FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Choreography and the Specific Image: Nineteen Essays and a Workbook

Daniel Nagrin
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Discovering the inner forces of dance-making has never been an easy task for choreographers. Few artists have probed this area as deeply as the author, a legendary modern dance artist and gifted teacher and writer. Now professor emeritus of dance at Arizona State University, Nagrin draws on his experience as a performer and choreographer, creating a book that fills a need in choreographic pedagogy.

Unlike other choreographic texts that focus on design elements, Nagrin's book explores dance by focusing on content and the sources of passion that can shape a dance. "To make a fine piece of choreography," he writes, "all that is needed is a passion for exploring in depth that single phrase. If passion isn't the driving force, there's no point in making art at all and the center of this book is locating the sources of passion."

Nagrin's essays comprise the first half of this book, including descriptions of his work with Helen Tamiris. Discovering the inner motivations of dance and realizing "the specific image" of individual dances are the major premises. Nagrin also addresses the role of improvisation and the investigation of metaphor in dance. Through specific examples of his work with students, he offers rules for the choreographer to ponder when creating new work. Nagrin's theories are clearly grounded in his lifelong approach to creating dance that is rich in meaning.

Notable essays address comparisons between modern dance and ballet choreography; the concerns of both solo and group choreography; and choreography for theatre, musical comedy, and opera, with additional contributions from prominent artists working in these fields. In the final essay, Nagrin states, "We need to look at and unearth the more subtle vibrations and motions that lie within our being." These reflections cast light on the subtler and nobler aspects of our being from which the aspiring dance artist can derive inspiration.

The second half of the book, "The Workbook," offers improvisational exercises that support the discovery of "the specific image" in choreography and performance. Many of these exercises, applicable to solo and group settings, are based on Nagrin's previous work in

directing the dance company “Workgroup,” which explored improvisation as a viable resource for choreography. The exercises challenge the dancer to probe more deeply into the areas of motivation and intention that affect choreography.

The author’s writings provide potent information regarding the creation of powerful dance statements, accompanied by beautiful drawings by Phyllis Steele-Nagrin, which capture the essence of dancers in practice.

Drawing on his continual interactions with prominent colleagues and students, Nagrin’s book vibrates with the energy and passion of dance itself.

Dorothy Eisenstein