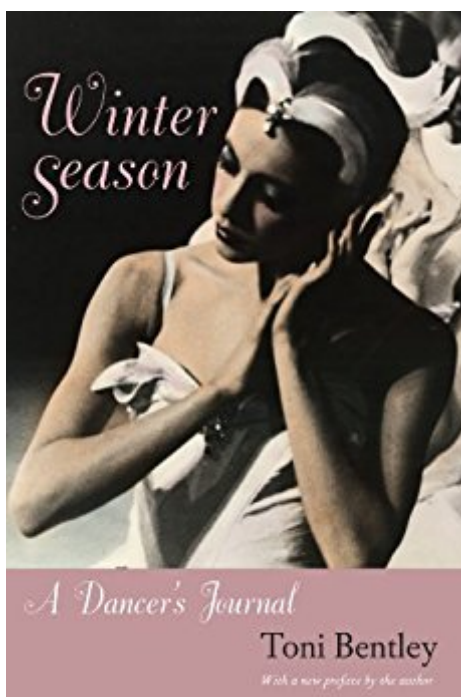


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# Winter Season: A Dancer's Journal, With A New Preface



## Synopsis

Quite possibly the most revealing book about the world of ballet ever to see print. •--National Review • œOne of the most intelligent and introspective glimpses ever offered into one of the most competitive and excruciatingly nervous existences in the arts.â •----New York Times Book Review • œWithout entirely stripping away the glamour of being a dancer, Bentleyâ™s candid and modest account makes for a moving revelation about the price discipline and control exacts from young dancers in the name of art.â •--Chicago Tribune • œA mini-marvel, impossible to put down. . . . As a dancerâ™s-eye portrait of the choreographer, a divinity to Ms. Bentley as well as, apparently, to everyone else in the NYCB and to uncounted other ballet lovers in the world beyond, the book is invaluable.â •--New York Review of BooksAn irresistible inside look at one of the worldâ™s great dance companies, *Winter Season* is also a sensitive, intimate, and almost painfully honest account of the emotional and intellectual development of a young woman dedicated to one of the most demanding of all the arts. Bentleyâ™s association with the New York City Ballet began when she was accepted by the affiliated School of American Ballet at the age of eleven. Seven years later, she became a member of the company. In the fall of 1980, as the winter season opened, she found herself facing an emotional crisis: her dancing was not going well. At 22 she felt that her life had lost direction. To try to make something of her experience, on paper if not on stage, she began to keep a journal, describing her day-to-day activities and looking back on her past. The result is perhaps the closest that most of us will ever come to knowing what it feels like to be a dancer, on stage and off. It also offers memorable glimpses of some notable members of the City ballet, with, at the center, the man whose vision they all servedâ™George Balanchine.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Winter Season: A Dancer's Journal is the exquisite chronicle of a ballet dancer's experiences with the New York City Ballet. The dancer, Toni Bentley, claims a certain naivete, but I don't believe it's innocent ignorance as much as it is simple yearning for experiences she rarely has. She has a delicate flair for words, and her prose couldn't be any less lovely than her plies and tondus. Dancing with a world-famous ballet company is gruelling. The dancers are overworked, underfed, and have little understanding of how the "real world" works, yet it would seem they like it that way. Ballet companies thusly have much in common with military outfits: soldiers and dancers work brutally hard, but have their concerns looked after by the higher-ups. Balanchine is the dancers' general. With the incredibly long hours and the accompanying mental and physical exhaustion, how did Toni get the time to write this book? She writes, "We are hairless. We have no leg hairs, no pubic hair, no armpit hair, no facial hair, no neck hair and only a solid little lump at the top of our heads. Any sign of stubble must be closely watched out for and removed." That is not all. We don't eat food, we eat music. We need artistic sustenance only. Emotional, inspiring sustenance. All our physical energy is the overflow of spiritual feelings. We live on faith, belief, love, inspiration, vitamins and Tab. Toni eventually does break free of the NYC Ballet machine, but she's drawn inexorably back. After all, as she says, "We live only to dance. If living were not an essential prerequisite, we would abstain."

With "Winter Season," Toni Bentley allows her audience to see a real picture of the incredibly tough, demanding and creative world of professional ballet. We see George Balanchine at the end of the career, and such greats as Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins. The incredible, difficult, almost insane demands put on the dancers are clearly drawn, as is Ms. Bentley's love for her art. Especially evocative is her struggle with reconciling art with her demanding profession. Often, artistic memoirs focus on the superstars, the Tallchiefs and Nureyevs, for instance. The view from the corps de ballet is all the more interesting for being so rare. This book is beautiful, wry, humorous

and exquisitely-written. I wish Ms. Bentley had written several other volumes.

I really enjoyed this book. It gave a wonderful glimpse into the real world of professional dancing. Miss Bentley told this story with beautiful language, her words flowed like water. I found it wonderful to know what it was like to live the life of a dancer, to know the struggles and the victories, the fantasies and the realities. I recommend this book for all who love dance and for anyone interested in show business or simply anyone who enjoys a good read.

This is a beautifully written very open look at the world of a professional dancer. The difficulties and joys of life in a world class ballet company are clearly and thoughtfully laid out by Bentley. The pride she had for her place in NYCB, and the sadness of standing in the background while others danced in the spotlight in front of her. But ultimately we are allowed to see the great joy finds in her dancing, and the struggle and work it took to get her there, as well as the struggle and hard work it took to keep her there. Overall I thought that Bentley was very candid and very honest about her life in NYCB. Every dance student planning a life as a professional dancer should read this book.

I enjoyed this book. It was an absorbing, eye-opening look into the world of the ballet written by an insider - a young, intense and highly intelligent young woman, a dancer with the NYC Ballet, who exposes life in this elite and unique world.

I chose this book while looking to immerse myself in the wonderful yet tough world of classical ballet, trying to get a glimpse of what a ballerina thinks, worries and dreams about during a performance season. In that sense, Bentley's book was a great choice. Through the pages of her journal one meets characters as "Mr. B," the timeless George Balanchine, Suzanne Farrell (Bentley's personal idol), Baryshnikov, Nuereyev, Kirkland and other legends of ballet with which the author was lucky to work. Her prose is agile and enjoyable, and the best thing about this book is that she doesn't tell the utopian odyssey of the "ugly duckling" ballerina that suddenly becomes a principal. It's the real account of a corps dancer, with all the uncertainty and yet all the wonderment of a professional dance, not just dancing for a living but, as she puts it, living for dance. Nevertheless, as I came to the last page of the book, I was left wanting more. One winter season came and went swiftly and with it, the world of ballet evaporated before my eyes before I knew it. So, as a junkie, I had to go looking elsewhere to "get my fix" of more ballet =).

A dancer's confession book but written as pure poetry. It is obvious that Toni Bentley was not only a dancer but a writer as well. Anyone who loves dance, has a good sense of humor and enjoys good literature, should read this book. It is not chronological or biographically detailed. Her story is told in the style of fragments but written with great charm and beauty. The book really is pure poetry. I highly recommend it. It is fast reading and a book that makes you want to read it again and again.

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