

## Notes

1. This publication was partially conceived as an update and expansion of the special issue on Forsythe's work in the journal *Choreography and Dance*, edited by Senta Driver in 2000. Four of the authors who originally contributed to the journal issue have updated their articles or have written entirely new essays for this book. Six other writers have joined the conversation in the volume, including Forsythe himself. In 2004, Gerald Siegmund edited a German-language collection of essays on Forsythe's work, *William Forsythe: Denken in Bewegung*, which, unfortunately, has not yet been published in English.

2. I was also one of Forsythe's collaborators from 2002–2006, first as dramaturg of Ballet Frankfurt, and later as executive director of the Forsythe Foundation.

3. See Forsythe (1999); Forsythe, Palazzi and Zuniga-Shaw (2009); and Groves, deLahunta, and Zuniga-Shaw (2007).

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- Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures**  
edited by Susanna Sloat. 2010. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida. 393 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.  
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Today the scholarly study of dance is well on its way to gaining academic legitimacy, but the progress is slow: in the United States there are not many PhD programs in Dance Studies, and jobs for dance scholars are few and far between. Nevertheless, dance scholarship continually gains in breadth, depth, and sophistication, while also entering into fruitful exchange with any number of other fields and theoretical domains. These exchanges have been critically important in allowing dance scholars to explore how and why dance matters to politics, geography, youth, urban sites, and more. Just as important, such engagement has shown the academy more broadly that dance—like any other kind of cultural production—is itself politically, historically, and culturally complex, multifaceted, and above all, relevant. It is this move away from a more didactic and documentary impulse that has allowed scholarship on dance to flourish; the dominance of that same problematic impulse in this volume is, therefore, its greatest weakness.

With twenty-one contributions arranged geographically, *Making Caribbean Dance* is at once hefty and unwieldy. The chapters come from a range of authors with a corresponding range of backgrounds: many are dancers themselves, some are dancer/scholars, others are choreographers, some are primarily researchers.

The large number of contributions and the breadth of their topics make the book something approaching comprehensive—so much is covered here, from dance hall in Jamaica to Indian dance in Trinidad. Perhaps if conceived as an encyclopedia of Caribbean dance, the project would have been more successful. It seems clear that in order to accommodate the large number of chapters, unusually tight limits on length had to be imposed. The result is that many essays end abruptly or feel incomplete, and there is little opportunity for in-depth analysis and discussion. The volume is most useful as a sort of primer that provides descriptive examples of Caribbean dance forms—some of them well known (Rumba) and others less so (Big Drum). This review focuses on a small subset of the chapters to illustrate the pleasures and problems of the collection overall.

Several artist statements are included, and these are among the most provocative and useful portions of the volume. These artists do not feel confined to reproducing traditional, academic forms of the essay, for instance, and the freshness of their voices and perspectives provides fertile opportunity for thinking about their specific work—and dance in general—in novel ways. “The Drums Are Calling My Name” by Nicolás Dumit Estévez is a dreamy recollection of childhood experiences with television, dance, and performance, while in “Helen, Heaven, and I,” Tania Isaac describes her own choreographic world and world-view with direct language that speaks and moves.

Those looking for theoretically engaged, critical analysis will be disappointed. Virtually none of the chapters frames its topic conceptually; neither does any of them conduct interpretation or analysis that is theoretically engaged. Considerations of epistemology, knowledge-making, meaning production, cultural politics, gender issues, questions of race or colonialism—all remain utterly untheorized, though these issues do make shadowy, uninflected appearances in several chapters. The Caribbean occupies a prominent place in both the geography and scholarship of modernity—in flows of the Black Atlantic culture, in the development of postcolonial theory, and in the invention of Negritude. The absence of analysis drawing from or contributing to these ongoing discussions is a glaring omission that appears as nothing so much as a missed opportunity

for studies of dance, and for dance studies more broadly.

One notable exception to this problem is Isaac Nii Arong’s chapter, “Ghanaian Gome and Jamaican Kumina: West African Influences.” Poetically written and offered as an analysis of cultural kinship between Jamaica and Ghana, the essay is nonlinear and thus embodies the very circuits of the cultural movement it traces. With its strategic choice of writing format, it is a strong example of what anthropologist Delmos Jones would have termed “native anthropology.” By this, Jones meant specifically a use of native concepts and theories, not just Western anthropology practiced by supposed natives (1970). A Ghanaian using indigenous (perhaps post-colonial) concepts in order to describe and understand Jamaican cultural forms is undeniably an example of Jones’s kind of native anthropology.

