

# Maud Allan: 'The Salome Dancer'

By Margo Miller  
GLOBE STAFF

Her "mama's boy" brother was hanged for the murder of two young women he killed in the belfry of the family church. The scandal was to dog her for the rest of her life but, also, perhaps, to form her art. A Canadian raised in San Francisco, she was one of the pioneers of modern dance. Even more than Isadora Duncan or Loie Fuller or Ruth St Denis, she was fodder for the tabloids. Only Maud Allan was the "Salome Dancer."

Usually the severed head of John the Baptist was a stage prop and Allan kissed papier mache lips. One evening, to avenge one of her brother's victims, a Hungarian baron made a cruel substitution, a head fresh from the morgue. As Salome, she wore a costume that would make Madonna look overdressed. Lest her performance in India compromise the "prestige of white women," the British viceroy considered banning "Salome." Instead, Allan danced her classical music program, interpreting Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" and Chopin's Marche funebre and Grieg's "Peer Gynt" Suite. "I believe it was appreciated by the Europeans," wrote a Bengali critic, "but we Indians had no taste for it."

Allan's US debut came in January 1910 at Boston's Symphony Hall. American critics were also puzzled: was she a concert artist or a vaudeville entertainer?

The life and times of Maud Allan (1873-1956) are vividly conveyed in "The Salome Dancer," by her most recent biographer, Felix Cherniavsky. His father Mischel was the cellist in the Cherniavsky Trio with whom Allan toured the world. For a while, the Cherniavskys feared Allan would make off with handsome Leo, the trio's violinist. In a letter home, the tour manager unburdened himself about Allan: "She has innocent but dangerous blue eyes, like a child's, but she is mean and selfish, a grab all and give nothing, a harlot at heart and a humbug because she is always posing as the paragon of virtue." Uncharitable, but not inaccurate, Felix Cherniavsky writes. Even in black and white photos, those eyes

## A video collage of Maud Allan

There is no extant film of Allan dancing but Cherniavsky has put together a six-minute video of still photos called "Did She Dance?" that augments the illustrations in his biography. Published in Canada by McClelland & Stewart in 1991, "The Salome Dancer" awaits an American publisher but can be ordered from Firefly Books, 250 Sparks Ave., Willowdale, Ontario, Canada M2H 2S4. To order the video, as well as the electronic publication containing Cherniavsky's documentation write the Dance Collective Danse, 145 George St., Toronto, Canada M5A 2M6.

like him to engage Miss Allan at the Palace Theater so that the English public may enjoy her performance as much as we have."

Butt did and the public did. Maud Allan played the Palace, the class act headlining a bill of jugglers, performing dogs, the comedian "who made the Shah laugh," and a black-face act called Belle Davis and Her Southern Piccaninnies. Allan danced "The Vision of Salome" immediately after The Bioscope, a sort of newsreel. The movies were to kill vaudeville, and television to dent the movies. Had Allan been the "Salome Dancer" of the 1960s, she would have been launched on the Ed Sullivan Show.

How shocking was "The Vision of Salome"? All things considered, a more daring act than the performance artist who smears herself with chocolate to make a political statement or the practitioner of mixed media who suspends the crucified Jesus in urine. Certainly an act of more imagination. Allan was not quite nude. Acts like hers invited the audience's imagination to conspire. Acts like hers humbly conspired with the arts of music and theater magic. Unlike most dancers, she was genuinely musical. As a young woman she had hopes for a concert career as a

# 'Street Fighter

## VIDEO

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Capcom. "It's head-to-head competition, it's fast-paced, and people like that. What makes it so great is that there are over 30 fighting and defense techniques to master."

Like thousands of other Street Fighter II fans, Fonseca and his friends hang out in the afternoons, play the game and have a good time.

"To me, it is an unusual game. The fighting moves are challenging and each character is different," said Fonseca, sporting a baseball cap, a Walkman and a T-shirt. "And you can also compete with other kids in the arcades."

The flashy "Street Fighter II" game became a phenomenon after Capcom USA Inc. released it in February 1991. It was later named "Arcade Game of the Year" by the Amusement and Music Operators Association.

Riding the popularity wave, Capcom then released "Street Fighter II Champion Edition" in April. Since then, the company has sold more than 20,000 arcade games nationwide - the average Top 10 video game rarely sells more than 3,000 units. Street Fighter II was also featured on the covers of six game players' magazines over the past four months.

