

## The Language of Classical Ballet

by Flavia Pappacena. 2012. Rome, Italy: Gremese E Editore. 240 pp., 400+ illustrations, bibliographical references. \$30.95 paper.  
doi:10.1017/S0149767713000107

For the list price alone, Flavia Pappacena's *The Language of Classical Ballet* would be a treasure for collectors of ballet imagery. Although my early version of the book did not have numbered images, I counted roughly 409, with nearly half of them in color. This kind of book exceeds the quantity of images in Clarke and Crisp's *Ballet: An Illustrated History* (1973), which was published with only black and white images. Pappacena reintroduces several French scenographic gems previously known only from James Laver's *Costume in the Theatre* (1964).

The author's perspective—an analysis of ballet's iconography in order to define ballet as a medium—is interesting. Her basic thesis uses imagery related to scenic and costume design renderings, publicity documents, and choreographic transcriptions as a means of reconstructing how dance technique may have developed into “classical ballet.” To my knowledge, there is no other ballet book that takes this premise so far.

Such an ambitious method of reconstruction requires a strong timeline, but Pappacena veers from the familiar chronology that is often applied to ballet history. Though she cites *le Ballet Comique* (1582) as an important first step toward the development of ballet, she does not include any of its related visual imagery, nor any imagery related to dance until the court of Louis XIV. Her endpoint for source materials stops with late nineteenth century French, Italian, and Russian works. The absence of dance imagery from the Court of Louis XIII, as seen in Margaret McGowan's excellent *The Court Ballet of Louis XIII* (1990) and the Ballets Russes' treatment of classical ballet in the early twentieth century, would have strengthened her arguments about the continuation of iconic forms in ballet. The total absence of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries seems to refute her contention that classical ballet has continued to develop beyond the nineteenth century.

This all seems largely linked to a “lost in translation” situation: the unfortunate choice of *The Language of Classical Ballet* for the book's English title in place of Pappacena's original *Il linguaggio della danza classica*. The translation of *danza classica* to “classical ballet” is problematic, since “classical ballet” has become a kind of catch-all term in English for Petipa's ballet innovations in late nineteenth-century Russia. Although she mentions Petipa, choosing to highlight only *The Sleeping Beauty* (itself a throwback to seventeenth-century court ballet before the establishment of classical dance technique) while ignoring other “classical” works such as *Swan Lake* and the *Nutcracker* further confuses the boundaries of this terminology. Ultimately, the author and/or translator's insistence on “classical” in the book's title derails the excellent points that Pappacena attempts to make.

As such, it is difficult to place this book within a reader's demographic, since it is a strange hybrid of a picture book and a treatise attempting to create a methodology to define the history of “classical” ballet. Imbued with little of the gravitas of Kant's *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet* (2007) or Lee's *Ballet in Western Culture* (2002), *The Language of Classical Ballet* does not use academic citation or a specified bibliography, and would not be a great tool for guiding university students through the wider trans-historical definitions of ballet as a genre. As related to dance scholarship, the book has none of the concentrated specificity of works such as Michael Burden and Jennifer Thorp's *Ballet de la Nuit* (2009), which presents the entire scope of scenographic images from an individual ballet production. And although I previously raved about the book's quantity of images, in the version that I read, the basic attribution of many of the images was incomplete, making them fairly useless for academics. (The Italian publishing house seems strangely immune to the copyright laws that make including such an expansive collection of unattributed images impossible for American publishers.) In short, although Pappacena's attempt to use ballet iconography as a tool to reconstruct ballet history is interesting, there is much lacking in this work.

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## Works Cited

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## Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship

by Yvonne Daniel. 2011. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. xviii + 296 pp., 14 photographs, 18 charts, notes, bibliography, index. \$75 cloth, \$28 paper.  
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*Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship*, Daniel's third book on Afro-Caribbean dance, is a testament to her extensive knowledge, which has been accumulated over a lifetime devoted to ethnographic research on a variety of Afro-diasporic dance forms. This latest book is methodologically very different from Daniel's previous works, which are in-depth analyses based primarily on ethnographic research. Here, Daniel offers the reader a historical overview of the development of Afro-Caribbean dances, informed by ethnographic research, from the sixteenth century to the present. *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance* is conceptualized as an introductory book aimed at teachers and beginning practitioners of Caribbean dance, which Daniel hopes will provide a "solid foundation on which African Diaspora dance genres can be examined as representative culture of related peoples" (xv). Daniel focuses precisely on the interrelatedness of selected Afro-Caribbean dance forms, foregrounding their shared Africanity and their ability to build local, national, and transnational Afro-diasporic

communities. Throughout the book, Daniel stresses the courage and resilience of Afro-Caribbean dancers who have endeavored to keep Afro-Caribbean dances alive. She also notes the beauty and sensuality of Afro-Caribbean dance forms, as well as their ability to foster "good physical health and psychological balance" (17).

The book is divided into nine chapters, which take the reader on a whirlwind tour of dances throughout the Caribbean, including areas Daniel refers to as "circum-Caribbean" or "related territories." (Brazil, as well as Uruguay and the United States are some of the countries included as related territories.) Her inclusion of places that are not usually considered part of the Caribbean draws attention to the commonalities among the experiences of Afro-descendants throughout the Americas. What I found puzzling about this extended view of the Caribbean, however, is the absence of Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama—countries that share Afro-diasporic dances and festivals very similar to those discussed by Daniel.

In her first chapter, "Diaspora Dance: Courageous Performers," Daniel pays homage to artists who are "recognized promoters of African dance heritage" (8). She expresses her admiration for choreographers and dance company directors from Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Curaçao, and the Virgin Islands. As promoters of Brazilian dance, Daniel acknowledges several U.S.-based choreographers, who are "uniquely responsible for promoting Brazilian forms; they use Afro-Brazilian and modern concert dance techniques on the concert, community, and educational stages to make Brazilian dance spectacle" (9). This statement exemplifies one of the book's grave omissions: a lack of critical analysis of the processes that transform Afro-diasporic dances into "spectacle"—racialized displays of difference and national identity, which are often tied to the promotion of tourism. The "courageous performers" Daniel lists seem to be, in the majority, professional transnational choreographers and directors involved in staging "folkloric" dances. In the case of Brazil, the selected representatives of Afro-Brazilian culture are in the majority U.S.-based choreographers and capoeira mestres