“Rumba Encounters” by Juliet McMains offers an intriguing account of the author’s efforts to trace the lineage of ballroom-style rumba, which today seems to hold little or no relationship to Cuban rumba as it exists in Cuba. Her detective work has some worthwhile payoffs. Following leads and clues, McMains finds that specific artists who taught rumba in Cuba in the late 1930s were likely the sources of key transformations in step—and especially rhythm—in what typifies ballroom-style rumba today. What is missing from the essay is any contextual sense of the cultural, class, or historical politics embodied in rumba’s travels (or the author’s own involvement in those travels). Her discovery that the source of ballroom-style rumba can be most likely traced to a few specific teachers whose mastery of the form both musically and bodily was probably—at best—mediocre is remarkable and important, but the implications of this remain unexplored. What does it mean for an internationally influential dance form such as ballroom rumba to be founded upon what was, it seems, bad dancing? Considering the way in which “bad” dancing can become the epitome of what is deemed to be “good” seems fruitful and provocative. These were teachers, who because of their racial and social capital, could teach rich foreigners—foreigners who, for their part, could hardly tell an expert from a bumbling novice. What happens when the awkward mistakes of an inexperienced-expert become the

foundation for a new form that takes on a life of its own? Does it even matter? What fascinating questions to consider, if only they had been pursued. To be fair, McMains notes that rumba as practiced by the Cuban (white) elite of the time was hardly likely to bear much resemblance to the down-and-dirty versions being inculcated in local bars, courtyards, and rural compounds where “authentic” rumba was and is practiced by the darker and poorer Cubans. The point is that cleavages of race and class within Cuba—and between Cubans and touring foreigners—require not just description but analytical attention as well. What is lacking here is what C. Wright Mills called, in the title of his well-known book, the sociological imagination. It is certainly impossible to avoid comparing this particular essay with Marta Savigliano’s *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (1995), which traces the similar travels of Tango onto ballroom floors and world stages. One important difference between McMains’s essay and Savigliano’s work is the central role of context and theory in providing a grounding for understanding the what, why, and how of the dance, its history, and its meaning across time and space. Given the personal nature of McMains’s essay, some attention to questions of the author’s own cultural/political/power positions as she conducted her work would have enriched the discussion, providing a through-line in understanding the ways in which the quests of dancers from the United States have provided problematic “opportunities” for dancers in Cuba, both before and since the revolution. To what degree are Cubans compelled by tourist/consumers to offer up versions of their dance cultures deemed authentic? What complex forces are at work when particular elements of cultural material are picked up and transported abroad, and to what ends?

Similarly, Celia Bambara Weiss goes some of the way—but does not travel nearly far enough—on an interpretive or analytical journey. Focusing on the different approaches of three prominent dancer-choreographers in and around Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Weiss describes the varying ways in which each of these women understands and mobilizes Vodou, its

traditions and expression. Moreover, she investigates how each views the limits of mixing Vodou with other forms such as ballet, modern, or yoga. Few dance scholars have paid much attention to the ways in which supposedly traditional artists are deeply engaged with various strands of modernity in their work, and Weiss’s point, if elucidated more fully, is one with exceptionally promising possibilities. What might this ethnographic example contribute to ongoing discussions of tradition and authenticity? How do these women’s different positions with regard to dance accord (or conflict) with their own widely varying social and class identities—identities that matter so deeply in Haitian culture? It is frustrating that these questions are at best alluded to, but remain fundamentally unexplored.

As a compendium of well-described and specific examples of dances that, on the whole, are rarely seen or experienced outside their specific cultural settings, *Making Caribbean Dance* is an excellent reference source for those seeking basic information. It is, then, something of a starting place. Ultimately, what this volume shows quite starkly is that documentation and description are critically important endeavors in dance studies, but they are not useful when they become an end in themselves. Engagement with theory, interpretation, and critique all deeply enhance our understanding of how and why dance matters so much. Such engagement increases our understanding of dance and its place in the world, and it also helps to establish dance as a legitimate arena of study in the academy and beyond.

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