Joan Myers Brown & the Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina

A Biohistory of American Performance

Brenda Dixon Gottschald

Foreword by Robert Farris Thompson

Afterword by Ananya Chatterjea
Advance Praise for Joan Myers Brown & the Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina

“Joan’s artistic accomplishments and contributions to the dance world occupy a special place in history. Generations of dancers have her to thank for the doors she opened. For years, I’ve appreciated her wisdom, enthusiasm, and support. Joan has been a trailblazer in her professional life, and I feel fortunate to call her a friend.”
—Michael M. Kaiser, President,
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

“Smoothly-written by our most accomplished chronicler of American dance and race politics, this essential volume demonstrates the impact black Americans have made in the performing arts against long odds. Brown’s story will be familiar to every African American girl who ever wanted to be a ballerina. Newly mined documentation of the vibrant dance cultures of Philadelphia and the inner workings of Philadanco, the internationally recognized modern dance company that Brown created to international acclaim, provide cogent context to understand dance, gender, and especially race in the American performing arts. Gottschild reveals a hidden history of black ballet crucial to understanding the African American presence in contemporary dance.”
—Thomas F. DeFrantz, author of Dancing Revelations:
Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture and Professor,
African and African American Studies,
Duke University

“Joan Myers Brown & the Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina, a critical analysis of the life and work of Joan Myers Brown, is a visionary study that breaks new ground in several ways: It provides a much-needed history of the development of dance in Philadelphia, examining its unique racism as well as the more general racist values espoused by the entire country. It integrates oral history with a more general portrait of the community and its sense of identity, offering a commanding overview of the changing beliefs around African American identity and rights from the 1940s to the present. It details the vital relationship between a company, Philadanco, and its school and the staff who administer both. It shows how there are no rigid boundaries between the worlds of concert dance and entertainment and social dance productions. And it provides a brilliant analysis of the motivations on the part of the African American middle class to assimilate white culture but also to adapt it and make it their own. As in her other works, Dixon Gottschild gives us a deeply thoughtful and complex rendering of the participation of dance in the formulation of identity and community, one that also provides a powerful revisionist focus on the importance of Philadelphia in the formation of concert dance in the United States.”
—Susan Leigh Foster, Distinguished Professor,
Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance,
University of California,
Los Angeles
“In telling the story of Philadanco, Brenda Dixon Gottschild not only brings a dance company’s history and vibrant present to life, she thoughtfully and insightfully discusses the ethos of Philadelphia, the lifestyles of its black community, changing race relations, and the decades-ago experiences of African Americans who, like Philadanco’s spunky founder-director, Joan Myers Brown, aspired to be ballet dancers.”

—Deborah Jowitt, dance critic and historian, and author of *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance*

“Brenda Dixon Gottschild brings a bracing mix of scholarship and unsentimental compassion to bear on the story of Joan Myers Brown, a classy, feisty, eminently pragmatic visionary whose life and dance company occupy a vivid and important place in the largely unexamined history of dance in Philadelphia. This book is an indispensable good-read about an individual and her epic fight to make a place for herself in a world that did not accept black-skinned dancers like her and then to build and maintain a major American dance company. But the book is much more. In the detail of the day-to-day work of being a dancer and developing dancers against the odds, so vividly evoked, too, in Myers Brown’s pithy and unexpectedly poignant observations, Dixon Gottschild has captured the struggle of black Americans to help shape the culture of their country.”

—Jennifer Dunning, former dance critic, *The New York Times*
June 16th - 21st, 2009
The energy
the power
returns to the
JOYCE
THE JOYCE THEATER
175 EIGHTH AVENUE AT 19TH ST JOYCE RECHARGE 212 242 0800
Philadanco in pose from Christopher Huggins’s *Enemy behind the Gates*. From left to right: Crouching—Mora Amina Parker, Dawn Marie Watson, Elisabeth Bell. Airborne – Odara Jabali-Nash, Bellamy Eure.

*Source:* A.Turner Design/Alfred Turner Jr. Photo ©Lois Greenfield
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Other Books By Brenda Dixon Gottschild

Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance
Waltzing in the Dark
The Black Dancing Body
The History of Dance in Art and Education (coauthor, third edition)
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For JB, with love,
and
To the next generation,
and the next, and the next—
May our struggles be the labor
that births your triumphs
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