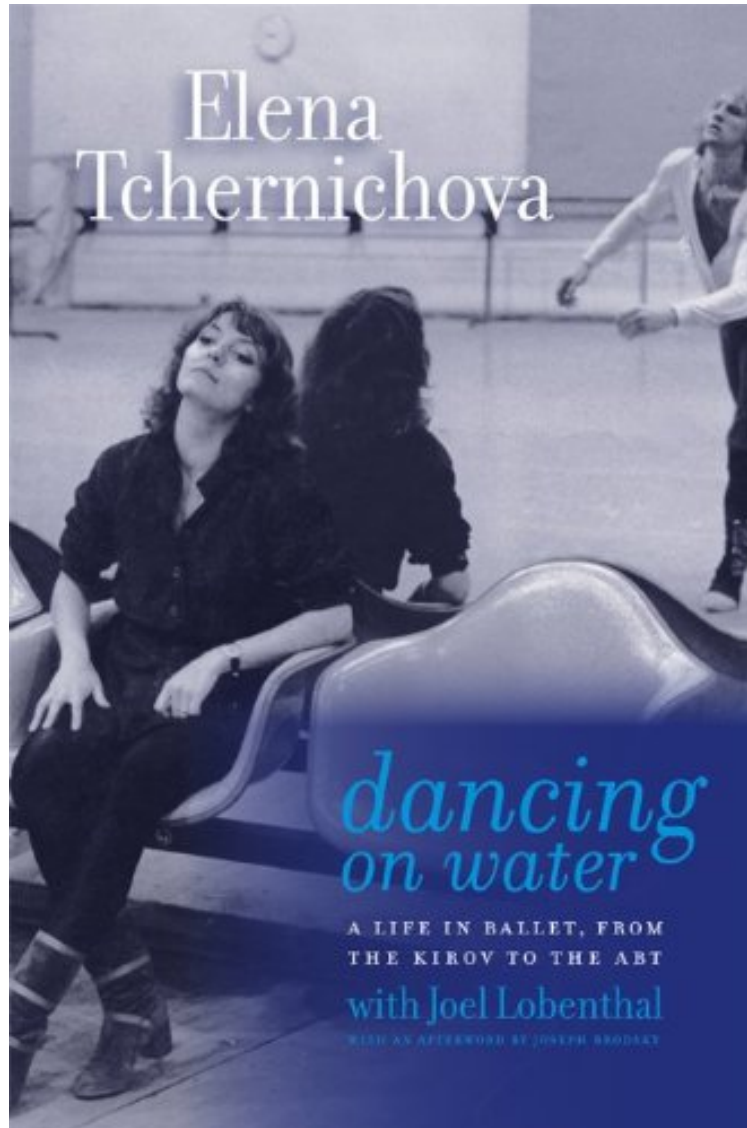


(Free read ebook) Dancing on Water: A Life in Ballet, from the Kirov to the ABT

Dancing on Water: A Life in Ballet, from the Kirov to the ABT

Elena Tchernichova, Joel Lobenthal
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#1158836 in Books 2013-05-14 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.24 x 1.08 x 6.381, 1.44 #File Name: 1555537928328 pages | File size: 60.Mb

Elena Tchernichova, Joel Lobenthal : Dancing on Water: A Life in Ballet, from the Kirov to the ABT before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dancing on Water: A Life in Ballet, from the Kirov to the ABT:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Don't let this wonderful view of the dance world pass you by. By eledavf Vivian From first page to last this book carries the reader along. I personally could not put it down and was sorry when it ended. Elena's start in life was nothing short of tragic. Raised in starving, war-ravaged Leningrad, she had a neurotic mother who became an alcoholic and committed suicide when Elena was still a child. Afterwards, her

grandmother -- illiterate, the daughter of serfs -- coped as well as she could, but it was a mother and daughter from the great Vaganova ballet school who became Elena's salvation by urging her to study there. In school and later at the Kirov Theater she encountered so many fabled performers with weaknesses, strengths and personalities of their own, individuals who will remain in your memory. Plisetskaya, whose features would reveal nothing during the most incredibly difficult performances, or Alla Shelest who was nervous as a cat before going on stage. Nureyev who refused to put himself out for a partner who would not go halfway to help him in the lifts, or Baryshnikov who would shrug and go along, if grudgingly, with the uncooperative partner. And Makarova with her dressing table crowded with religious icons for good luck. Then the never to be forgotten Ninel Kurgapkina.... All those gods and goddesses of the dance. Elena Tchernichova herself did not have their superhuman drive, their willingness to suffer limitlessly in striving to become a world-class dancer. Her true vocation was to teach others to dance on a world-class level. And to do that she had to suffer through the most rigorous course of ballet, the Russian school. Her career then took her to other parts of Russia including Odessa where she and her husband, a former leading dancer, directed the ballet program. In time, more than a few stars and other practitioners of the art, including Tchernichova herself, renounced their citizenship and seized what opportunities they could in foreign lands. For some, like Alexander Godunov, the result was not always happy. The author's description of his defection is highly entertaining and I can verify its accuracy because the bizarre facts, played out in headlines and newscasts, remain vividly in my mind. The book provides fascinating insights into the ballets themselves as well as the struggles and contentions that go into any production. And of course not to be forgotten are the difficulties and risks that are part of a dancer's life. Among those risks are the fish-dive and the even more perilous double fish-dive which ballerinas fear. There are few moves as exciting in all of ballet and the particular example described in this book is proof beyond a doubt of the courage and incredible skill of these artists. There is much wry humor in the book as well. The last paragraph in chapter twenty-four is hilarious. Cynthia Gregory and Patrick Bissell in *Giselle*. Cynthia runs screaming from the stage: "Never again!" I am convinced there will never be a more authentic account of life in the dance world. Certainly there will never be a more interesting one.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. One of the rare indispensable dance books

