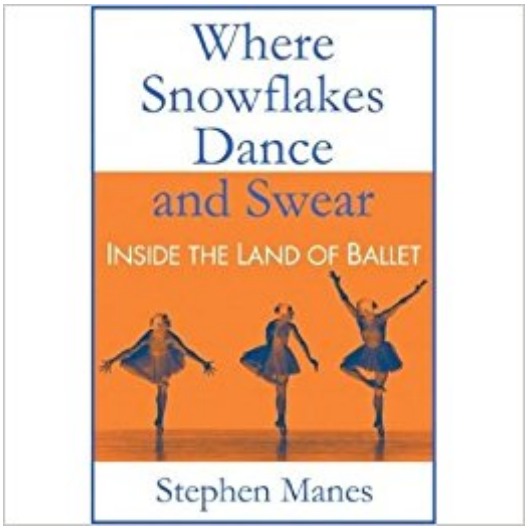
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Where Snowflakes Dance And Swear: Inside The Land Of Ballet



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Synopsis

The internationally acclaimed book that takes you behind the scenes to reveal how ballet really happens:In a scuffed-up studio, a veteran dancer transmits the magic of an eighty-year-old ballet to a performer barely past drinking age. In a converted barn, an indomitable teacher creates ballerinas as she has for more than half a century. In a monastic mirrored room, dancers from as near as New Jersey and as far as Mongolia learn works as old as the nineteenth century and as new as this morning. Snowflakes zooms in on an intimate view of one full season in the life of one of America's top ballet companies and schools: Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet. But it also tracks the Land of Ballet to venues as celebrated as New York and Monte Carlo and as seemingly ordinary as Bellingham, Washington and small-town Pennsylvania. Never before has a book taken readers backstage for such a wide-ranging view of the ballet world from the wildly diverse perspectives of dancers, choreographers, stagers, teachers, conductors, musicians, rehearsal pianists, lighting directors, costumers, stage managers, scenic artists, marketers, fundraisers, students, and even pointe shoe fitters--often in their own remarkably candid words. The book follows characters as colorful as they are talented. Versatile dancers from around the globe team up with novice choreographers and those as renowned as Susan Stroman, Christopher Wheeldon, and Twyla Tharp to create art on deadline. At the book's center is Peter Boal, a former New York City Ballet star in his third year as PNB's artistic director, as he manages conflicting constituencies with charm, tact, rationality and diplomacy. Readers look over Boal's shoulder as he makes tough decisions about programming, casting, scheduling and budgeting that eventually lead the calm, low-key leader to declare that in his job, "You have to be willing to be hated." Snowflakes shows how ballet is made, funded, and sold. It escorts you front and center to the kick zone of studio rehearsals. It takes you to the costume shop where elegant tutus and gowns are created from scratch. It brings you backstage to see sets and lighting come alive while stagehands get lovingly snarky and obscene on their headsets. It sits you down in meetings where budgets get slashed and dreams get funded--and axed. It shows you the inner workings of Nutcracker, from kids' charming auditions to no-nonsense marketing meetings, from snow bags in the flies to dancing snowflakes who curse salty flurries that land on their tongues. It follows the tempestuous assembly of a version of Romeo and Juliet that runs afoul of so much pressure, disease, injury, and blood that the dancers begin to call it cursed. Snowflakes uncovers the astounding way ballets, with no common form of written preservation, are handed down from generation to generation through the prodigious memories of brilliant athletes who also happen to be artists. It visits cattle-call auditions and rigorous classes, tells the stories of dancers whose

parents sacrificed for them and dancers whose parents refused to. It meets the resolute woman who created a dance school more than fifty years ago in a Carlisle, Pennsylvania barn and grew it into one of America's most reliable ballerina factories. It shows ballet's appeal to kids from low-income neighborhoods and board members who live in mansions. Shattering longstanding die-for-your-art clichÃƒÂ©s, this book uncovers the real drama in the daily lives of fiercely dedicated artists in slippers and pointe shoes-and the musicians, stagehands, costumers, donors and administrators who support them. Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear: Inside the Land of Ballet brings readers the exciting truth of how ballet actually happens.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Ballet is about as transparent as the federal government, which means that a very small percentage of its backstage business makes it into the public eye. Author Stephen Manes is about to change all of that..." --Jane Vranish, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette "For those who secretly wish for carte blanche access to shadow and observe all of the inner and outer workings of a major ballet company, then Stephen Manes' new volume is for you... a unique contribution to the dance world...not to be missed..." --Dean Speer, Ballet-Dance Magazine "I cannot say enough great things about this book. Its exciting in-depth coverage of 'life on the inside' is exactly what musty-dusty dance library shelves have been craving for years!...This beefy book--with all its juicy gossip and first-hand dancer accounts--boldly goes where no balletomane has gone before!" --Vala Dancewear blog "Snowflakes lets us in on aspects of the art form few audience members even know of...A

