

but internal to taiko performance. Additionally, the book highlights a secondary objective: not to provide answers allowing Asian America to cohere, but to advance critical conversation.

Despite such success, the treatment might not always match the necessary scope of the content. While Ahlgren acknowledges omissions due to “brevity and focus,” the book may have been more effective by providing a fuller representation of the complexity of the art form. For instance, Ahlgren critiques San Jose Taiko’s *Ei Ja Nai Ka?* as “eclips[ing] other aspects of Japanese American history . . . omit[ting] internment indicates that the piece has more to do with the connection between the *issei* and *sansei* [first- and third-generation Japanese Americans] than it does with relating a complete and accurate timeline of Japanese American history” (39). However, to expect that a single piece of repertoire, intended as a joyous communal dance, somehow ought to address the darkness of wartime internment, is not only an unjustified critique but perhaps demonstrates an incomplete understanding of the choreographic project. Expanding the scope of discussion to compare the dance with actual taiko repertoire from the ensemble, such as their internment-themed *DoR (Day of Remembrance, 2007)*, might create better analytical terrain.

Scholars with interests in Asian American studies, ethnomusicology, dance, theater and performance, social sciences, and gender and identity studies might strongly consider reading this book, albeit with an awareness of the diverse roads musicking may take the reader. I echo Ahlgren’s encouragement for the taiko community to advance its own critical awareness, understanding, and engagement on issues concerning race, sexuality, gender, Orientalism, identities, and activism.

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## JOSEPHINE BAKER AND KATHERINE DUNHAM: DANCES IN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

by Hannah Durkin. 2019. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 272 pp., 20 illustrations. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 978-0-252-08445-4  
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Josephine Baker and Katherine Dunham are unparalleled in transforming the politics of representation, authorship, and stardom amid a segregated United States and under the scrutiny of the lingering colonial gaze of Europe in the twentieth century. As African American women working on stage, screen, and page both in Europe and the United States during the interwar years, they provide a rich semantic field for interpretation from the standpoint of dance, film, theatricality, and racial activism. In a carefully researched and presented book, Hannah Durkin provides a powerful archival inquiry into these fields practiced by both Baker and Dunham. Stemming from foundational questions, such as the reason behind their success, the challenges and opportunities they were afforded, the importance of their own storytelling in writing, and their ability to cocreate on film and stage, the book exposes a detailed account of the interworkings of their cultural production, as well as their contradictions. The latter were almost impossible to elude as black, female, performing artists of their time, which Durkin retells by narrating important details of how many shows and film sequences came to be. Special attention is given to the primitivist gaze, for example, which they sometimes played into or resisted entirely, as well as to the complexity of the sexualization and the fetishization of the black body in the light of both artists’ activism against racism. Durkin illustrates how Baker’s and Dunham’s work transforms racial policies, viewership, and performance venues during the lifespans of their multifaceted careers.

Durkin exposes some of the disciplinary challenges for this kind of study, since both these artists worked in many different countries and were increasingly influential on stage and on film, making their writing a lesser known source. The conceptual framing of the difference between the two artists as writers is of special interest, as this brings to light the way their work is truly groundbreaking and relatively unknown at this level of comprehensive discussion. Although Baker and Dunham share commonalities, they have quite different backgrounds and achieved notoriety each in their own right. Baker was a pioneering artist and tackled many frontiers, mainly in Europe during the twenties and thirties, before Dunham. Meanwhile, Dunham was empowered by her academic background both in dance and anthropology, allowing her an unparalleled international career that included a special relationship with the Caribbean, especially Haiti, where she had a home. These differences, however, should not be perceived as an attempt by the author to evaluate their contributions from a hierarchical point of view, but rather, to highlight their personal and political experiences as contributing to similar achievements. As Durkin states: "Although they adopt contrasting viewpoints, with Dunham acting as cultural observer and Baker describing dance as a lived experience, both women's writings foreground corporeal experience" (20). This fact is constructed through the lens of the use of "translation," presenting Baker as being translated and Dunham as being a translator. This is a thought-provoking way to grasp the multifaceted talents of these two women, and Durkin does a commendable job in pointing out the biases to which body-centered work has been subject. Durkin suggests that the spectators who only see Dunham and Baker as dancers or film stars may fail to understand the importance of the authorial voices, to see their work as a path to liberation.

Durkin analyzes the influence of racial violence and the othering of black dancing bodies, viewing Baker and Dunham both as women and as dancers. Strategies are exposed that promote an anti-racist, idiosyncratic way of existing within a frame that insists on demeaning the black artist, especially as preys of the primitivist gaze, so prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century in modern dance. This dynamic is

again illustrated in Dunham's experience making films in Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Detailed accounts of the off-stage dynamics in Baker's and Dunham's incursions in film lead to a thought-provoking analysis about artistry, power, and self-affirmation. A look inside the archive of the circumstances surrounding these films not only supports her arguments but sheds light on issues that are not entirely resolved in current film and stage productions regarding othering.

