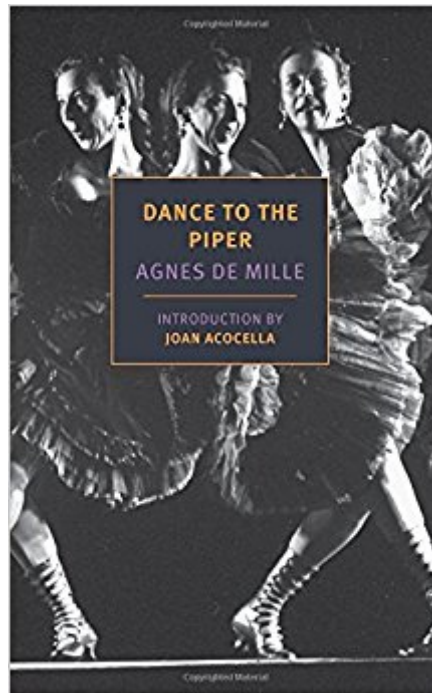




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Dance To The Piper (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Born into a family of successful playwrights and producers, Agnes de Mille was determined to be an actress. Then one day she witnessed the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, and her life was altered forever. Hypnotized by Pavlova's beauty, in that moment de Mille dedicated herself to dance. Her memoir records with lighthearted humor and wisdom not only the difficulties she faced—the resistance of her parents, the sacrifices of her training—but also the frontier atmosphere of early Hollywood and New York and London during the Depression. "This is the story of an American dancer," writes de Mille, "a spoiled egocentric wealthy girl, who learned with difficulty to become a worker, to set and meet standards, to brace a Victorian sensibility to contemporary roughhousing, and who, with happy good fortune, participated by the side of great colleagues in a renaissance of the most ancient and magical of all the arts."

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Customer Reviews

"De Mille was a writer like her father and uncle and grandfather, and not only a writer of bodies in space. She wrote prose, too, and gorgeously, with tremendous and purposive contradiction, about her life as a dancer and choreographer. To my mind, *Dance to the Piper* is as good a book about dance as any book about cinema written by a director." —Jonathon Sturgeon, Flavorwire

[A] finely written memoir, *Dance to the Piper*...was originally published in 1951. It's a dry and self-deprecating bildungsroman that was, by her account, scratched out on napkins and envelopes

while she was 'doing a barre' or tending to an infant." • "Harper's" • Perhaps the best dancer ever to write and the best writer ever to dance. • "Janice Berman, *Newsday* • Nobody can read this history of courage and belief in an ideal without understanding both dancing and human nature a little better. Indeed, I believe nobody can read this book without following it up with a salutation, • "Bravo, Agnes de Mille!" • "Carl van Vechten • *Dance to the Piper* is rich in the vitality, honesty and humour which are de Mille's professional characteristics; it gives excellently well-balanced judgements of the great dancers whom she has seen and worked with; and it also paints lively portraits of the courageous author herself. • "Lillian Browse, *The Spectator* "Enhanced with traditional ballet as well as the modern school, she was associated with both, but she made her success in her own style of American modern. She writes with verve about all three schools, describes perspectively the inseparableness of dancer and dancing, the agonies of work and exhaustion, the personality of the true ballerina who must be cut off from the norm of social and sexual life." --Kirkus Reviews "One of the finest and most eloquent writers on dance the world has known" --Clive Barnes, *Dance Magazine*

Agnes de Mille (1905–1993) was born in New York City, the daughter of the writer and director William C. de Mille, and the niece of the well-known film producer-director Cecil B. DeMille. Raised in New York and California, she attended the University of California, Los Angeles, and trained to become a dancer, studying in New York and London and touring with companies in the United States and Europe. In 1942 de Mille had her first great success as a choreographer with *Rodeo*. She went on to choreograph celebrated musicals such as *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, and the award-winning *Brigadoon* and *Kwamina*, fusing modern and classical dance techniques to create her own innovative style. She also wrote widely about her work as a dancer, the early years in Hollywood, and childhood summers spent at the family estate in New York. Despite a stroke in 1975 that led to partial paralysis, de Mille continued to work, choreographing dances for American Ballet Theatre and other companies, as well as writing and lecturing. In 1986 she was awarded the National Medal of Arts for her lifetime achievement in the theater. • Joan Acocella is a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. She is the author of *Mark Morris; Creating Hysteria: Women and Multiple Personality Disorder*; *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*; and *Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints*. She also edited the unexpurgated *Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*. •

One of the greatest books of all time about the art of Dance!

Agnes de Mille writes extremely honestly about herself in this memoir, often self-deprecatingly. Her tremendous skill as a writer is evident from the start. She comes from a family of intellectuals: Father was William C. de Mille (playwright, writer and director) and uncle Cecil B. de Mille (renowned producer-director). Her father and uncle built the name that is synonymous with movie making and production... Hollywood. The filming lots in those days were little more than scrub land with snakes wondering around the grass. She says of her father that: He was a display of intellectual pyrotechnics when speaking. And of her uncle: He was a delightful conversationalist and an exuberant raconteur, leaning on exaggeration. Not forgetting her mother, Mrs. de Mille, who also possessed a great intellect and was a tremendous influence on her. And that is where Agnes grew up. Amongst some of the most famous stars of the silent movie era and the talkies, surrounded by creativity and intellect. After meeting Anna Pavlova, in person (the famous ballerina of the period), Agnes decided that becoming a ballet dancer was her true calling. However, her lack of physical attributes needed for the art form impeded her progress. After much hard work, struggle and other avenues, she eventually turned to choreography. This is the best thing that could have happened. Most people may not know the name Agnes de Mille, but they would have seen her choreography without realising. Productions such as: Rodeo, Oklahoma, Carousel, Brigadoon and many more. Her style was unique, a blend of American, Modern and sprinkles of Classical. I was myself a principal ballet dancer in the UK and danced with The Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet. During my career, I had the good fortune to perform in one of her creations. It was the ballet Fall River Legend about the life of Lizzie Borden (an American) who was tried and acquitted for the 1892 axe murder of her father and stepmother. This ballet had the most amazing sinister atmosphere created with hardly any choreography or movement. In Agnes' version, Lizzie is found guilty and hanged. The reason I was given (by the person setting the production) was that the composer could only compose hanging music. I actually believe Lizzie was guilty of the crime. Agnes has very strong views about dance throughout, which she voices most eloquently. Some of her views I don't share, but at least she stands by them and doesn't take a vague, politically correct and diplomatic position. However, she is from a different era and this has to be remembered when reading this wonderful book. The book is entertaining, humorous and replete with anecdotes and wonderful prose. Given that she was a physical person throughout her life, and she expressed herself through movement and choreography, her skill as a writer is second to none. This is a book worth reading. I loved it. Sergiu Pobreznici (author)

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