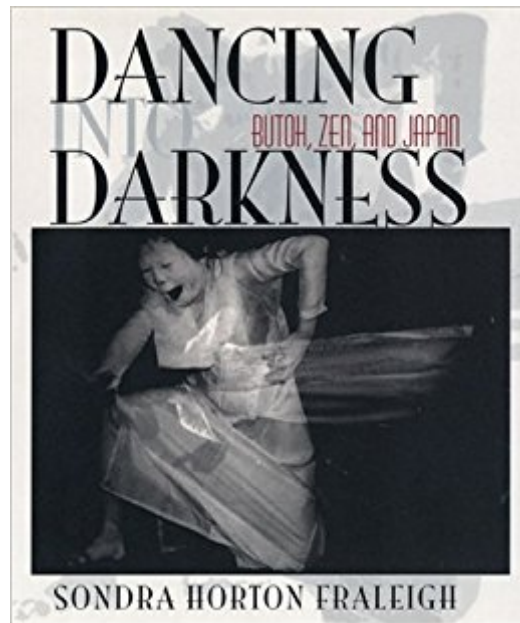




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Dancing Into Darkness: Butoh, Zen, And Japan



Synopsis

Dancing Into Darkness is Sondra Horton Fraleigh's chronological diary of her deepening understanding of and appreciation for this art form, as she moves from a position of aesthetic response as an audience member to that of assimilation as a student. As a student of Zen and butoh, Fraleigh witnesses her own artistic and personal transformation through essays, poems, interviews, and reflections spanning twelve years of study, much of it in Japan. Numerous performance photographs and original calligraphy by Fraleigh's Zen teacher Shodo Akane illuminate her words. The pieces of Dancing Into Darkness cross boundaries, just as butoh anticipates a growing global amalgamation. "Butoh is not an aesthetic movement grafted onto Western dance," Fraleigh concludes, "and Western dance may be more Eastern than we have been able to see."

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Customer Reviews

“Should inspire anyone interested in the active feminine voice...It has a niche beyond the dancer-reader, to those drawn to Japan, to cultural anthropology, and to cross-culturalism.”
—Janice LaPointe-Crump, Texas Woman's University

Sondra Horton Fraleigh chairs the Department of Dance at the State University of New York, Brockport. She is the author of *Dance and the Lived Body* and co-editor (with Penelope Hanstein) of *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*. Her articles have been published in texts on dance

and movement, philosophy, and cognitive development. She has been a guest teacher of dance and somatic therapy in America, Japan, England, and Norway. She has served as president of the Congress of Research in Dance and is a Faculty Exchange Scholar for the State University of New York. Her innovative choreography has been seen on tour in America, Germany, and Japan, where she has also been a visiting scholar at several universities.

5 stars for Sondra Horton Fraleigh's essays, which she wrote while staying in Japan. Her personal insight and discussions and workshops and performances with masters of this dance philosophy are an essential read to delve deeper into the subject.

Fraleigh's book is a hidden gem in the search for documentation regarding Butoh. When recently trying to research the subject for a performance art project I found myself confronted with the task of gaining access to this impenetrable medium; There is not a lack to discover, just merely a lack to provide. "Dancing Into Darkness," acts as both journal to Fraleigh's personal discovery of Butoh and also the relationship that the medium has today (for some of artists) with Zen - which ultimately results in her internal discovery - an experience, that as a reader, is overwhelmingly beautiful on occasion. The text also acts as a kickoff point in understanding the conceptualization of the movement and gives reference to the facts and exploration of these to a certain point. Chapters are headed by instances of calligraphy and haiku, which perfectly set mood and pace. The only negative criticism that one may have is that in terms of pure research, though this does provide the necessary spiritualism that one needs in understanding the piece, it lacks the essay like critiques that some may desire for their own work. Either way this is a book that should suit all, purists, intellectuals, newcomers and those seeking the spiritual.

Butoh is a dance 'genre' that, for the most part, is hard to pin down into a digestible definition. Perhaps that is the beauty of it, perhaps the nature of it. Butoh, one could say, evades definition and just 'is'. Fraleigh's book takes this quality account; in the form of diary entries and snapshots of classes and performances, Fraleigh writes from a personal place, describing events and ideas of her own while providing some kind of context for Butoh's background, variability, and poetry. I was particularly interested in her exploration of the way butoh explores/uses the feminine principle. I suggest this book for those who have grown tired of reading purely academic journal articles or textbooks. Fraleigh is a dance scholar and thus, an academic, but writes this particular book in a way that it is both beautiful and readable. She gives us a good sense of what butoh involves, but

also humbly acknowledges her position as someone writing from a Western perspective.

"Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen and Japan" is an excellent resource for Drama and Dance Teachers who are truly trying to understand an art form that they may not be too familiar with. I found particularly useful the author's ability to describe some of the dances she witnessed, the language creates clear and beautiful images in the reader's mind and if read to a class with music in the background or with the students lying down eyes closed it could definitely help their understanding of this unusual style. Maureen Billiau

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