By Ivy Lin

The list of must-read dance autobiographies is disappointingly short. Dancers are not necessarily the most articulate people, and their memoirs are often frustratingly opaque and unreflective. A happy exception is Elena Tchernichova's memoir. Maybe that's because her dance career was rather brief. Instead she spent most of her time as a coach, most famously during the Mikhail Baryshnikov era at the ABT. Tchernichova's childhood was unhappy. Her father was called in by the state police one day and never returned. Heartbroken and distraught, mother poisoned herself when Tchernichova was nine. Tchernichova was accepted into the Vaganova Academy and later, the Kirov (nowadays Mariinsky) Ballet. Tchernichova's remembrances of her tough, harsh ballet training and the politics of the Kirov Ballet are priceless. Natalia Dudinskaya, Konstantin Sergeyev, Alla Shelest, and other famous and not-so-famous dancers from that era are recalled without any sentimentality and (this is important) agenda on the author's part. Tchernichova later immigrated to the United States and became a highly influential coach at the American Ballet Theatre. Mikhail Baryshnikov was once asked to fire her and said "She is the ABT." This part of her memoirs is more gossipy, more into score settling (there's no love lost between Tchernichova and Sir Kenneth MacMillan or Georgina Parkinson), but Tchernichova's talent for telling interesting stories is as strong as ever. Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gelsey Kirkland, Alessandra Ferri, Altyнай Asylmuratova, Diana Vishneva, and others are described vividly. What's more, Tchernichova has some very intelligent and insightful things to say about the Russian school of dancing vs. the American school. You actually learn about what it's like to dance in several ballets. Ever wonder how the corps prevent their legs from cramping in the long stretches when they are asked to stay perfectly still in the background? You can find out in this book. Tchernichova herself comes across exactly as you'd expect a ballet mistress to be: tough, unsparing, but also capable of compassion. This is one of the few books that is gentle on Gelsey Kirkland. This is a book I return to time and again. Wonderful memories, wonderful insights. If you love ballet, you will want to read this book.

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Must Reading for Ballet Lovers

By Giselle

As a lover of ballet and an erstwhile ballet student, I loved every minute of this book. Mme. Tchernicheva gives us an intimate portrait of her life at the Vaganova Academy during the siege of Leningrad and her ultimate decision as an adult to leave the Soviet Union for the West. Unlike other more famous people, such as Nureyev, Makarova, and Baryshnikov, Tchernicheva chose not to become a performer but to share her talent and impeccable training to pass along the Russian legacy to others as a coach and director, while working to raise standards to the highest possible level. I lived through the years of which she writes, and was fascinated to read about the backstage world that we don't get to see as members of the audience. I didn't want the book to end.

Dancing on Water is both a personal coming-of-age story and a sweeping look at ballet life in Russia and the United States during the golden age of dance. Elena Tchernichova takes us from her childhood during the siege of Leningrad to her mother's alcoholism and suicide, and from her adoption by Kirov ballerina Tatiana Vecheslova, who entered her into the state ballet school, to her career in the American Ballet Theatre. As a student and young dancer with the Kirov, she witnessed the company's achievements as a citadel of classic ballet, home to legendary names Shelest, Nureyev,

Dudinskaya, Baryshnikov but also a hotbed of intrigue and ambition run amok. As ballet mistress of American Ballet Theatre from 1978 to 1990, Elena was called the most important behind-the-scenes force for change in ballet today, by Vogue magazine. She coached stars and corps de ballet alike, and helped mold the careers of some of the great dancers of the age, including Gelsey Kirkland, Cynthia Gregory, Natalia Makarova, and Alexander Godunov. *Dancing on Water* is a tour de force, exploring the highest levels of the world of dance.

The voice in the book is excellent company, as Tchernichova endures growing pains, backstage intrigues, and the shocks of emigration... This book offers a fascinating portrait of a surprisingly open-minded ballet intellectual. *Dance Magazine*