

October 2021

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Melbourne Books

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LEANNE BENJAMIN

BUILT FOR BALLET

This autobiography by Leanne Benjamin with Sarah Crompton reveals the extraordinary life and career of one of the world's most important ballet dancers of the past 50 years.

Leanne was born and raised in the central Queensland town of Rockhampton in a tightly knit hard-working Catholic family. At the age of 3 she attended her first ballet class and at 16 she was accepted into the Royal Ballet School in London and at 18 danced her first leading role on the Royal Opera House stage in the school's performance of *Giselle* that catapulted her to a stellar career.

The book takes you behind the scenes to find a real understanding of the pleasure and the pain, the demands and the intense commitment it requires to become a ballet dancer.

It's a book for ballet-lovers which will explain from Benjamin's personal point of view, how ballet has changed and is changing.

It's a book of history: she was first taught by the people who created ballet in its modern form and now she works with the dancers of today, handing on all she has known and learnt.

But it's also a book for people who are just interested in the psychology of achievement, how you go from being a child in small town Rockhampton in the centre of Australia to being a power on the world's biggest stages — and how an individual copes with the ups and downs of that kind of career.

It's a story full of big names and big personalities — Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, Kenneth MacMillan, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Darcey Bussell, Carlos Acosta to name a few. President Clinton, Michelle Obama, Diana Princess of Wales and David Beckham all make an appearance.

But it is also a book of small moments of insight: what makes a performance special, how you recover from injury, illness and childbirth; how you combine athletic and artistic prowess with motherhood, how a different partner can alter everything, what it's like to fall over in front of thousands of people and what it's like to triumph. Above all, it seeks to explain, in warm and human terms, why women get the reputation for being difficult in a world where being a good girl is too much prized. And what they can do about it.

The Authors

Leanne Benjamin, OBE, AM, is a highly acclaimed and award-winning dancer, who was a principal ballerina with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, English National Ballet, Deutsche Oper Berlin and ultimately a principal for 20 years with the Royal Ballet. Born in Queensland, Australia, she started her professional ballet career at the age of 18 and retired from the stage at the age of 49, after a world-class career. She now devotes herself to coaching for major ballet productions around the world for companies including the Royal Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Houston Ballet, the Australian Ballet and Queensland Ballet. She is Vice Chair of the Board of Governors for the Royal Ballet Companies, and patron of the Tait Memorial Trust. She is also much in demand as an international judge and motivational guest speaker.

An Autobiography

LEANNE BENJAMIN
WITH SARAH CROMPTON



Sarah Crompton (Co-Author) is one of Britain's most respected writers and broadcasters, commenting on all aspects of culture and the arts. Her work appears in the *Guardian*, the *Sunday Times*, *The Times*, the *Observer*, British and American *Vogue* among others. She reviews dance for the *Observer* and theatre for *WhatsOnStage*. She is a regular contributor to the BBC's *Front Row*. She was previously the Arts Editor in Chief and dance critic of the *Daily Telegraph*. Her first book was *Sadler's Wells: Dance House*, a study of the recent creative history of Sadler's Wells.

Published by **Melbourne Books**

www.melbournebooks.com.au

Hard cover with jacket, 154 x 235mm portrait

400 pages includes 32 pages colour photo sections

RRP: £35 ISBN: 9781925556575

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ISBN 978-1-925556-57-5



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Leanne's extraordinary journey really comes to life in this refreshingly honest account of her career in dance. She was not only a brilliant Principal with The Royal Ballet but has made a significant impact on the artform through her coaching of the next generation of performers. With her consummate artistry, tenacity, warmth and wit, she truly is built for ballet!

— Kevin O'Hare | Director, The Royal Ballet

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Praise for Leanne Benjamin from *LEANNE BENJAMIN: BUILT FOR BALLET*

'Very rarely does a young dancer become established as an artist of star quality at a single performance, but that is what happened yesterday ... this extraordinary artist seems bound to make a considerable impact on the ballet world.'

— On winning (at age 16) the The 1980 Adeline Genée competition, judged by Dame Margot Fonteyn. Fernau Hall, *The Daily Telegraph*, under the headline 'A Star is born'.

'... With so many young women already competing for leading roles in the Royal Ballet it might seem rash of Leanne Benjamin to risk moving there from Berlin Ballet, where she was already a principal dancer. But the small, vivid Australian seems to thrive on this. She has a special gift as a dance actress.'

— John Percival *The Times*, 1993

'She's astonishing, very, very talented. She has a lovely line and all that, but she brings out the dramatic qualities in the music too.'

— Kenneth MacMillan

'Rarely does one see the two parts so carefully and intelligently thought through or projected with such clarity and feeling.'

— Edward Thorpe, in the *London Evening Standard*, reporting on Leanne's debut in *Swan Lake*

'Once Upon a Time, in a Poetic Land, Lived a Ballerina Who Walked on Air.'

— Anna Kisselgoff 1997 on Leanne's performance on the opening night of the Royal Ballet's *Cinderella* at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York

'Benjamin pares away all passion, her small, gaunt frame transfigured by her acceptance of fate. It is a remarkable, ruthless performance, Noh-like in its simplicity.'

— Jann Parry in *The Observer*

'Caught up in a rush of adrenalin, the physicality of [the] performance spilling forth like floodwaters ... elemental and unstoppable.'

— Debra Craine writing in *The Times* about Leanne's performance in *The Invitation*, 1996

[Leanne has] 'a grounded quality onstage, a rooted realism that transmits directly to the audience and which became even more palpable after the birth of her son ten years ago.'

— Laura Thompson *Daily Telegraph*, 2013

'It's the uniqueness of the Royal Ballet ballerina Leanne Benjamin that tomorrow night at Covent Garden, aged nearly 49, she will be playing a sex-mad teenager, and no one will have the slightest difficulty believing it. Then she'll retire. Not for her a soft swoop into long dresses and matronly gestures, easing decorously into the sunset, but an all-out assault on physical and emotional extremes that is typical of the career of this tiny stick of dynamite from the Australian outback.'

— Ismene Brown *theartsdesk.com*, 2013

