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## REVIEWS

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**American Indian Ballerinas.** By Lili Cockerille Livingston. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. 328 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

This book provides in-depth biographical information about four Native American women who became premier ballerinas in the mid-twentieth century. For those who are familiar with and interested in the world of classical dance, the book should prove enlightening and informative. For those who are interested in Native American culture, gender issues, history, and questions of identity, the book suggests possibilities for further research but ultimately leaves readers hungry for more analysis.

The book follows the lives and dance careers of Rosella Hightower, Maria and Marjorie Tali'chief, and Yvonne Chouteau. All four women were born in the 1920s in Oklahoma. Hightower, of mixed Choctaw and Irish heritage, moved with her family to Kansas City in the late 1920s, where her father had obtained a job with the railroad and where she served as a star player on her school's as well as her father's baseball teams. At age thirteen, she witnessed a Russian ballet company and "decided then that that was what I was going to do with my life" (p. 13). Trading in her baseball glove for pointe shoes, Rosella began to study ballet in New York at the age of fourteen. "I loved being in front of an audience," Rosella told the author. "And I felt in my place onstage" (p. 15). In 1937, at the age of eighteen, she auditioned and won a place in

the Ballets Russes, a company based in Monte Carlo. Shortly thereafter, after Germany invaded Poland, Hightower and her troupe returned to the United States, where she eventually joined another company, married a French set designer and painter, and bore a daughter. Hightower later returned to Europe, where she opened a ballet school in Cannes, France.

Maria (Betty Marie) and Marjorie Tallchief, sisters born to an Osage father and a mother of Scotch, Irish, and Dutch descent, took up ballet and dance from an early age. Maria also became an accomplished concert pianist. As children, Maria and Marjorie performed frequently. One of their most popular routines—Stars and Stripes Forever—featured a grand finale in which “Maria wore a cape that had an American flag sewn into the lining. At the end she would do fouettés holding the cape open while [Marjorie] did walk-overs around her in a circle. As silly as it all was, people always wanted us to come back” and gave the girls a “big round of applause” (p. 36). The Tallchiefs also performed caricatures of Indian dances. “We had bells on our ankles and hopped around in headpieces decorated with feathers,” Maria remembered. “Obviously it had nothing to do with traditional Indian dances. As I remember them, the authentic Osage dances were kind of lethargic, and I don’t think Mother thought they were suitable for showcasing our best attributes” (p. 36). The juxtaposition of these two performances begged for commentary and analysis, but instead Livingston continued her chronicle of the sisters’ path to ballet stardom.

Using the profits from Osage oil, the Tallchief family moved to California to promote the girls’ dancing and music careers. There they studied dance with Bronislava Nijinska, the “grande dame of Russian ballet in America” (p. 41). Attending Beverly Hills High School, the girls appeared in films and performed in a gala evening of dance at the Hollywood Bowl. Within a year of winning a place in the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo on its Canadian tour, Maria had become one of the company’s premier ballerinas. After working extensively with the famous choreographer George Balanchine, Maria married him in 1946. Between 1947 and 1957, Maria starred in twenty-two ballets choreographed by Balanchine. Having become America’s first and foremost ballerina, Maria was named woman of the year in 1951 by *Mademoiselle* magazine. In 1952, she portrayed Anna Pavlova in the MGM film, *Million Dollar Mermaid*. That same year, she also divorced Balanchine. Eventually, she married a Chicago con-

tractor and set up a dance school and company in Chicago. As Maria's career took off, Marjorie found further work in Hollywood films and a Judy Garland spectacular. In 1944, she was named Pin-Up Girl for the 414th Air Squadron. Eventually she, too, joined a professional ballet company and married another Russian dancer/choreographer, George Skibine. Just three months after giving birth to twins in 1952, Marjorie returned to the stage. After retiring from performance in the late 1960s, she opened a ballet school in Dallas. One of her sons became the director of gaming for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. After her husband's death, Marjorie moved to Chicago and then Florida, where she ran other ballet schools.

