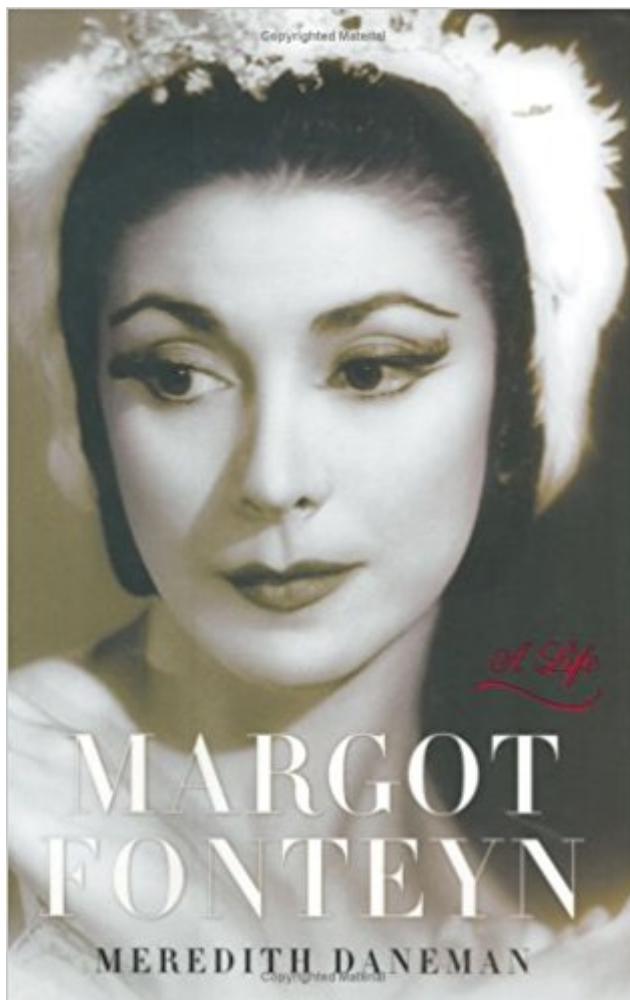


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MARGOT FONTEYN



Synopsis

The legend of Margot Fonteyn has touched every ballet dancer who has come after her, and her genius endures in the memory of anyone who saw her dance. Yet until now, the complete story of her life has remained untold. Meredith Daneman, a novelist and former dancer, reveals the fascinating story of Peggy Hookham, a little girl from suburban England, who grew up to become a Dame of the British Empire and the most famous ballerina in the world. This completely riveting and definitive biography chronicles Fonteyn's early years and her intense connection to her mother, the aBlack Queen; her loves in bohemian thirties and forties London; her relationship with her balletic Svengali, Frederick Ashton; her conquest of New York with the Sadler's Wells Ballet; and her final years in Panama with her husband, Roberto Arias. Daneman reflects on Fonteyn's lyricism and limpid purity of line, so potent with theatrical moment that even film cannot capture it and the world of ballet from the birth of the British Royal Ballet to Rudolf Nureyev, her final partner and rumored lover. Balletomanes and readers of biography alike will applaud Daneman's vivid, insightful, and highly entertaining work. Based on more than ten years of research and lavishly illustrated with beautiful and evocative photographs, "Margot Fonteyn" is an exquisite biography that is supremely worthy of its alluring subject.

Book Information

Hardcover: 672 pages

Publisher: Viking Adult (October 21, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0670843709

ISBN-13: 978-0670843701

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 2 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 24 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #874,375 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #144 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Dancers #233 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Dance > Classical #6629 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Actors & Entertainers

Customer Reviews

Margot Fonteyn (1919–1991) earned her title of prima ballerina assoluta with her elegant presence, exquisite musicality and eloquent line. She was Frederick Ashton's muse, Rudolf

Nureyev's partner and, for more than 40 years, the ideal of the English ballet style. As Daneman relates in this admiring and compulsively readable biography, well before forging her partnership with Nureyev, Fonteyn was a star, Britain's "Queen of Ballet." She was already in her early 40s when Nureyev defected in 1961 and she danced Giselle with him; despite the 20-year age gap, the unlikely pair generated magic on stage. Fonteyn was rejuvenated as a dancer: her career lasted an additional 15 years. But in Daneman's astute telling, Fonteyn's personal life proves more fascinating than her dance legend. She performed in London during the blitz, becoming "a national mascot," and was discovered in her hotel bed with a lover the night German troops entered the Hague. She had many lovers (Nureyev perhaps among them) before marrying Roberto Arias in 1955; Arias was a former Panamanian ambassador suspected of planning a coup against the government of President Ernesto de la Guardia. Fonteyn gave her final performance in the early 1970s and then retired to Panama to live with Arias, who had been paralyzed in an assassination attempt. Daneman has impeccable credentials: a graduate of London's Royal Ballet School and a former member of the Australian Ballet company, she's written four novels. Both critically sophisticated and dramatically compelling, this is a must-read for balletomanes as well as biography aficionados. Illus. not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Daneman's biography is probably the closest examination that could be made of the notoriously reticent English ballerina. In the nineteen-thirties, British ballet, which still barely existed, needed a young, homegrown star. The teen-aged Fonteyn stepped into the light, and over the next three decades her simplicity, lyricism, and understated emotionalism—qualities nursed in her by the great choreographer Frederick Ashton—came to represent the English style in classical dance. Then Rudolf Nureyev, almost twenty years her junior, defected to the West, and their lady-tames-lion partnership kept her dancing into her sixties—too long, but who cares now? Daneman tells us the hard parts: Fonteyn's weakness for men who treated her badly ("Shit, shit, you dance like shit," Nureyev would yell at her), her steely gentility (she was often compared to the Queen), and her distaste for introspection—indeed, at times, for truth. But that was just in life. Onstage, she told the truth. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker

