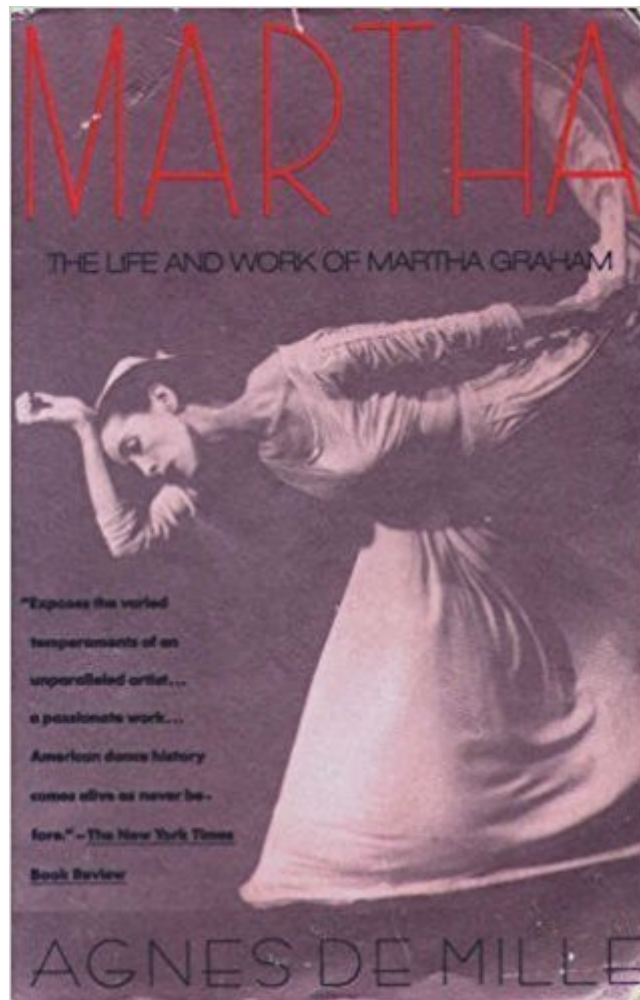




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Martha: The Life And Work Of Martha Graham



Synopsis

In a critically acclaimed biography now in paperback, renowned dancer and choreographer Agnes De Mille penetrates the late Martha Graham's mask of privacy to capture the woman who, in her 96-year lifetime, virtually invented modern dance in America. 32 pages of photographs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This biography of the modern dancer and choreographer is a substantial, carefully considered, highly personal portrait never compromised by the author's clear adulation for her subject. Photos. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Eye-opening, riveting, enlightening, uplifting--Martha Graham's life and times seen through the discerning, appreciative eye of Agnes de Mille. This is an earthier, more human Graham than in her own *Blood Memory* (p. 839); it is also a more detailed look at the era. Graham's vision was so focused that she was unaware of, or thought unimportant, the surroundings, players, intrigues; she was also extremely private. De Mille can and does give us the fuller picture. De Mille met Graham in the early Denishawn days in California; their lives and careers intertwined ever after with varying degrees of intensity. They were friends, worked with many of the same people, and kept a critical eye on each other's work. Graham's strength and will were apparent certainly by her teens; her genius was apparent early, too. De Mille follows the development of that gift, and along the way explores in depth Graham's contemporaries, technique, and the dance world generally. This is

meaty, detailed stuff, and all in de Mille's wonderful voice. On Doris Humphrey: "...she analyzed everything. It was not enough that a fall or lean could be lovely. She had to explain why...Her own dancing seemed to have little personality, while Martha's was electrifying." On the relationship between a choreographer's physique and his work, and Graham's in particular: she claimed that she always choreographed falls on the left because the heart is on the left. "Maybe so," says de Mille, "but to this dancer it seems that it really was because her left leg and thigh were stronger and more stretched out." De Mille drops a number of bombshells here, particularly in her discussions of Graham's emotional life. She had stormy, sometimes physically abusive (by both parties) relationships in her life. De Mille describes the two most intense crises: Graham's failed marriage to Erick Hawkins; and her forced retirement as a dancer, in 1968, at age 72. This latter precipitated a physical collapse that de Mille names convincingly as being alcoholic. "Martha got well, in her own way, in her own time, and without alcohol. Martha rose from the dead, and verily, she was changed now." A loving, respectful, but always clear-eyed account of the human Graham. A must for fans of Graham's, de Mille's, dance- -indeed, anyone wanting a clear picture of a creative era that is fast drawing to a close. (Thirty-two pp. of b&w photos--not seen.) -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Watching this is a beautiful experience. Anyone interested in dance will enjoy it. I will buy more about this dancer.