To me, Yvonne Chouteau proved to be the most intriguing of the women featured here. In Chouteau's case, the author provides more information about how the young dancer perceived her Indian identity. A child of a French, Shawnee, and Cherokee father and a mother whose cultural affiliation is not given, Yvonne was raised to be aware of and appreciate her Native heritage. As a powwow dancer, Chouteau performed for the first time at age two and a half. In 1933, at age four, she represented the state of Oklahoma at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago and "appeared at every world's fair held on this continent from 1933 to 1941" (p. 66). At age five, Chouteau became mesmerized by ballet. "Of course, my parents were not about to let ballet take me away from my Indian dancing," Chouteau told Livingston, "but they made it possible for me to do both" (p. 65). At the San Diego World's Fair of 1935, Chouteau performed both ballet and Indian solos. "As far as I was concerned, the two were very similar," she remarked. "I had been taught the sanctity of dance as it is seen in the eyes of the Indian and approached ballet the same way" (p. 65). From Chouteau's comments, I again yearned for further analysis, but Livingston again failed to deliver. In 1941, Chouteau went to study ballet in New York, where she won a lifetime scholarship to Balanchine's School of American Ballet. At age fourteen, she also joined the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo. Later, she married Miguel Terekhov, another dancer, who was of Russian and Uruguayan Indian heritage. The couple lived for a time in Uruguay, but after political problems erupted there, they returned to Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, Chouteau and Terekhov developed a private dance studio as well as a college dance program at the University of Oklahoma.

The author is first and foremost interested in these women as ballerinas. Livingston danced with each woman, and later when

she moved to Oklahoma, she served as an arts writer and dance critic with the *Tulsa Tribune*. Livingston conducted extensive interviews with each woman between 1988 and 1989 and updated her information in 1995. We learn about the ballets in which each woman danced, her favorite roles, the other dancers she knew, the choreographers with whom she worked, and the ballet wars that divided Chicago in the 1970s. As background on each woman's early life, Livingston does provide important historical data regarding the Choctaws, Osages, Shawnees, and Cherokees in Oklahoma. Yet we discover very little about how each woman perceived herself as a person of Native American ancestry who had succeeded in the world of classical ballet. Whether this question was not of interest to the author or was irrelevant to the dancers, I still felt the topic merited attention.

It would have been of great interest to look at these women in the context of other work being done on Native Americans in the twentieth century. For example, from Bunny McBride's *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995) to L.G. Moses's *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), a number of scholars have begun to explore the meanings that Native Americans have attached to their role in the entertainment industry. Thus far, much of this work focuses on Native Americans "playing Indian" for white audiences. Other historians of twentieth-century Indian experience have also become concerned with examining "Indians out of place," that is, Indians who sometimes fulfilled white expectations by "playing Indian" but also transcended this role to forge their own new cultural identity. A prime example of this new scholarship can be found in Philip Deloria's article, "'I Am of the Body': Thoughts on My Grandfather, Culture, and Sports," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 95:2 (Spring 1996): 321-338. This provocative article suggests that through sports in the early part of the twentieth century, Native American men helped to create an "intercultural world," where for a brief, fleeting moment, they seemed to enjoy a form of equality with white men. When I read Deloria's article, I wondered what venues Native women may have found for creating their own intercultural world. As I read Livingston's book, I thought that she may have uncovered just one such arena for a few Native women. Unfortunately, Livingston does not explore these questions. However, she does provide future researchers with a valuable account of four

notable Native women who seized upon new possibilities in the mid-twentieth century.

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**An Annotated Listing of Ojibwa Chiefs, 1690-1890.** Compiled by John A. ("Jake") Ilko, Jr. Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1995. 79 pages. \$6.50 paper.

This short volume is clearly a labor of respect and love. The author, John A. ("Jake") Ilko, Jr., has painstakingly compiled as complete a list of Ojibwa political leaders as he could, motivated by the wish to "acknowledge and honor past leaders" (p. 1) of the Ojibwa people. The entries are arranged in alphabetical order, overwhelmingly by Ojibwa-language names, with English translations provided where possible. Identifying remarks and, where evidence permits, short biographical vignettes accompany the names. Maps of the southern Ojibwa territories are included, noting locations of historic Ojibwa communities in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and southern Ontario. A bibliography of works consulted is appended and a photo folio completes the volume. Excellently reproduced, it features photographs of ten Minnesota Ojibwa leaders, dating, with two exceptions, from the 1860s.

In a short introductory section, Ilko discusses the several problems he encountered in compiling an annotated biographical listing. Too briefly, he covers issues involved in identifying individuals with the same or similar names, and the challenges of locating geographic features far separate in space but bearing the same place names. He touches as well on the difficulties involved in the translations of names which were usually written down by native English-speakers attempting to reproduce a language they neither spoke nor understood. In consultation with modern-day Ojibwa-language speakers, Ilko has attempted to provide translations of names, although he does not indicate in the annotated listing itself which names were translated by modern-day consultants and which translations remain those of his original sources.

A brief discussion of Ojibwa leadership concludes the introductory material. Ilko attempts to distinguish between the different types of political leaders, making the important point