colossal undertaking, unbelievably thorough and thought-provoking..." --Laura Cappelle, Bella Figura"The must-have dancer gift (or self-gift!) this year...everything a non-fiction ballet book should be." --Juliette Clark, BalletScoop"Snowflakes reveals all...There is no other book that covers the same territory...I do recommend it for anyone with a passion about dance, the way it really is on the other side of the curtain." --Valerie Lawson, Dancelines"An engrossing read...unparalleled...lively prose and an almost indecent amount of information about how the cogs in a ballet company all turn...I found it hard to tear myself away from the characters after the book had ended." --Rym Kechacha, Balletco"Snowflakes is the most accurate depiction of company life in professional ballet that I have ever read." --James Fayette, former Principal Dancer, New York City Ballet, now New York Area Dance Executive, American Guild of Musical Artists --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for Snowflakes from around the globe:"For those who secretly wish for carte blanche access to shadow and observe all of the inner and outer workings of a major ballet company, then Stephen Manes' new volume is for you... a unique contribution to the dance world ... not to be missed ..."--Dean Speer, Ballet-Dance Magazine"Reality TV may have taken an interest in ballet recently, but for a behind-the-scenes look at the life of a company, Stephen Manes' Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear is set to become the gold standard.... it answers in great detail that common question: What really goes into getting a ballet onstage?... A rich, pragmatic resource ..."--Laura Cappelle, Dance Magazine "An engrossing read ... unparalleled ... lively prose and an almost indecent amount of information about how the cogs in a ballet company all turn ... I found it hard to tear myself away from the characters after the book had ended." --Rym Kechacha, Balletco"The must-have dancer gift (or self-gift!) this year ... everything a non-fiction ballet book should be." --Juliette Clark, BalletScoop"Snowflakes reveals all ... There is no other book that covers the same territory ... I do recommend it for anyone with a passion about dance, the way it really is on the other side of the curtain." --Valerie Lawson, Dancelines"Another top gift for dancers ... This intimate look inside Pacific Northwest Ballet is everything we hoped 'Breaking Pointe' the show about Ballet West would be - it is the real deal and was such a page turner we stayed up late reading ... An acclaimed writer, Manes perfectly captures the world of dance ..."--Got Dance LA"Snowflakes lets us in on aspects of the art form few audience members even know of...A colossal undertaking, unbelievably thorough and thought-provoking..." --Laura Cappelle, Bella Figura"Ballet is about as transparent as the federal government, which means that a very small percentage of its backstage business makes it into the public eye. Author Stephen Manes is about to change all of that..."--Jane Vranish,

