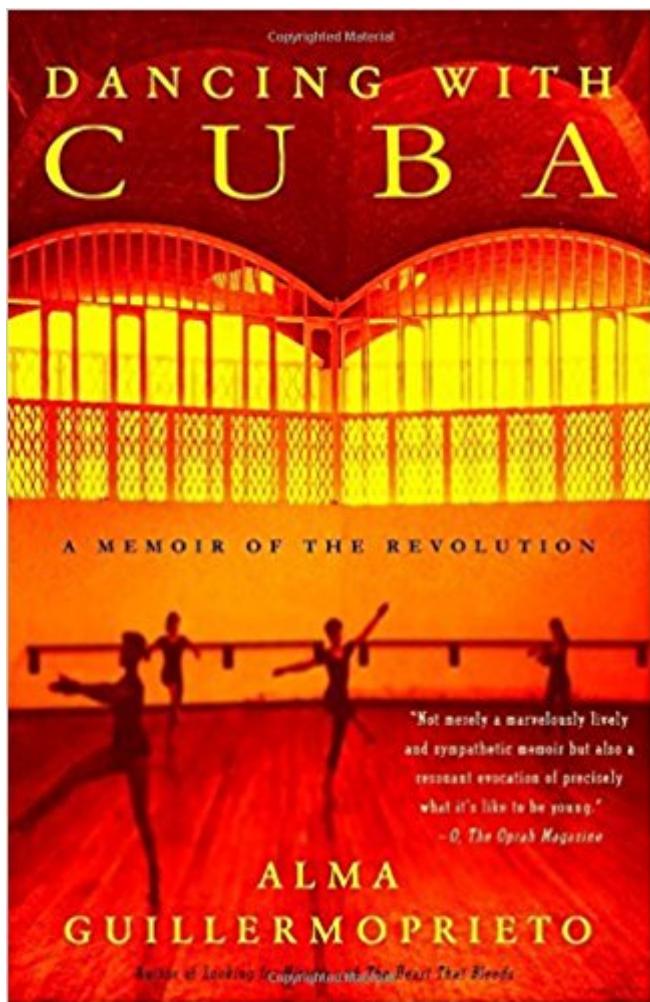


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Dancing With Cuba: A Memoir Of The Revolution



Synopsis

In 1970 a young dancer named Alma Guillermoprieto left New York to take a job teaching at Cuba's National School of Dance. For six months, she worked in mirrorless studios (it was considered more revolutionary); her poorly trained but ardent students worked without them but dreamt of greatness. Yet in the midst of chronic shortages and revolutionary upheaval, Guillermoprieto found in Cuba a people whose sense of purpose touched her forever. In this electrifying memoir, Guillermoprieto "now an award-winning journalist and arguably one of our finest writers on Latin America" resurrects a time when dancers and revolutionaries seemed to occupy the same historical stage and even a floor exercise could be a profoundly political act. Exuberant and elegiac, tender and unsparing, *Dancing with Cuba* is a triumph of memory and feeling.

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Customer Reviews

Journalist Guillermoprieto (*Looking for History*; *The Heart That Bleeds*; etc.) revisits the six months in 1970 she spent teaching modern dance in Cuba. At the state-supported school where she finds neither mirrors nor music, but dedicated yet ill-trained students, Guillermoprieto realizes she's embarked on a journey that would "thoroughly unravel my life." Her intense commitment to art may seem a contrast to the revolution and its aftermath, yet it provides a jumping-off point for her book about dance, which is really about Cuba and a political coming-of-age. As the then 20-year-old former student of Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham makes the "inimitable elastic flow" of dance visible, she discusses her political education through composite characters, invented

dialogue and reconstructed letters. The detail can be daunting, pedestrian even, but the experience is always lifelike. Guillermoprieto captures the complexity of a revolution that scared and bewildered but attracted her. The racism, homophobia and police activities stir "the insidious counterrevolutionary" within, but do not still the discovery that she "belonged to a wider community than that of my friends and fellow dancers." In Nicaragua several years later, Guillermoprieto finds her second calling - journalism - yet she doesn't leave dance behind. It informs her political analysis as she looks back to the failure of the Ten Million Ton Harvest: "any dancer could have told Fidel that the movements of the dance of [harvesting sugarcane]... can't be learned in a single day..."Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
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Award-winning Mexican-born journalist Guillermoprieto has made Latin America her beat for the past 25 years, writing perceptive and unflinching reports for the *New Yorker* and several books, including *Looking for History* (2000). She now tells the involving and visceral story of her political awakening, disclosing the fact that this renowned writer of conscience initially wanted to be a dancer and studied with the best: Martha Graham, Twyla Tharp, and Merce Cunningham. Eventually recognizing that she isn't destined for stardom, Guillermoprieto accepts an invitation to teach dance in Havana. Abysmally ignorant about Cuba and therefore utterly unprepared for the harsh realities and painful paradoxes that await, she arrives on May 1, 1970, and is soon struggling to stay sane at a state-run dance boarding school with inadequate food, no mirrors, no music, and students who have never seen modern dance before. Guillermoprieto vividly and purposefully recounts her acute discomfort with the strained and ludicrous rhetoric of the revolution, her sorrow over Castro's catastrophic failures, her astonishment at the great valor of Cuba's people, and her gradual recognition of her true calling as a journalist. Guillermoprieto's riveting portrait of herself as a young artist is an excellent corollary to Gioconda Belli's *Country under My Skin* (2002).
Donna Seaman
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This book is a commentary on a failing economic system as seen through the eyes of young woman utterly committed to ballet. That she has the acumen to look back twenty-five years and make sense of what she felt then and bring it to the page now makes her a wonderful storyteller. Her narrative provides a portal into a world few Americans understood except as a menace, and her change over the course of six months is a captivating tale told well. Read the book as a personal essay, not a

