

ent cultures through history, the book includes a detailed index and bibliography. Wendy Buonaventura—author of *Serpent of the Nile*, dancer and choreographer—is interesting and “opinionated.”

Buonaventura has a subtly embedded message: Women who love to dance are not necessarily doing so to be titillating. Buonaventura, validating the desire to dance, attempts to answer the unanswerable: Why dance has been/is viewed as taboo and why women who dance have been/are relegated to the realm of the profane. While this material is not new to feminist scholarship, she presents an inventive hypothesis as to why women have been/are perceived as “dangerous creatures” with bodies with which society is obsessed: “Perhaps it stems from the fact that, in many cultures, the worship of a single male god replaced religions in which both male and female deities were once honored for their powers.... Ever since then, man has been the measure of all things...and woman with her messy biology is something of a liability.” With chapter titles such as, “And God Created Devil-Woman,” “Revolution on the Dance Floor,” “Forbidden Fruit,” and “Twentieth Century Goddess,” Buonaventura brings her unconventional scrutiny to the dance world.

From the tango in Buenos Aires (immigrants created the tango), to the can-can of Paris, to the Hawaiian hula, to flamenco, and much more, she demonstrates how dance and its various prohibitions, reflect and shape female sexuality and society’s (mis)perceptions of sexuality. Blending anecdotes

Something in the Way She Moves: Dancing Women From Salome to Madonna

By Wendy Buonaventura



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Rating: Recommended

Review by Nina Costanza

Something in the Way She Moves is a well-written exploration of dance through women’s eyes. A scholarly approach to dance of differ-

with research, she grapples with the conflict of myth and reality. From the Spanish dancer, Caroline Otero (*Folies Bergère*), known as “the Andalusian Volcano” and who was said to have “the whole of the Orient between her legs,” to the writer Colette, whose career as a dancer was launched when she kissed her female lover on stage, Buonaventura examines the myriad ways in which feminine sensuality is expressed. She comments on anorexia, transvestitism (the first geishas were men, she says), cosmetic surgery, age, and the icons of dance legend from Salome, Josephine Baker, and Isadora Duncan, to Madonna. While she disparages the demonization of female dance expression, she also sacralizes that demonization—an engrossing contradiction,

which Buonaventura handles intelligently. Dance is, at once, sublime, sexy, and a way for “girls to strut their stuff.”

She closes with a wonderful story about a flamenco dancer in her seventies: “Half her teeth were missing, she smoked like a chimney and had the body of a woman who clearly enjoyed her food. But she was a demon onstage. In the dressing room after the show I told her I thought it was amazing that she was still performing at her age. Her eyes glinted dangerously as she looked at me. ‘Let me tell you a secret, my dear,’ she said as she leaned across the table, ‘When you dance, there is no such thing as old age.’”

