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Understanding Dance

Graham McFee

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Graham McFee : Understanding Dance before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Understanding Dance:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Highly philosophical, thus eye-opening though impractical
By Daniel
Graham McFee has written a tremendous book on the aesthetics of dance. His discussion goes on for roughly 350 pages yet rarely becomes repetitive or obtuse. Much has been written on the aesthetics of many other art forms both high and low--music, painting, and architecture, for instance--even though most of us freely acknowledge that

what makes these art forms wonderful and human is impossible to explain in plain language. Why are we moved by melody, drawn in by a painting, or surprised by a great building? It's possible to discuss these questions but not to pin down the answers. The wonderful thing is how these discussions become more pleasurable rather than less so because they have no definite end. In this vein, McFee's lengthy book on the aesthetics of dance is not conclusive. Yet while McFee never pins down exactly why humans dance and enjoy watching others dance, he firmly nails down components of the answer that enrich and enliven thought and discussion on the subject of dance. "Understanding Dance" is not a practical guide to how to watch and quantify particular dance performances. There is no glossary, and you won't find a chart explaining the differences between jazz, tap, modern, and ballet dance styles. Still, its unique approach makes it a worthwhile and memorable read both for people deep in the world of dance and also for people just getting their feet wet. Rather than being full of jargon and dancing fundamentals, this book takes a broad and high approach to the subject of dance. You won't learn the difference between a pirouette and a grand jeteacute;, but you will understand much more deeply why it is so pleasurable and inspiring to watch a ballet troupe (or any group of dancers) perform. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Comprehensive and ambitious...By Julie C. Van Camp". . . one of a very few comprehensive studies of dance by a serious philosopher, and he explores a wide range of important philosophical issues, from the identity of works of art in dance to the nature of critical reasoning." -- from my review for the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 51 (Fall 1993), pp. 644-666.

Understanding Dance is a comprehensive introduction to the aesthetics of dance, and will be an essential text for all those interested in dance as an object of study. Focusing on the work of a number of major choreographers, companies and critics Graham McFee explores the nature of our understanding of Dance by considering the practice of understanding dance-works themselves. He concludes with a validation of the place of dance in society and in education. Throughout he provides detailed insights into the nature and appreciation of art as well as a general grounding in philosophy.