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette "I cannot say enough great things about this book. Its exciting in-depth coverage of 'life on the inside' is exactly what musty-dusty dance library shelves have been craving for years!...This beefy book--with all its juicy gossip and first-hand dancer accounts--boldly goes where no balletomane has gone before!"--Vala Dancewear blog "My new literary obsession ... The newest and most exciting book on ballet ... If you do not yet have your hands on a copy of this innovative look into the behind-the-scenes world of ballet, I highly suggest it."--Rebecca King (Miami City Ballet dancer), Tendus Under a Palm Tree"Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear deftly makes the often arcane world of ballet both tangible and colourful ... a sweeping comprehensive picture of a modern ballet company as a body of artists, as a cultural organization, and as a business.... very well written ... It offers a unique view on the gamut of ballet's various elements, and does so in a way that makes its many pages leaf by quickly." --Peter DeVries, Dance International "... a unique book ... sets out with one big question: "How does ballet happen?" ... I dove in, and right from the start was taken with the writer's factual yet imaginative style and his way of making us think about aspects of the realm of ballet that we'd possibly never thought about before ... It's the pages and pages about the dancers as individuals and as a collective that make Mr. Manes' book a necessity for balletomanes worldwide."--Philip Gardner, Oberon's Grove "Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear is the most accurate depiction of company life in professional ballet that I have ever read. As a former dancer who performed with many of the artists that are identified in the book, I am impressed at how Stephen Manes captured each of their personalities and individual stories. As a union executive who has engaged in various negotiations with the Pacific Northwest Ballet, I am surprised at the level of access and detail that this book provides about the inner workings of the organization. A truly in-depth exploration that should be recommended to anyone who craves insight into the very private world of professional ballet and the dancer subculture." --James Fayette, former Principal Dancer, New York City Ballet, now New York Area Dance Executive, American Guild of Musical Artists "This is a must-read book for anyone vaguely interested in or passionately engaged with ballet or dance in general--a delightfully engaging insider story by an outsider wanting to know, 'How does ballet happen?'"--Rita Kohn, Broadside: A Newsletter of the Theatre Library Association "... a refreshing look at the nuts and bolts of putting together a season of dance."--Josephine Reed, Art Works, the official blog of the National Endowment for the Arts "Fab! ... a very thorough account of how a ballet company operates."--The Ballet Bag "... a fascinating look behind the scenes at one of America's premiere ballet companies."--David Dunkle, Patriot-News "Ballet may seem esoteric to a lot of non-balletomanes ... But it may be less so if they delve into Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear.... the book reveals what happens behind the

scenes and how ballet really happens."--Barbara Trainin Blank, Carlisle Sentinel "Unlike much of the romantic drivel written about the tulle-and-pointe-shoe crowd, Manes' tome offers a fascinating look at the minutiae of how ballet makes it to the stage.... Overall, this book is a nice reality check for aspiring dancers and a fine antidote to the melodramatic nonsense peddled by films like 'The Red Shoes' and 'Black Swan.'"--The Tyee "Wonderful!"--Kim Alexander, Sirius XM Book Radio

If you're an amateur dancer, a balletomane, or even if you just enjoy a good, witty non-fiction book, do yourself a favor and read Stephen Manes' _Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear._ Through Manes' fresh, wide-open eyes, you'll get a good look at the day-to-day life of one of the United States' premier ballet companies, and to a lesser extent into the inner workings of ballet itself. While this is, in a sense, a very serious examination of the world of ballet, it's laced with Manes' wit (as the title suggests) and never bogs down under its own weight.Very good read -- well worth the price, and deserves a spot in any balletomane's bookshelf.

Stephen Manes spent a little over a year at Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB), from preparation of the 2007-8 season, Peter Boal's third as Artistic Director with the company after a much-celebrated career as a Principal Dancer with New York City Ballet (NYCB), to the very beginning of the 2008-9 season, and he followed just about every aspect of life in the company and the hundreds -- thousands if you consider families and mentors -- of people that make a season possible. It is similar to Joseph Mazo's "Dance is a Contact Sport" in that Manes dedicated his life to a season with a company, but far from being just about dancers and choreographers. Manes takes an in-depth look at the school, classes, coaching, backstage, PR, the front of the house, administration, touring, auditions, fundraising, the orchestra, the Board: all of the aspects that come together to make the organization run and the performances happen. He even pays a visit to The Barn in Carlisle, PA. He also avoids the self-conscious cutesy style into which Mazo, a sportswriter, lapsed.Many people have asked over and over, "How are works transmitted?" "How do the dancers learn them?" "How do dancers work?" This books describes all of this in great detail, including the contrast in style, approach, and expectation of different stagers/stager-choreographers/choreographers. Because that season boasted so many new works of different sizes and demands, there is quite a contrast. (The one thing they had in common, how many times they praised and encouraged, was the biggest surprise to me.)The book gives a robust portrait of Peter Boal in a critical year in his first five-year term as Artistic Director, particularly through an in-depth description of the crucible of that period: a production of Jean-Christophe

