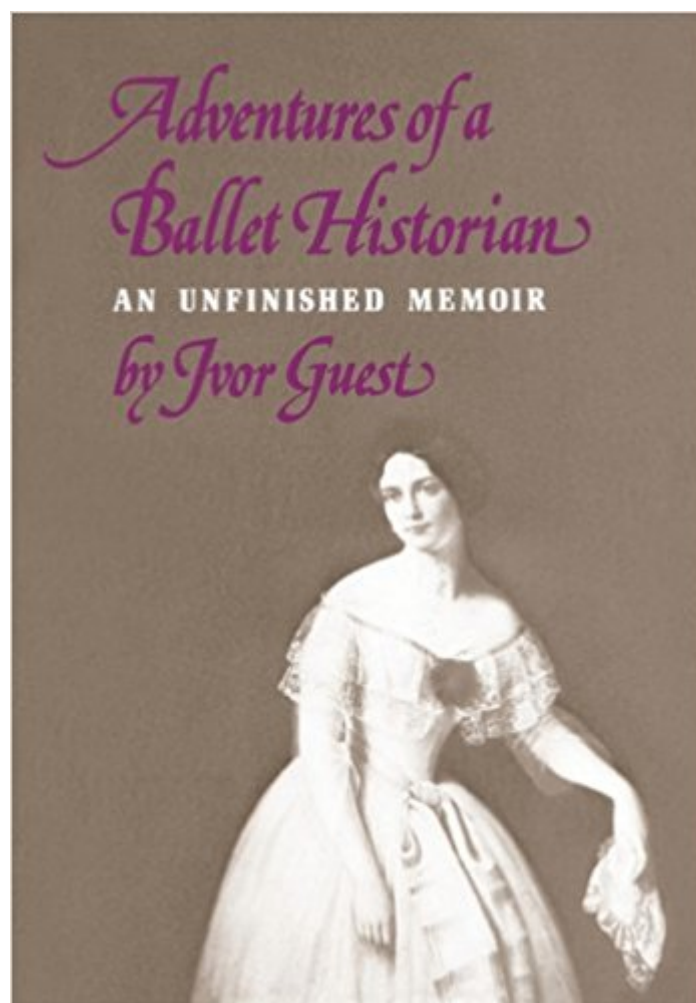


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Adventures Of A Ballet Historian (Unfinished Memoir)



Synopsis

A historian's task is a voyage of discovery, and in these personal reminiscences Ivor Guest allows the reader to share the romance of recreating times past. Since his first published article appeared in the 1940s he has vastly expanded and enriched our knowledge of ballet in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through more than a score of books, many of them definitive works, that are a rare blend of scrupulous scholarship and readability. The story of his involvement in the world of ballet is a romance in itself. When he was drawn to the study of ballet history, comparatively little serious research had been done, and he found himself working in virtually virgin soil - the fulfillment of an historian's dream. The Paris Opera, with its library and archives, became his mecca, where he returned year after year to unearth the material on which were based his classic chronicles of the French ballet. In time his pre-eminence was to be recognised when he - an Englishman - was commissioned to write the official history of the Paris Opera Ballet. For him all this was a labour of love - almost in a literal sense, for as he reconstructed the lives of long-dead ballerinas through his patient research and deductive sleuthing, he fell under their spell like a man in love. His biographies are written with an easy style that conceals the toil that went into them, but in this book he tells of his quests for characters who were often maddeningly elusive, such as his 'first love', Fanny Cerrito. The account of his search for the date of her death is told with a touch of fine comedy, and culminates in the discovery of her descendants. These 'Adventures' are concerned mainly with Ivor Guest's work as a writer, but this is by no means the whole story. He played a crucial part in the creation of Frederick Ashton's 'La Fille mal gardée', discovering the early scores from which the music for this evergreen ballet was adapted, and his marriage to Ann Hutchinson led him up new paths as they combined their talents, hers as a specialist in dance notation, to recreate several choreographic gems from the past, including Fanny Elssler's famous Cachucha. And, to emphasise that his life is not all spent at his desk or in dusty archives, he tells the story of his involvement with the Royal Academy of Dance, as Chairman of its Executive Committee from 1969, when it was on the verge of bankruptcy, to the 1980s when it was riding high as the largest and most vital association of ballet teachers in the world. These reminiscences illuminate an aspect of the dance world that seldom comes into the limelight, yet is of great importance for its cultural significance. Scholars and writers who lift the curtain on the past work quietly in the background. This book tells the story of one of them, who in the field of dance scholarship is internationally recognised for his work.

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