

Katharina Rathaus, “Charleston: Every Age Has the Dance It Deserves” (October 1926)

Abstract

The magazine *Uhu* was published monthly by the Berlin publishing house Ullstein-Verlag since 1924 and was one of the leading magazines of the Weimar Republic in terms of both content and design. This article from the October 1926 issue describes the Charleston, a dance originating in the United States, which had African American roots and could be danced alone or as a couple. After it had conquered the nightclubs and dance halls of the U.S., it also became popular in European cities in 1925 thanks to Josephine Baker. While the Charleston was initially rejected by many dance teachers and their associations as indecent and provocative, it was soon to fill dance classes.

Source

Charleston: Every Age Has the Dance It Deserves

The waltz is dead—and all attempts to resuscitate it are failing and destined to fail. For the times have changed and with them, like a natural necessity, so must the dances. Today, when a new car rolls out of Ford’s factory every minute, when “Valencia” and the latest hits are played simultaneously in major cities and the smallest provincial nests, when radio makes it possible for us and the deepest forest dwellers to check out simultaneously the applause earned by the closing Charleston in the Savoy Hotel in London, in Berlin’s pace-setting Dance Palace, or in Paris—today the movement and rhythm of dance is different than it was in the cozy times of the blessed Strauss. They are creatures of the new mobility of life, of its whipped-up and racing tempo! They are full of the new spirit, and the new should not be judged, good or bad, too quickly! The notion of the “good old times” is marked by a fear of the new, and skepticism over the new dances usually goes along with an inability to dance them. And as the “new” is always the slogan of the young, so does the new generation fasten its excited grip on the new dances. It senses that the empty bowls of the old Europe will offer no new nourishment for the blood, that the burned-out temperament of the European centers of culture can convey to the body no unsuspected, electrifying rhythm. The mechanization and democratization of life force upon its members new and other movements. Instead of dancing dances in a strolling gait with the spirit of a bygone era, the younger generation takes its inspiration from the original motions of primitive peoples, from an unaffected return to the rhythmic, musical experiences of naïve souls. If such borrowed steps, perhaps movement fragments of savage peoples, end up melted together with the remnants of Western culture, tempered in the ovens of modern civilization, if they find their final form in the molds of a talented dancer’s sense of style, to be cooled finally into social dances at parties and balls by the conventions of our democratic-bourgeois milieu—who would wonder then that hearts and legs fly, race to them, dance in exultation! For dance speaks to the blood and to the beat of the heart, not to reason! The associations of international dance teachers persist in their yearly efforts, in vain, “to invent” new dances. All “invented” dances are still-born children. They live a few fleeting days and hours. All the dance teachers in the world are incapable of forcing their artificial products on the dancing crowds, which instinctively defend themselves against the rape of their movement by affectation. On the contrary, the new, original dance; Terpsichore’s modern face, made-up, powdered, and painted according to the current dictate of fashion; bobbed hair in the latest cut; crêpe de Chine streamers just to the knee—none of this needs advertising. This dance gets its own recruits, makes its own way, discharges itself (with occasional farcical misunderstandings) amid the thunder of a jazz band like a storm! It cleanses tradition of the dust of decades, inflames blasé dance fanatics anew, shows all those excited by dance the rhythm of their life,

their feelings and thoughts. It answers to the name Charleston.

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