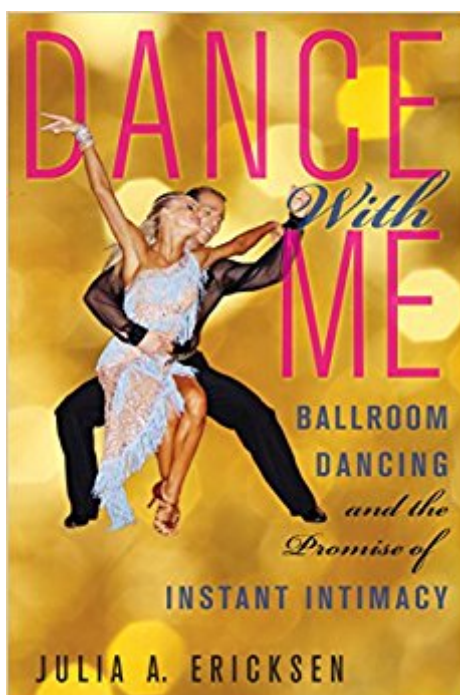


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Dance With Me: Ballroom Dancing And The Promise Of Instant Intimacy



Synopsis

Click here to listen to Julia Ericksen's interview about Dance with Me on Philadelphia NPR's "Radio Times" Rumba music starts and a floor full of dancers alternate clinging to one another and turning away. Rumba is an erotic dance, and the mood is hot and heavy; the women bend and hyperextend their legs as they twist and turn around their partners. Amateur and professional ballroom dancers alike compete in a highly gendered display of intimacy, romance and sexual passion. In *Dance With Me*, Julia Ericksen, a competitive ballroom dancer herself, takes the reader onto the competition floor and into the lights and the glamour of a world of tanned bodies and glittering attire, exploring the allure of this hyper-competitive, difficult, and often expensive activity. In a vivid ethnography accompanied by beautiful photographs of all levels of dancers, from the world's top competitors to social dancers, Ericksen examines the ways emotional labor is used to create intimacy between professional partners and between professionals and their students, illustrating how dancers purchase intimacy. She shows that, while at first glance, ballroom presents a highly gendered face with men leading and women following, dancing also transgresses gender.

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Customer Reviews

There is much to like about this book. Erickson explores in great depth and richness this fascinating and complicated world that combines competition, artistry, and intimacy in a relationship that is often based on an economic exchange. "Social Forces" Interviews with top competitors and social dancers reveal the power that intimacy between partners can bring." -Publishers Weekly "This wonderful combination of text and image results in a nuanced portrait of the performance of

heterosexual intimacy in the "emotional labor of dance." For all audiences interested in the historical and social contexts surrounding ballroom dancing."-S. Ferzacca,CHOICE

Julia A. Ericksen is Professor of Sociology at Temple University and author of *Kiss and Tell: Surveying Sex in the Twentieth Century* and *Taking Charge of Breast Cancer*.

Julia Ericksen has done an impressive job interviewing dancers and dance teachers to explore some of the psychology of ballroom dancing. As a competitive dancer and ballroom dance teacher myself, I found the study interesting but curiously frustrating. Ericksen is so busy psychoanalyzing why people dance that in the process she misses the experience of dancing. I dance with ladies from all walks of life. They dance for many reasons, but at the end of the day all of them just enjoy dancing; they aren't trying to figure out how it contributes to male-female dynamics or other aspects of the human condition. That's what Ericksen misses. In her search to find some deep hidden mental or sexual motivation for partner dancing, she overlooks the simplest, most common and most beautiful reason: that dancing together is a physical activity that's enjoyable and just plain fun. You'll enjoy this book for its depth of research, but don't expect some fresh insightful conclusion.

Well written book that captures the joys and challenges of serious ballroom dancing. Having been an amateur ballroom dancer for 5 years, it was very realistic providing a variety of in-depth perspectives from both professionals and amateurs from a variety of backgrounds and dance studios. However, be aware that while the book touches on a variety of ballroom dance situations, the author primarily focuses on pro-am teachers and students. I loved the book because I am deep into dance. I am not sure that those who have not experienced ballroom dance for awhile will find the book as interesting as it may be hard to relate to some of the stories.

The author did not catalogue her own experiences as a dancer but rather studied ballroom dancing as a sociologist might, examining various facets of the sport from both the participant's viewpoint and the teacher's. It was sprinkled with enough anecdotal information that it did not become dry and boring and answered a lot of questions about the ballroom dancing life that I would not have even thought to ask. I feel like I learned a lot about what it is like to compete as a ballroom dancer and the image of instant intimacy seemed very apt although not one I would have thought of myself. I enjoy very much watching competitions such as *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance* and am a great fan of some of the pro dancers especially Derek Hough who has as well

choreographed pro dances and performed many outside the box routines for them in their Macy's Stars of Dance and other segments as well as competing. If you have not seen his most recent homage to Fred Astaire in the Walking On Air dance I highly recommend it. [...]But I digress. I feel that this book has increased my appreciation and enjoyment for what dancers like Derek do and how it affects the amateur dancers who go for instruction. I have seen it to some extent from both sides now and am more fascinated than ever.

leave all hopes outside, you who are ready to read this book. Insightful, informative, filled with need-to-know info, yet managed to take a little of the glamour away and shine a steel mercatorial light on this whole slice of life, completely fairy tale like and isolated from the rest, that is ballroom dancing for the amateur. All in all, highly recommend. Could not give it five stars just because I felt like a little girl who just got told Santa is not real...

You can't learn Ballroom Dance from a book, but still there are far too few books about Ballroom Dancing! In part this void has opened because the best (professional) ballroom dancers spend all their time developing as dancesport competitors, and not writers. Luckily, this book provides a lot of the information one might pick up by osmosis from long association with top-level professionals, in a well written and attractively structured format. Julia Ericksen is an excellent writer, a Ph.D. with writing skills polished by years of writing academic articles and books and correcting students' work. She is also a top academic researcher, able to tease information out of interview subjects. Here she turns her attention to world of Ballroom Dancing, and specifically gathers together a great deal of information about competitive Pro-Am dancing, i.e. dancing where one partner is a professional teacher and the other is a student, somewhat like Dancing with the Stars. While she does cover social dancing and amateur couple dancing, the novel emphasis here is on the lives that professionals lead while teaching amateur competitors and while competing professionally. She has (anonymous and non-anonymous) interviews with the leading professional competitors today and discusses in detail the attitudes of, for example, Russian expatriate dancers, Male professionals versus Female professionals, and students coping with the high financial cost and time commitment required to compete at the highest levels. There are many very nice photos of professionals performing and some also of amateur and social dancers. I particularly enjoyed some of the non-anonymous interviews that Julia Ericksen had with professional dancers who are among my own favorites, and the 'adult' tone in which some of the difficulties of this way of life are discussed. Ballroom dancing is exciting to watch, and fun to learn and do; the professionals who teach for

competition are highly dedicated athletes and artists, who for the most part have not had a 'voice', before this book. Small caveat: the book is written with one eye on an academic audience, so some readers may find it a bit analytical and jargon-ish, with discussions about how amateurs who dance in Pro-Am are 'purchasing instant intimacy'. Academics may choose to read the book for such analytical insights from Professor Ericksen, but dance enthusiasts ought to be able to enjoy the book without the academic facade getting in the way.

This book on ballroom dancing is the best after reading quite a few of these. It's written by a professor of sociology with interviews to a lot of dancers. It covers all aspects of ballroom dancing especially the psychological and emotional aspect of the dancing life. If you are new to the ballroom scene, this book is a must read.

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