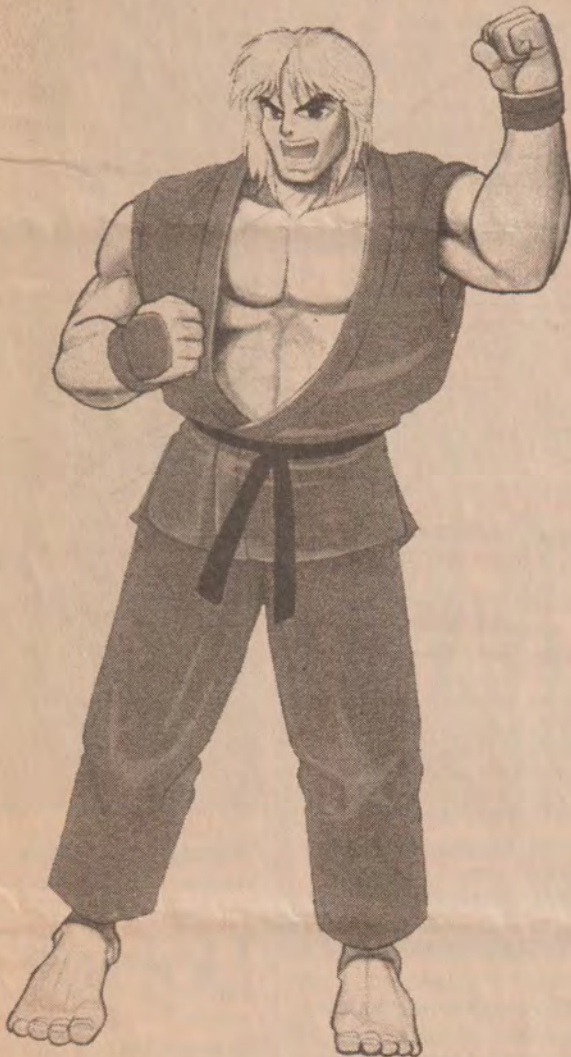
The Super Nintendo Entertainment System version of the game recently hit Boston's store shelves. In Japan, where the game is more popular than it is here, more than 1 million units have been sold.

"When virtually all of our industry critics concluded that the Street Fighter II game series would rival the popularity and success of Pac-Man, we knew we were not only releasing a megahit, but initiating a new entertainment phenomenon," said Joe Morici, Capcom senior vice president. "The home version of Street Fighter II will have a dramatic impact on the market."

Boston's video arcades and theaters that carry the game have been crowded with teen-agers wearing backward baseball caps and squinting into the glare of the screen.

Street Fighter II features 12 characters, including Honda the sumo wrestler, Dhalsim the yoga master and Blanka the beast. Each character has his or her own

# 'Street Fighter II' wants to be the next Pac-Man



Each "Street Fighter" character has 24 fighting styles.

strengths, weaknesses and 24 fighting styles. Players will eventually have to master special moves like the "Sonic Boom," "Yoga Fire" or "Dragon Punch" to defeat certain opponents.

Some fans, like Fonseca, have learned about 30 of the moves. But it takes patience and time, they said.

"It took me about a year to get all the moves down," Fonseca said. "But ... there was never a boring moment."

Because only two players can compete at a time, it is not unusual to see dozens of kids challenging each other. Players must defeat each opponent before facing the next one,

**'To me, it is an unusual game. The fighting moves are challenging and each character is different. And you can also compete with other kids in the arcades.'**

IGNACIO FONSECA  
*'Street Fighter II' player*

which is no easy feat.

At the Game Room, Dan Li, a 15-year-old self-crowned video-game expert, was earnestly defending his character from losing. Gripping the joystick, his hands moved rapidly to deliver kicks and blows to his opponent.

Li, who attends Boston Latin Academy, said he has been interested in video games since he was very young and now spends about two hours playing the game with his friends.

"This is much better and more challenging than other video games," he said. "You can fight each other and you have to master the special moves. It is very popular among my friends at school."

Maybe so. But one concern for parents may be the game's violent battles, though both Capcom and Nintendo representatives are quick to say that Street Fighter II is no more violent than other action-adventure video games.