This long, detailed biography provides a real understanding of this transcendent dancer. If it is not the total picture, it is hard to think what facets of her life and character are missing. Eventually I began to skip a few pages here and there, especially when the author became fixated on Margot's

sex life. Surprisingly, when Rudolf Nureyev enters the picture, we are encouraged to ruminate on the possibility that Margot might participate in and enjoy trysts with a homosexual. I think that is a bit excessive. Margot's life was filled to overflowing with peerless artistry and triumphs. Her greatest sorrow seems to have been the terrible fate of her husband, crippled in an attempted assassination. The description of her gravesite in a cemetery bordering on tin shacks in Panama City is moving beyond words. Near her husband, to whom so much of her life and devotion had been dedicated, she lies with the simplest possible inscription on her gravestone: Margot Fonteyn de Arias. But that name will be glorious forever. For those who have a real interest in the history of the Royal Ballet, this book will answer many questions. It covers unsparingly, for instance, the blighted careers of those dancers frozen out by Margot's brilliance and by her position as the great favorite of Ninette de Valois, the managing director. It also describes in detail the demoralization of the company, especially of the male dancers, during the years of Nureyev's ascendancy. He instantly became the favorite of management and entrepreneurs, and his triumphant partnership with Fonteyn left little room for other, lesser luminaries to share the glory. The author's picture of Nureyev is not kind. He was not a kind man, and his treatment of Fonteyn was sometimes brutal.

Who could look at the face in the photo on the cover of this book, and not fall in love with the one behind that image? What beauty. Of course, I am speaking from a man's point of view. By reading this book, one finds that a lot of men fell in love with Peggy Hookem....er....that is Margret Fontes....er....no wait, old Uncle Manoel Fontes couldn't have his family name dishonored by association with a "theatre" personage. What shortsightedness. So the name, so famous today, came out of the telephone book. The name "Fontene", which sounded British, was chosen with a minor change in spelling. The name Margot Fonteyn was born. Yes, lots of men fell in love with her, but she like so many women had a hard time choosing the right man, and many of those she chose used her only for her beautiful flesh. Eventually, she found one whom she thought she loved, devoted her remaining life to, and even he was not worthy of her. His name was Tito Arias, a Panamanian, lawyer, politician, ambassador, divorcee, husband, revolutionary, gun runner, traitor (some would say), philanderer, and God knows what else. He even got Margot involved, arrested (and deported from Panama) in some of his schemes. Yet she loved him with all of her being, but she wouldn't give up her love for the ballet even for him. It's a good thing for him that she did not give up the ballet, because it was her money that supported him after he became a paraplegic in an assassination attempt. Things were brought out in this biography that Margot would not have wanted known. Things of a personal nature about her intimacies with men who could not keep them private.

Some are pure conjecture and some may be true, but Margot did not mention any such happenings in her own autobiography, so it is too bad they had to be brought out after she died. Yes, too bad. She was not the oldest ballerina to ever dance on stage, but because of her indomitable will, reinvigorated by Rudolph Nureyev, she was able to dance far longer than most ballerinas. Life returned her to the ages when she was 72, taken away by cancer, respect of no human being. Read this book about the remarkable, muse of the Royal Ballet.....Richard.

Really enjoying this very nice book...in near perfect condition. Thank you'

great product and service

I was initiated ten years ago by the two daughters of my wife, who have practiced ballet all their lives, in the knowledge of ballet. Before I just did not understand it, and even today know little about it. This biography, however, is beautifully written, very well researched, with a great sensitivity and it has been beautiful for me to know from the inside this life of "the most famous ballerina of the world", a life very different from a point of view and at the same time so near to our own lives. My life has been enhanced after this lecture. Now I understand a thousand times better ballet and I love it. Thanks to Meredith Daneman for her great work.

This book was wonderful! Such work went into it! Meredith Daneman did GREAT research, and it was all documented. She took many years to do the research for this book, and I really appreciate it very, very much. I'd like to write to her but do not have an address...do you? BTW, I hear that a brand new book entitled MY MARGOT by Ken Ludden. do you have this one as I would like very much to read it. Thanks! khazeldine@woh.rr.com

This is the book I've been waiting for, All about Margot, Saw the movie, now read the book! Just started to read, but looks like the real deal. Recommended to anyone who loves ballet, and Margot Fonteyn. 5 stars.

For all the ones who love ballet or dance this book could be used as an inspiration into this magic world.

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