Agnes is a great storyteller, and she knew Martha personally. She doesn't hide the rough edges, but reveals a fascinating human who changed the dance world in one lifetime. It would be a good read if it were fiction. It's much better because it's real. If you are interested in the history of dance, or strong women, or the up and down sides of genius in the arts... read this. If you want a dramatic story about sticking to your guns in spite of societal disdain/misunderstanding, read this. If you like biographies... read this. My favorite dance biography of all. And that's my favorite non-how-to book of all.

Yes!

It is unfortunate that this book is out of print, for it gives an overview of one of the most brilliant choreographers of the twentieth century. The mind and values of Martha Graham are exposed in detail by the author, and it serves its purpose in giving the curious reader insight into the life and

dance technique of a woman who single-handedly developed one of the most original forms of movement to this date. Anyone who is overcome by watching the dances of Graham will definitely appreciate this book, written by a person who had known Graham for fifty-eight years. Included in the book are an excellent collection of black-and-white photographs, both of Graham and some of the people she worked closely with. Indeed, Graham was a beautiful woman, and her personality, as well as her physical beauty, are exemplified nicely in these photographs. The knowledge one can gain from the reading of this book makes it well worth the time, for by reading it one can understand how Graham developed her technique, interestingly without any government aid; there was no National Endowment of the Arts to assist in her endeavors. Graham viewed dance as a celebration, and eschewed the attitude of those who danced for monetary gain. One reads of Graham's relationship with Louis Horst, and of the popularity of the writings of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche among Horst, Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Isadora Duncan. Graham's father told her that "bodies never lie", and this statement apparently had a major influence on her resulting "philosophy of dance", as well as the influence of Ruth St. Denis and Erick Hawkins. The author discusses the differences between the dance technique of Graham and Humphrey, the latter being characterized as mathematical by the author, the former emotional. But I find the Graham technique straightforward to view from a mathematical standpoint, if one is so inclined. The technical aspects of the Graham technique are brought out nicely in the book, one example being the marvelous description of the "spiral fall" and its recovery. One also learns of the use of "plastiques", i.e., the posing and moving in scarves and costumes by the dancers. Also, it is interesting to learn of the omission of mirrors in the early Graham studios; lest the student, in the author's words, "drown in his own image". The class routine for the Graham dancers, particularly the floor exercises, along with the spasm of the diaphragm, are the most well-known manifestation of the Graham technique, and are discussed nicely in this book. It is fortunate that Graham was able to find such dedicated students for her classes. Forcing to live a frugal existence, these students found her dances a "religion that they served", according to the author. Indeed, if one has ever viewed modern dance performances of the Graham technique, one can see this attitude in the dancers, as though they were privileged, and moving to a unique traceform in space never before executed. The Graham technique is brilliant, and it forces one to rethink preconceived notions of what movement must be, and instead speculate on what it could be. Graham in her works made it readily apparent that gravity is real, but that it need not be a total master. Even on the floor the Graham dancers are in control, at least momentarily, interpolating brilliantly between order and bodily dissonance. Martha Graham, as portrayed by the author, was an innovator and a determined individualist, and has given

us a unique collection of traceforms, both in our memories and in books and videos, that will embolden us and refresh us always.....

Agnes de Mille, a distinguished and popular choreographer in her own right, and a sometimes intimate friend of Martha Graham, has written an outstanding biography of this iconic woman. The story of Martha Graham is inevitably the story of Modern Dance-- which many would say she invented--and the history of American artists--of which she was the queen. De Mille's book is both extremely informative and thoroughly enjoyable. She gives you the history you need in order to put Graham's revolutionary dance technique in context, and then she offers personal insights and observations on the life, love affairs, personality, triumphs, and tragedies of the inimitable Martha. A portrait of a truly incredible, inspiring, tiny giant of a woman by another who is at least her equal in intellect and probably in artistry as well. For anyone interested in dance, this book is an absolute must.

Received a beat up book with the cover being held on with scotch tape.

Agnes De Mille, has an objective view of Martha Graham, and at the same time, a very close relationship with the Artist. Her description on Martha's moods, are eloquent, and astute, as if you were Agnes De Mille herself, witnessing the intricate life of this Genius, Martha Graham. The beginning of the book, might be a bit long if you are not a Dancer, but once it gets to the point, it is a very exciting book, you must own it. Enjoy your reading...

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