



## In Balanchine's Company: A Dancer's Memoir

**Barbara Milberg Fisher**

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“Balanchine possessed a kind of multi-dimensional alertness that included the immediate phrase of music and the spatial design of the sequence he was envisioning,” writes the author, “but also an uncanny awareness of the physical idiom of the dancer he was working with, the way that person naturally moved.”

Fisher, a former soloist with the New York City Ballet and professor emeritus of English at City College of New York, illuminates the world of George Balanchine from a company dancer's perspective. Her memoir of the formative years of the New York City Ballet provides insightful information on Balanchine's legacy while illuminating the many collaborative artists, including Igor Stravinsky, who played major roles in the shaping of the legendary company.

Fisher's account of touring with the New York City Ballet in the early 1950s is filled with recollection of professional triumphs and personal anecdotes. She describes witnessing Balanchine's choreographic genius while he created the role of Stravinsky's Firebird for Maria Tallchief and the transformative effect of her performance. Fisher takes the reader through the trials of performing on raked stages of Europe unsuitable for the demands of ballet) and through a humorous costume mishap during a performance at the Champs-Élysées. Throughout this riveting memoir, the author reveals the camaraderie of company members and the purposeful work that bonded the dancers to each other and to Balanchine.

During the time Fisher danced with the company, Balanchine collaborated with Stravinsky on the ballet *Agon*. “Two Russian geniuses had designed a muscular, vigorous, acrobatic, elegant, compact, contrapuntal, and marvelously healthy bird of fire.” Fisher's account of working with Balanchine on this masterpiece is interspersed with details of her simultaneous marriage to Howard Fisher. From this perspective of counterpoint, Fisher depicts *Agon* as a turning point in her own history as well as a time of renewal and change for the New York City Ballet. The ballet *Agon* also introduced audiences to the young black dancer Arthur Mitchell, future founder of The Dance Theatre of Harlem. Fisher describes Balanchine's ingenuity in breaking down barriers of race relations through his enigmatic choreography.

Fisher later joined Jerome Robbins's Ballets: USA and was part of this first ballet company to dance at the White House as guests of the First Lady and President Kennedy. Fisher danced with Balanchine when New York City Ballet was just beginning their remarkable history. She shares that history through a personal narrative that is accessible to all readers regardless of their knowledge of dance. A moving memoir of an inspired era of ballet. (October 4, 2006)

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