Throughout the book, Durkin's analysis of writing and film is also contributing to dance and performance history by providing detailed explanations of each choreography under scrutiny. Baker and Dunham both highlight African-American vernacular dance, as well as Caribbean dance, as a continuous experimentation and aesthetic exploration of expression in movement, concluding in a vision for new dance form. This is exposed in Durkin's descriptions of the intersections of "high" and "low" art, modernity, commercial, and artistic differences. However, as Durkin also explains, both artists felt that performing and filmmaking in Europe gave them greater opportunities to feature their creativity and artistry, given that racial relations in the United States not only limited, but invisibilized their contributions. This narrative is constructed by framing, first, Baker's experience in French silent film in 1927 in the chapter titled "Performing within Primitivism," in which Baker's humor is seen as a strategy against the colonial gaze. Then, Durkin continues the artist's path into stardom in France, inside and outside of the same constraints. Dunham's American film experiences are narrated as "cinematic segregation," a useful term to understand the dynamics in which Dunham was both an important contributor and a crafty negotiator within the racial realities under which she was forced to work. As Durkin is constructing her analysis by seeing these ideas in both artists' experiences on opposite sides of the Atlantic, she follows Dunham into the European post-World War II films. Dunham and her company were immensely popular, and her signature technique appears in many of the film choreographies in which Dunham had been involved between 1950 and 1956. Baker, who had almost retired at that point, was so moved by seeing the Dunham dancers in Paris, that she made a comeback, which

included, as Dunham did, a renewed aesthetics for her dance forms.

One of the main contributions that Durkin points out consistently is that both Baker and Dunham, although well-known and revered artists, continue to be overlooked as powerful authors of their dance aesthetic, innovators, and activists of anti-racism. Since I am from the Caribbean, and as we do our scholarly work in relative isolation from the capitals that circulate scholarly production, I couldn't help but notice that there is still a much needed conversation warranted in order to continue to place the radical contribution of these artists in the context of the geographies where much of their source material came from, and within the relationship between the United States, Europe, Africa, South America, and the Caribbean. This is explored in Dunham's work in my own book length study: *Defiant Itineraries: Caribbean Paradigms in American Dance and Film* (2015). Dunham is always conscious of this as she choreographs and features Caribbean dance in her film work, as is Baker, yet the geographical and artistic relationship between the work and the archive it also defies, merits many more studies like Durkin's and, eventually, mention of studies like mine that are conducted outside of the metropolitan academy.

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## THE CHOREOPOLITICS OF ALAIN PLATEL'S *LES BALLETS C DE LA B: EMOTIONS, GESTURES, POLITICS*

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For more than three decades, Flemish choreographer Alain Platel has been at the forefront of the European dance scene. Yet a major academic publication on his work and the company so closely associated with him, *les ballets C de la B* (standing for *Contemporains* and *Belgique*), is long overdue. Who is Alain Platel, what drives him, and what is his work's social, political, and dramaturgical significance? *The Choreopolitics of Alain Platel's les ballets C de la B: Emotions, Gestures, Politics* is a first in several regards. It is the first to assemble a multitude of knowledgeable writings about Platel and his company from diverse perspectives. It is also the first—and long anticipated—volume in Bloomsbury's new *Dance in Dialogue* series, supported by the British Society for Dance Research and Bloomsbury Academic. Series editors Anita Gonzalez, Katerina Paramana, and Victoria Thoms have devoted this series to the intersection (or “dialogue”) between dance, performance, and a wide array of other disciplines.

The volume is—withstanding its rather small font size—well presented, with a pleasing front cover and including more than thirty illustrations. Its essays, seventeen in all, are full of evocations of Platel's rich stage imagery and engage in lively discussion. Contrary to the subtitle's suggestion, the collection is grouped into four rather than three parts, each with a different emphasis: dramaturgies, emotions, gestures, and politics. In line with the Bloomsbury series' mission, the authors hail from different subject areas, including dance studies, theater, music, psychotherapy, performance art, and musicology. The chapters are preceded by a useful introduction penned by the three volume editors Christel Stalpaert, Guy Cools, and Hildegard de Vuyst, which provides a lucid overview of the four topic clusters and short synopses of each chapter. The editors are expertly acquainted with Platel's work as his dramaturg (De Vuyst), critic and coproducer (Cools), and Ghent-based scholar (Stalpaert). While acknowledging Platel's rootedness in the 1980s artistic movement of the Flemish Wave, they take issue with what they see as its “reductive identity politics” (3), resisting in particular the policing of movement as expounded in André Lepecki's 2013 article “Choreopolic and Choreopolitics: Or, the Task of the Dancer.”