Fraleigh. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2007. vii + 554 pp. Photographs, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$149.95.

Through her extensive study, Jonette Lancos rectifies the historical neglect of modern dance pioneer and Nebraska native Charles Weidman. Perhaps overshadowed by the greater attention accorded his partner and collaborator Doris Humphrey, with whom Weidman established the Humphrey-Weidman Company and School, Weidman has not been the focus of a critical biography until now. Without denying the importance of Humphrey's influence, Lancos seeks to examine other influences on Weidman's work and to explore his individual achievements.

Lancos begins with an overview of Weidman's career, framed by excerpts from his essay written as a ninth-grader in Lincoln, Nebraska. Then Weidman's family history is documented, from his ancestors' background to his parents' arrival, meeting, and marriage in Lincoln. Weidman's family alternated between life there and the Panama Canal Zone, where his father was appointed fire chief. Thorough

examination is applied to the vaudeville performances Weidman attended (including that of future mentor Ruth St. Denis), as well as his own local performances in opera and dance. Lanco's devotes two chapters to the time Weidman spent studying, touring, and teaching with the Denishawn company, during which modern dance legend Martha Graham was also a member. The longest chapter documents Weidman's collaboration with Doris Humphrey both as dancer and business partner, including their break from Denishawn, establishing their company and school, choreographing for Broadway and the Federal Theatre Project, as well as their eventual parting at Humphrey's retirement.

Central to Lanco's study is the chapter "Shaping a Movement Style and Technique," in which she attempts to document a distinct aesthetic for Weidman differentiated from contemporaries like Graham and Humphrey. While the descriptions of techniques and exercises are illuminating, it is difficult to imagine the particulars from written description, or to fully appreciate the pantomimic techniques and humor in performance for which Weidman was known. Fortunately, Lanco includes an appendix with line drawings of Weidman exercises and movements, which aid readers in imagining what is described, as well as referring them to several performances on videotape.

Lanco devotes considerable attention to Weidman's most famous works, including those influenced by his years in Nebraska: the autobiographical pieces *And Daddy Was a Fireman* and *On My Mother's Side; A House Divided* (a meditation on the legacy of Weidman's hometown namesake Abraham Lincoln); and *Lynchtown*, inspired by his witnessing a lynching in Nebraska. The remainder of the study chronicles Weidman's solo work as a choreographer and dancer, including Broadway musicals and opera.

Lanco lavishes much-needed attention on Weidman's lengthy and varied career, and the final chapter, "Legacy and Witnesses," includes several firsthand accounts from Weidman's artistic collaborators. Abundant photographs

and appendixes help document the impact of this dance pioneer and Nebraska native.

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