"It's not that bad or bloody," Goddard said. "This is just competition, and it is fun. The violence isn't what draws people. There are more violent games out there."

If its current popularity is any indication, Street Fighter II will be around for a long time. For now, Fonseca and his friends have set their sights on buying the home video version of "Street Fighter II." It costs about \$75.

"I don't see anyone getting bored with it," said Fonseca. "You can play all day, and as far as I know the craze hasn't died out yet."

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do look blue and dangerous.

Even if there were film showing Allan in performance, it would reveal little about how she danced, or her effect on the public. She had few students, left no school. "She simply alchemized a piece of music for you," a London critic wrote of her visualization of Chopin's Valse in A minor. For our part, we can't go back to that innocent age. You went on the stage at considerable risk to your reputation. Here is Maud's mother, Isabella Durrant, warning Maud, still a piano student in Berlin, away from the primrose path: "Do not keep late nights if you value your looks. Late suppers in ill-smelling, badly ventilated restaurants with wines will sooner or later give one a dissipated look and manner, which in a measure will court a familiarity that at other times one would not permit."

From restaurant to stage was but a step. Dance was, well, so physical that who could tell the dancer from the dance? Performing to Chopin wouldn't preserve Maud's purity. "A dance is a dance, and sooner or later," a family friend thundered, "it will be given in the Variety Halls. You have only to look at that girl Fuller's dance. It is given in the ten-cent show as also in the free beer dives by painted-up beer handlers. Your daughter would not want her name sounded as the Fuller's when mentioning the dance."

The artiest of art dancers, Loie Fuller did not dance so much as waft webs of silk to music. She was generous to other dancers, but Allan was to find this generosity undermined by the lesbian circle around Fuller. Isadora Duncan also claimed to help the younger Allan. But it was a king, England's Edward VII, who really launched the "Salome Dancer." She was the after-dinner entertainment, provided by a society hostess at Marianbad. Allan opened with some Rubinstein waltzes in Greek costume. The king grew restless. There was a brief intermission, a change of costume. "Salome's heavily jeweled Oriental dress," wrote one who was there, "seemed to concentrate around the wrists and ankles, for there seemed to be nothing much anywhere else." Presented afterward to the king, Allan recalled his asking: "Why have we not had the pleasure of seeing you dance in London?" Edward then turned to an equerry. "Please write to Alfred Butt and say we would very much

praise, and musicians on the order of Busoni (a sometime lover) and Artur Rubinstein testified to her musicality. She made you feel the music change from major to minor, one critic marveled. Where she wasn't innocent was in the choice of Salome as subject matter.

Most of Christian Europe and America still felt it was blasphemy to stage most things in the Bible. As head of the Church of England, Edward VII may have been taking his chances on Allan but he also, to his credit, had "no wish to pose as a protector of morals." Decadence was fashionable; people worked hard to shock. Salome tempted many, including Loie Fuller in 1895, and Max Reinhardt staged Oscar Wilde's perfumed verse play in 1904 in Germany. Allan, says Cherniavsky, "made Salome a mystifying mixture of the erotic and the exotic, artfully shrouded in a veil of Edwardian discretion and good taste." Thus packaged, marketed if you will, Allan dared do her Salome in 1906. Three years later, she had the satisfaction of smacking Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's lover, across the face with her fan when he exclaimed "But your brother was a murderer!"

Whether the Biblical Salome's intimacies with John the Baptist have anything really to do with Maud Allan's coping with the murder conviction and hanging of her brother is speculation. She did not mind the public making the connection: It was good for the box office. Theo went bravely to his death, having made a career out of his innocence. Maud Allan would not have gone on stage without this same flair for making her audiences willingly suspend their powers of disbelief.

She had her critics. "Fraud Allan," some said. But when life was good it was very, very good. In London, she mingled in polite society and lived in Regent's Park. She saw the world.

She added to the gaiety of nations: Berliners one week in 1906 could choose among the Salome Dancer or Artur Schnable or Will Rogers *Lassowerfer*. Her final years were sad and sour. Her only contact with another famous modern dancer, Ruth St. Denis, seems to be war work in an aircraft factory. "Miss Ruth" was a riveter, Salome did drafting. Money was short. She took odd jobs. One was teaching deportment to starlet Jane Wyman, Ronald Reagan's first wife.

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