Maillot’s "Romeo et Juliette", which replaced a much-loved version of former Co-Artistic Director Kent Stowell’s, "The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet". In addition, the book describes the creation process of Tony award-winning choreographer Susan Stroman’s ("The Producers") new work for PNB, "Take Five...More or Less", and the staging of much-lauded choreographer Christopher Wheeldon’s "Variations Serieuses".2007-8 was also a critical point in the transition from Francia Russell and Kent Stowell to Peter Boal, two years away from the honeymoon, and the adjustment was huge, however well as it was handled publicly. The detailed descriptions of the making of each rep and special performance, presentation, and gala/party over the season, as well as the dancers’ own words, establish context.Whatever anyone thinks of Peter Boal, there is someone in the book who will validate her or her conclusion, because, ultimately, this is a book about work and, by extension, about business, and Peter Boal is the boss. There are limited resources -- time and money -- and limited opportunity, and no matter how much money he and his staff raise, time and opportunity are still limited, and dancers’ careers live and die by opportunity.PNB is run, at least in this period, on a strict business model, to produce a small operating surplus each year. The book was written about the season before the financial crisis hit, after PNB had deferred an endowment gift on which the next season’s budget relied, only to find the value of the endowment reduced below contributions, and before "Nutcracker", upon which the company, like most companies in the US, relied to subsidize the rest of the season, suffered the triple-whammy of the financial crisis, a new Christmas show in town, and a massive snow storm just before Christmas that crippled the city, whose poor response to it helped to topple then-mayor Greg Nickels.It’s also a book about communication, and setting expectations, and often, the lack of both.There are many profiles, both of dancers, stagers, choreographers, and people behind the scenes, and for NYCB fans, Carla Korbes, who was cast widely in the season, is a featured player, with appearances by Miranda Weese, Seth Orza, and Sarah Ricard Orza. I thought the most fascinating was the profile of Bruce Wells -- what a perspective Wells has, from his time as a soloist with NYCB under George Balanchine, resident choreographer, interim Artistic Director of Boston Ballet, and teacher. Choreographer Maillot’s thoughts were also a highlight. There is also an epilogue, to bring the reader up-to-date through last season.It’s a fascinating story, regardless of whether the reader has ever seen Pacific Northwest Ballet.

I still haven’t finish it, but I can’t put the book down to know what happens next and, at the same time, I don’t want the story to end.Manes has written this book from the point of view of an outsider, not a ballet fanatic, but of a civilian, stranger to the world of tutus and pointe shoes, just like any

reader that may come across his book. And so, while spending a privileged year in the inner sanctum of Pacific Northwest Ballet, he’s able to tell us how a ballet company functions, from ballet masters to choreographers, stagers, dancers, technicians, props masters, mucisians, fundraisers and shoe makers. Everything I’ve ever wondered about what happens backstage appears in this book.At first I thought this would be a bit boring, somewhat academic, like the work of a solemn researcher entranced with a piece of knowledge he alone finds fascinating, but I happily discovered that Stephen Manes book has its moments of suspense, tragedy, romance, comedy and expectation one could find in the most absorbing novel. I don’t know if actual dancers would find it as amazing as I did, but when I was a child I used to dance, and really loved it, yet a series of different decisions took me through a different path in life. I sometimes wonder how would that world have been, so Manes’ book about PNB has given me a glimpse of what could’ve been that I’m thoroughly enjoying. This book has enhanced my respect and admiration for those who devote their lives to the performing arts.Also, while reading, I’ve looked for videos of the choreographies mentioned it the book, and have fallen in love with Ulysses Dove’s "Vespers," David Parsons` "Caught" as well as Nacho Duato’s "Jardi Tancat." Thanks to Manes, I’m planning to travel to NY or Seattle to attend the company’s performance of RomÃƒÂ©o et Juliette next february. Can’t wait to be there and see these artists, which the author has turned into dear heroes and amazing literary characters, in person.

Too long? No, if anything, not long enough for ballet fans, especially admirers of PNB and Peter Boal, its remarkable director. Boring? Not in the least! This is one of the most compelling ballet books to come along in quite some time. Perceptive and nicely written, it movingly conveys how ballet is passed from one generation to the next and is full of otherwise unobtainable information on the enormous complexity of running a ballet company. The book is also sprinkled with fascinating detail about dancers and choreographers (mostly associated with PNB, of course, but there are more NYCB tidbits than I’d expected). The book is addictive, like catnip to cats and fine artisanal chocolate to chocoholics. As I near the end, I find myself slowing down to make the pleasure last longer. If only PNB came east more often ... and Stephen Manes could be sent on a similar mission to NYCB and ABT among other companies!

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