



Teaching Classical Ballet

John White Jr.

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"Every commercial ballet teacher should have a copy. . . . offers solid self-evaluation to every teacher--it separates 'the mice and the Nutcracker'!"--Richard J. Sias, dancer, choreographer, and associate professor of ballet, Florida State University

"The contribution to the dance world is immense. . . . should be read by all teachers of dance as well as students in preparatory schools and colleges. . . . Mr. White challenges us to reexamine what we have accepted as excellence in the past and to push beyond that to find what is possible."--Patricia Walker, founder and director, Children's Ballet Theatre of New Hampshire

"A service of great importance for any artist wishing to pursue a career in dance. . . . applicable to both experienced and inexperienced dancers and teachers. It gives guidelines to the art of teaching ballet where none existed before."--Charles Flachs, principal dancer, Nashville Ballet

From his experience of 40 years in ballet as a student, performer, ballet master, and dedicated teacher, John White offers this work of inspiration and step-by-step instruction on the art and craft of teaching classical dance.

Stressing excellence in both the creative and the practical aspects of teaching, White discusses what it means to be a "master teacher"--someone with both a deep love for dance and an appreciation for the grandeur of the human spirit.

Good art is usually uncomplicated, he says. Illustrating with 97 photographs, he presents a method of study that includes such aspects of teaching as constructive warm-up exercises, when to begin pointe shoes, the beneficial aspects of pain, and appropriate music for the classroom, as well as elements of the basic lesson. He discusses how to recognize talent and to refine and develop it. He offers guidelines for establishing and organizing a well-run studio. And he presents his personal insights into the art of classical ballet pedagogy--shaped in particular by his study with ballet masters from the Kirov and Bolshoi ballet companies and by concepts from the famous Vaganova Choreographic School in St. Petersburg.

The book also confronts the controversial issue of the widespread mediocrity that is notorious in dance schools. Poor training often brings about the loss of talented students and the premature forced retirement of professional artists from unnecessary injuries. By contrast, White says, good teaching can be an exhilarating challenge and a profound joy.

John White is codirector of the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, located in a Philadelphia suburb, which he opened with his wife in 1974. He has been a soloist and the ballet master of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba and the head instructor and interim ballet master of the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. Since 1980 he has conducted seminars for dance teachers, training more than 400 teachers during this time. In addition, he was a contributing editor and writer for Ballet Dancer Magazine.

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