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Once A Dancer...An Autobiography



Synopsis

One of George Balanchine's greatest ballerinas, who was a principal dancer for more than twenty years with the New York City Ballet, talks about her childhood, dance career, marriage, and constant quest for emotional and physical stability.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This unusual, fascinating, and at times almost surreal autobiography chronicles the life of Allegra Kent, one of the most famous--and notorious--of Balanchine's prima ballerinas. The most blatantly erotic of Balanchine ballets were written for her pliant and chilly dance method. This book has it all: art, dance, infidelity, sexual intrigue, histrionics, eccentric outbursts, nose jobs, philosophy, and Krishnamurti. Entirely entertaining and intriguing for both dance enthusiasts and those who don't know a pliÃ© from a jetÃ©.

The dancing of ballerina Kent has been described as complex, even "demonic." In this memoir, Kent explains the tensions and conflicts behind her legendary performances with Balanchine's New York City Ballet. Kent, born in 1937, joined the company at age 15 and quickly became one of the favorites of "Mr. B," who choreographed several dances for her, including "The Unanswered Question" (from *Ivesiana*). But Kent soon began a strange, career-long pattern of successes followed by self-imposed exiles from dance. The reasons behind her disappearances were usually bizarre: a botched plastic surgery undertaken despite her Christian Science beliefs; a disastrous

marriage to photographer Bert Stern, promoted by Kent's mother to thwart any sexual involvement between Kent and Mr. B.; a willful decision to have three babies at the peak of her dancing fame; periods of overeating and weight gain that led Kent to discover water wings and to write Allegra Kent's Water Beauty Book. Although Kent's self-deprecating tone never matches the poetry of her dance, her autobiography offers wonderful sketches of her contemporaries-dancer Edward Villella, costumer Mme. Karinska and artist Joseph Cornwell, among many. It also grants a poignant look at the later years of a once-great ballerina, especially her need for income ("If you are calling to give me a job, I accept it"), her search for love through the personals ("Lyrically Limber Lollapalooza"... hopes to meet a man") and, finally, her moving appreciation of what she once had: "In real life, I was a sleepwalker-dance my only light." Photos. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Extremely well written - full of quirky insights and off the wall interactions. A great study of art, relationships, and culture. I was there with her in Paris during the attempted reconciliation with Bert. Memorable as is everything about this unusual book. Brava!!

excellent product. came in perfect condition and quickly too! This was a GREAT book! It was hard to put it down. So glad I made the choice to get it.

Allegra Kent was by many accounts the most gifted of all dancers anywhere. She danced for the greatest of all choreographers anywhere at any time, George Balanchine, the progenitor of the NYC Ballet, who created works for her that have assumed almost mythic proportions, Seven Deadly Sins to name just one. At a startlingly young age and still virginal, Ms Kent married the most influential photographer and of his time, Bert Stern, a notorious womanizer. The marriage prompted a sharp and generally negative turn in Ms Kent's life and career. Ms Kent tells her tale with candor, rapier wit, and intelligence. Any one interested in the worlds of dance, photography, and grasping the significance of making wrong life choices will especially value this volume. All in all, it makes the film Black Swan feel like a comic book.

wonderful book. seem so sad how her later life was for so very long. would love to meet her. what a devine dancer

Fantastic book!

Interesting account of an unusual life. Allegra Kent is an interesting and talented person. But to me she seemed to be an unhappy person, for no good reason.

If possible I would rate this book 3 stars and a half. One could say there are 2 main parts in this autobiography : part 1 : domineering mother leading to plastic surgery, bad marriage, eating disorders... part 2 : dating and relationship problems..... The Balanchine dance world is well detailed and it's interesting to have Allegra's point of view of the great choreographer when compared to what dancers like Gelsey Kirkland can hold. Again one can question the relation between being a great artist (which undoubtedly Allegra Kent is) and the emotional and physical imbalance these artists seem to display. A Kent's look on the world always holds some poetry and artistic blend.

The author is not afraid to expose her wacky side. That said, this is a serious, in-depth look at the strenuous life of a ballerina. It is not one of those boring and-then-this-happened-and-then-that-happened kind of books. Kent carefully analyzes her feelings about her parents, about dance, about her children and about the men in her life, especially Balanchine. Sometimes a bit difficult to follow, but overall a very interesting and informative read.

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