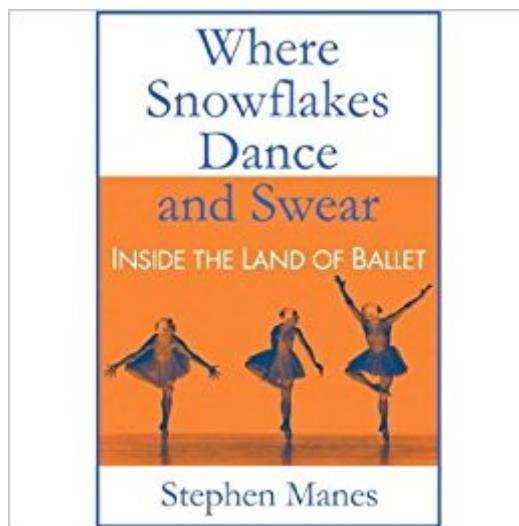


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# Where Snowflakes Dance And Swear: Inside The Land Of Ballet



## Synopsis

The internationally acclaimed book that takes you behind the scenes to reveal how ballet really happens: In a scuffed-up studio, a veteran dancer transmits the magic of an eighty-year-old ballet to a performer barely past drinking age. In a converted barn, an indomitable teacher creates ballerinas as she has for more than half a century. In a monastic mirrored room, dancers from as near as New Jersey and as far as Mongolia learn works as old as the nineteenth century and as new as this morning. *Snowflakes* zooms in on an intimate view of one full season in the life of one of America's top ballet companies and schools: Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet. But it also tracks the Land of Ballet to venues as celebrated as New York and Monte Carlo and as seemingly ordinary as Bellingham, Washington and small-town Pennsylvania. Never before has a book taken readers backstage for such a wide-ranging view of the ballet world from the wildly diverse perspectives of dancers, choreographers, stagers, teachers, conductors, musicians, rehearsal pianists, lighting directors, costumers, stage managers, scenic artists, marketers, fundraisers, students, and even pointe shoe fitters--often in their own remarkably candid words. The book follows characters as colorful as they are talented. Versatile dancers from around the globe team up with novice choreographers and those as renowned as Susan Stroman, Christopher Wheeldon, and Twyla Tharp to create art on deadline. At the book's center is Peter Boal, a former New York City Ballet star in his third year as PNB's artistic director, as he manages conflicting constituencies with charm, tact, rationality and diplomacy. Readers look over Boal's shoulder as he makes tough decisions about programming, casting, scheduling and budgeting that eventually lead the calm, low-key leader to declare that in his job, "You have to be willing to be hated." *Snowflakes* shows how ballet is made, funded, and sold. It escorts you front and center to the kick zone of studio rehearsals. It takes you to the costume shop where elegant tutus and gowns are created from scratch. It brings you backstage to see sets and lighting come alive while stagehands get lovingly snarky and obscene on their headsets. It sits you down in meetings where budgets get slashed and dreams get funded--and axed. It shows you the inner workings of *Nutcracker*, from kids' charming auditions to no-nonsense marketing meetings, from snow bags in the flies to dancing snowflakes who curse salty flurries that land on their tongues. It follows the tempestuous assembly of a version of *Romeo and Juliet* that runs afoul of so much pressure, disease, injury, and blood that the dancers begin to call it cursed. *Snowflakes* uncovers the astounding way ballets, with no common form of written preservation, are handed down from generation to generation through the prodigious memories of brilliant athletes who also happen to be artists. It visits cattle-call auditions and rigorous classes, tells the stories of dancers whose

parents sacrificed for them and dancers whose parents refused to. It meets the resolute woman who created a dance school more than fifty years ago in a Carlisle, Pennsylvania barn and grew it into one of America's most reliable ballerina factories. It shows ballet's appeal to kids from low-income neighborhoods and board members who live in mansions. Shattering longstanding die-for-your-art clichés, this book uncovers the real drama in the daily lives of fiercely dedicated artists in slippers and pointe shoes-and the musicians, stagehands, costumers, donors and administrators who support them. Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear: Inside the Land of Ballet brings readers the exciting truth of how ballet actually happens.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

If you're thinking about being daunted by the length of this book -- don't be. It is rich with human drama, starring a cast of a hundred interesting people we get to follow through their various rôles in a season of a leading ballet company. Manes makes sure you get to see their individual personalities through vivid portraits he delivers by using their own words. The unfolding dramatic events and stories about people we care about make the book a page-turner. Bypassing the apparent protocol of insider ballet writers, it's not just another retelling of ballet history through "heroic figures". It reveals the many previously unexamined or intentionally-ignored departments & people in a company, from costumes and sets to lighting and the orchestra, to marketers and ushers, all of whom are vital to the ballet experience. I think every young dancer should read "Where Snowflakes Dance and Swear". Like baseball, ballet dancing has a remarkably competitive career

path that winnows candidates. For every dancer who seems excellent at her or his own level, only a fraction make it at the next level up. As the book reveals, the commitment required to persist is enormous, the economic rewards pretty limited, the chance for personal satisfaction immense, the opportunities for ballet careers beyond dancing diverse and interesting. A young dancer will become both more realistic and more emotionally durable by reading the book. I didn't know a ton about ballet before I started reading Manes' book. I now believe I have the kind of knowledge one gets from a really good "plant tour". I feel like I really know a lot of the individuals I met through this insightful and fun book.

Stephen Manes spent a little over a year at Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB), from preparation of the 2007-8 season, Peter Boal's third as Artistic Director with the company after a much-celebrated career as a Principal Dancer with New York City Ballet (NYCB), to the very beginning of the 2008-9 season, and he followed just about every aspect of life in the company and the hundreds -- thousands if you consider families and mentors -- of people that make a season possible. It is similar to Joseph Mazo's "Dance is a Contact Sport" in that Manes dedicated his life to a season with a company, but far from being just about dancers and choreographers. Manes takes an in-depth look at the school, classes, coaching, backstage, PR, the front of the house, administration, touring, auditions, fundraising, the orchestra, the Board: all of the aspects that come together to make the organization run and the performances happen. He even pays a visit to The Barn in Carlisle, PA. He also avoids the self-conscious cutesy style into which Mazo, a sportswriter, lapsed. Many people have asked over and over, "How are works transmitted?" "How do the dancers learn them?" "How do dancers work?" This book describes all of this in great detail, including the contrast in style, approach, and expectation of different  
stagers/stager-choreographers/choreographers. Because that season boasted so many new works of different sizes and demands, there is quite a contrast. (The one thing they had in common, how many times they praised and encouraged, was the biggest surprise to me.)

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