

Evaluation of *Dance on camera: A guide to dance films and videos*

Deirdre Stretton

San Jose State University

Christine Moore/LIBR 220-02

March 10, 2006

*Dance on camera: A guide to dance films and videos* is an index of dance in films and video. Edited by Louise Spain and published in 1998 by Scarecrow Press and Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., it is an updated and revised edition of the title *The dance on film and video guide* and claims to be the only book of its kind. From initial searches, it does appear to be the only current resource on the subject, and as such, it is a very useful reference for those who are looking for dance on film and video.

Of the over 1400 entries in the index, more than 400 are new since the last edition and the rest of the entries were edited, updated and checked for accuracy. The listings were compiled from catalogs published by distributors that have been collected over the years and have been extensively reviewed for this edition of the book. Other resources were consulted as well, including Stanley Green's *Encyclopedia of the musical film* and *That's dancing* by Tony Thomas, and all the references used to compile the data are listed in the book's introduction.

Each entry consists of the title, year, minutes, whether it's in color or black and white, and the medium. It lists series, distributor, producer, choreographer(s), principal dancers, category, awards and a brief description of the film or video. Nearly all types of dance are covered, from Hollywood musicals to the traditional dances of Israel and Bali, to "Circus Arts." The volume also contains several indexes in which the listings are cross-referenced. Indexes include listings by awards, categories, choreographers, dancers, dance companies, directors, excerpts and series titles. This makes it a reference of great use to a number of researchers who may need to access resources in a variety of ways. The excerpts index makes it even more valuable, indexing items that might not be available in their entirety, but that can be seen through clips in other works. It also

includes a directory of distributors for the items in the reference and resources both in the US and worldwide, which would be extremely useful in locating the needed items.

*Dance on camera* was edited by Louise Spain, a librarian and director of media services in La Guardia Community College's Library Media Resources Center in New York. She is the former president and current treasurer of the Dance Films Association, the association closely associated with the publication of this book. The Dance Films Association has been around for nearly fifty years and "promotes excellence in dance on camera and public awareness of the artform through festivals, screenings, publications, grants, and workshops" (<http://www.dancefilmsassn.org/NewPages/about.html>). The book contains a foreword by Jacques d'Amboise, a renowned dancer and choreographer from the New York City Ballet, in which he stresses the importance of being able to view what has been done in the past and the necessity of a resource such as this. However this book goes beyond being a simple resource, as it also includes several short articles by dancers, professors and professionals that discuss dance on film. *Dance on camera* was published by Scarecrow Press and Neal-Schuman Publishers. Scarecrow Press is a publisher known for its reference titles in the arts and humanities, and Neal-Schuman for its library and information science titles. Those two entities together give the title credibility in terms of its being a credible reference source.

Because of the wide range of materials cataloged in this reference book, it could be useful to a wide variety of users. Dance instructors could find videos to help illustrate techniques to students, students doing papers on the history of musical theater, parents looking for dance films or videos for the child interested in dance, dance enthusiasts, choreographers looking for different kinds of movements to incorporate into routines, and

much more. One could say that it could be of interest to almost anyone interested in dance. However, there are a few limitations to the scope of the volume. Firstly, it is at this point quite out of date. Many more dance films have been made since 1998, and a new edition and more frequent editions seem like they would be necessary to keep up with the vast amount of dance films and videos being made. Significant modern dance movements such as krumping that can be found in the 2005 documentary *Rize*, as well as popular stage performance *Riverdance* are not listed, even though the latter came out in 1995 and should be in the scope of the index. Another area that surprisingly seems to be lacking is music videos. Only when they are compiled into a single resource, such as *Everybody Dance Now*, are music videos listed in this reference. Granted, there are so many of them (that are not always commercially available) that they could provide enough content for their own reference title, but it seems surprisingly lacking considering the popularity of dance in music videos today.

Overall this appears to be a reliable reference resource that could be valuable to a wide variety of users. While it is in serious need of a new and updated edition, and the coverage of music videos is lacking, it covers an otherwise wide variety of dance from around the world and throughout the history of film and video.