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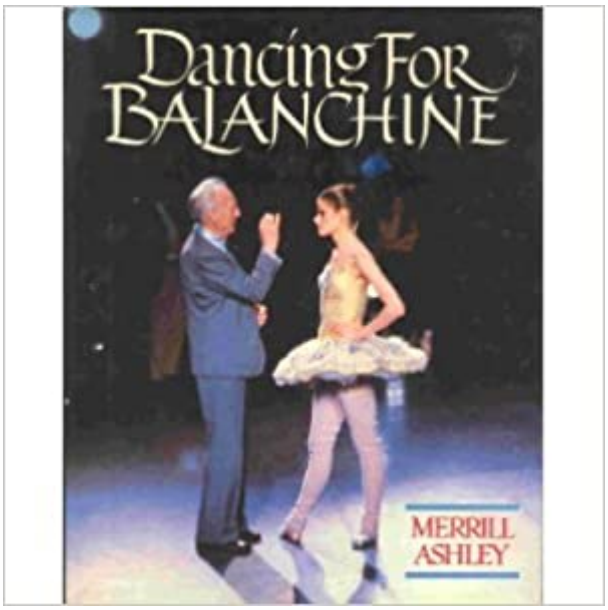

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Synopsis

Dancing for Balanchine [Nov 16, 1984] Merrill Ashley; Clement Crisp and Larry Kaplan ... 0525242805

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Customer Reviews

Dancing for Balanchine [Nov 16, 1984] Merrill Ashley; Clement Crisp and Larry Kaplan ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| 0525242805

Merrill shared her feelings and thoughts along the way as she pursued her ballet career...she was very humble. Excellent insight into the ballet world and technique of Balanchine! I was a dancer and found it very interesting as to how steps are done the Balanchine way. One of the best biographies of a dancer I have ever read - and I have read a lot of them!

This book is very technical. I wish I had read it when I was dancing.

A very enjoyable read by a great ballerina. Having recently met Ms. Ashley, it was fascinating to read about her experiences and her life.

This is an interesting book about Merrill's experience attending the SAB, then getting accepting as a member of the Company at age 16. It shows the incredibly hard work this young woman did, progressing through the ranks of the Corps, to soloist, then Principal Dancer. It was not an easy road. Merrill admits she was not very strong and had weak technique. She worked extremely hard to

increase her strength and attended Balanchine's classes religiously so she could improve her technique and understand what Mr. B wanted from his dancers. It was a grueling schedule, but she was determined to reshape herself into a Balanchine ballerina. Many tried and gave up, because they did not have the talent or drive or desire. Merrill was a quiet, determined dancer who steadily improved; she did not possess a flashy, dramatic diva personality like some of her contemporaries. With her, slow and steady won her high praise from Mr. B and from dance critics alike. This book tells of her journey from student to principal dancer. If you are looking for a gossipy book, this is not it. But if you are interested in how one young woman made it through the ranks of the NYCB, you are in for a real treat. You will see how Mr. B worked and why he did things a certain way. Others have complained about Merrill including technical information about certain ballet steps in the book. She does, but I find that of interest to anybody who dances, no matter what style. She explains some of the principles and technique behind certain basic ballet steps. I find I could glean some information that helped me with my line dancing, tap dancing and even ballroom dancing. These sections are only about 20% of the book--the rest of it is her autobiography and experiences with Mr. B. If you love ballet or are interested in George Balanchine and his ballerinas, this is a valuable testimony of what it was like to dance for Mr. B.

This is a fascinating account of Merrill Ashley's development as a dancer and her career with the NYCB, starting with her acceptance at the School of American Ballet. Clearly, her chief motive in writing the book was to emphasize the importance of perpetuating Balanchine's teaching of classical ballet technique, something she has since made a mission of. I was just a little sorry that more conventionally autobiographical material was not included, but I understand the decision to focus the book on "dancing for Balanchine," as a way of preserving his legacy. I really liked the stop-action photo sequences showing the details of technique in some of the most basic elements of classical ballet. I also appreciate the honest look at what it takes to fully commit to a dance career. On a personal note, I was in ballet classes with Linda Merrill (as I knew her) during the academic year she spent in Schenectady studying with Phyllis Marmein before making her permanent move to NYC. I didn't know her well, as she was so reserved, and as I now realize, not at all happy to be stuck in Schenectady. We girls didn't know at the time that she had already been accepted into SAB; we thought she was preparing to audition. At any rate, her talent was clear. She was already more technically accomplished than any other student I had taken classes with. (I'll always remember her solo as the fairy godmother in our end-of-the-year production of Cinderella, when she changed me from a mouse to a horse!) I've always followed her career, and was not in

the least surprised to see her emerge over the years as one of the most technically brilliant dancers in the world.

I had the privilege of seeing Merrill Ashley dance the Sugarplum Fairy in 1984. It was my first time at a ballet (age 21) and I was mesmerized by the perfection of her performance. I became an avid fan and read and enjoyed this book many years ago. It does have technical information and photos about ballet performance, but also provides a view into what it was like to study ballet at NYCB at that time and work one's way up through the ranks to become a principal dancer. For those of you looking for lots of juicy gossip about the dancers, this is not your book. But if you want a well-written book that will give you insight into the life and artistic process of a NYCB dancer, this book is perfect. I would especially recommend it to anyone who is seriously studying ballet.

I did not expect this book to be basically a textbook about learning to dance, so I'm disappointed that it didn't say more about actually working with Balanchine.

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