commentary on politics, though it is.

The person who stressed this is a memoir is on target though I think it is quite well written. As a long time admirer of Guillermoprieto's journalism I found this a fascinating and unfaiingly honest account of her life as a dance teacher in Cuba before she became a writer. IT IS a memoir and the self pity of her young self is conveyed with a brutal honesty--it is the middle-aged writer descibing where she once was and her perspective is a perfect balance of scorn and affection for who she was. If you are looking for a wide ranging view of the revolution, this is not the book you want to read, though you will get a very interesting perspective on life in Cuba in the early 1970s. If you have not read anything by her before, read The Heart That Bleeds and Looking for History (as well as Mark Danner's The Massacre at El Mozote, a story she was responsible, with Ray Bonner at the Times, for breaking in 1982. She is a remarkable writer and this memoir was one of my favorite reads of the last several years.

Great book! Especially for those who plan a trip to Cuba.

A very delightful book. Revealing.

Product exactly as described - prompt delivery.

There is much to recommend this book , particulary given recent developments between the US and Cuba. A young dance student of Mexican decent living in NYC during the late 1960s and studying modern dance is recruited to teach at the National Arts school in Havana and drinks up the atmosphere of revolutionary Cuba in the early 1970s.Her memoir of her time in Havana is a personal coming of age story with a revealing glimpse into her thoughts on love and her bout with depression and contemplation of suicide. The scenes of Cuba struggling economically, the shortages and deprivation in stark contrast to the political rhetoric are interesting as a backdrop to her story. This is not a history of the Cuban revolution but a personal diary of how one young woman coped with being immersed into a society struggling to define itself and her observations are at times riveting and at other times naive .Overall I think while a bit dated it is still a good read for those with an interst in Cuba.

Readers of books about Cuba today look for answers to one question: after Fidel, what? Covering

six months back in 1970, Dancing with Cuba leads to one answer: Cuba will fall apart, for the revolutionary spirit Fidel Castro led has not succeeded. Author Guillermoprieto believes only Fidel's mesmerization of the populace holds it together. His magnetism possessed her in 1970 when she took on a teaching job at the Escuela National de Danza, the School of Dance, established to show Cuban progress in this artistic field. She was spellbound by Fidel.

There never had existed a more heroic, lucid man. Increasingly, however, she became distressed by food shortages and the absence of worldly attention to the arts. Her adventure in Cuba came about through her training under Merce Cunningham in New York City. The master of a modern art form told her of the Cuban opening, and she followed it up. Once there, she wondered at the naivety of her students but plunged ahead with her courses on dance forms almost unknown on the island. The longer she taught the more concerned young Ms. Guillermoprieto became concerned about her own place in the world scheme of things. Her lack of revolutionary drive disturbed her. Was it possible Revolution had no place for Art? She devotes numbingly prolix pages to her contemplation of suicide. Ms. Guillermoprieto apparently transferred some of her concerns to the leading students of her class. A delegation of three came to her hotel room to tell her they were about to strike for better conditions and prospects, and hoped she would replace their current dance chief. She thought the strike absurd. It was settled through negotiation of minimal matters, and afterward the student situation improved. Ms.

Guillermoprieto left before the end of the year, as she had told the school she planned. In New York again, she soon dropped her former boyfriend and ultimately the dance, to become a writer -- and now lives in Mexico City. Her conclusion in Dancing with Cuba: Fidel's revolution has failed tragically in all its stated goals -- greater social equality and better living conditions for all. Robert Lincoln, a retired officer of the U. S. Foreign Service, lived in northern Virginia.

In 1970, Alma Guillermoprieto left her home in New York to teach modern dance in Cuba for six months. There, she found herself in the heart of the Cuban revolution. Though a memoir all the way, the book is peppered with historical background and short biographies of Cuba's most important heroes and figures. The author tells of her desire to have the faith of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, her horror over her ignorance of evil after watching a film on the Vietnam War, the conflict between her previous ideas about identity and purpose in comparison to those of her Cuban friends. Her memoir is a good recounting of her struggle, against the backdrop of Cuba's very complex history and culture. Though not by any means a reference on Cuban history, the book does give a good

inside look at how Cubans as well as outsiders viewed the revolution that was taking place. This is an enjoyable coming of age memoir, especially for fans of dance and Cuba.

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