



## Once A Dancer . . . : An Autobiography

By Allegra Kent



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### Autobiography of one of Balanchine's finest ballerinas

"What a witty, evocative writer Ms. Kent is!"--*New York Times*

"A daffy and unexpectedly poignant autobiography. . . . [Kent] repossesses as a writer the unpredictable charm of her dancing. She is zanily elegant . . . frequently stranded, broke, desperate, abused, or abandoned, yet well served by a fey kind of gumption."--*Kirkus Reviews*

"In [Balanchine's] garden of unearthly delights, Allegra Kent as the most enchanting bloom of all. . . . Through Kent's own wise and courageous recollections . . . we see her unique spirit and almost see again her glorious dancing."--*Vanity Fair*

"[Kent's] writing is as varied, lucid, and troubling as her dancing. . . . To ask whether she knows how much she has inadvertently told us is merely to frame one more time the terms of her peculiar mystery."--*Wall Street Journal*

"As distinctly riveting as she ever was on stage."--*Dance Magazine*

"Kent, one feels, has never known quite where or who she is. . . . Born Iris Cohen in 1937, she had an early life that was the crazy kind you might find in the fiction of Flannery O'Connor. . . . [She writes,] '[Mr. B.] saw in me the psychological raw materials that could be molded and remolded into images of sensuality--unrealized and restrained, but there, just under the surface. The star inside the sapphire.' This is not only a convincing analysis of a difficult concept, it is beautiful writing."--*Washington Post*



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**Once A Dancer . . . : An Autobiography** By Allegra Kent **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #611402 in Books
- Brand: Brand: University Press of Florida
- Published on: 2009-10-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.00" w x 5.90" l, 1.05 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

This unusual, fascinating, and at times almost surreal autobiography chronicles the life of Allegra Kent, one of the most famous--and notorious--of Balanchine's prima ballerinas. The most blatantly erotic of Balanchine ballets were written for her pliant and chilly dance method. This book has it all: art, dance, infidelity, sexual intrigue, histrionics, eccentric outbursts, nose jobs, philosophy, and Krishnamurti. Entirely entertaining and intriguing for both dance enthusiasts and those who don't know a plié from a jeté.

### From Publishers Weekly

The dancing of ballerina Kent has been described as complex, even "demonic." In this memoir, Kent explains the tensions and conflicts behind her legendary performances with Balanchine's New York City Ballet. Kent, born in 1937, joined the company at age 15 and quickly became one of the favorites of "Mr. B," who choreographed several dances for her, including "The Unanswered Question" (from *Ivesiana*). But Kent soon began a strange, career-long pattern of successes followed by self-imposed exiles from dance. The reasons behind her disappearances were usually bizarre: a botched plastic surgery undertaken despite her Christian Science beliefs; a disastrous marriage to photographer Bert Stern, promoted by Kent's mother to thwart any sexual involvement between Kent and Mr. B.; a willful decision to have three babies at the peak of her dancing fame; periods of overeating and weight gain that led Kent to discover water wings and to write Allegra Kent's *Water Beauty Book*. Although Kent's self-deprecating tone never matches the poetry of her dance, her autobiography offers wonderful sketches of her contemporaries--dancer Edward Villella, costumer Mme. Karinska and artist Joseph Cornwell, among many. It also grants a poignant look at the later years of a once-great ballerina, especially her need for income ("If you are calling to give me a job, I accept it"), her search for love through the personals ("Lyrically Limber Lollapalooza"... hopes to meet a man) and, finally, her moving appreciation of what she once had: "In real life, I was a sleepwalker--dance my only light." Photos.

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### From Kirkus Reviews

A daffy and unexpectedly poignant autobiography by the beguiling Balanchine ballerina celebrated in her heyday as a "rubber orchid." Kent, born Iris Margo Cohen in 1937 "on the very day Edith Wharton died, but in a different time zone," repossesses as a writer the unpredictable charm of her dancing. She is zany elegant, summing up the young Edward Villella's virtuoso hallmark as his "pronging springbok elevation." (And she assesses her own in this way: "There was a bit of Isadora and mountain goat in my dancing.") Her life sounds like that of a struggling heroine in a novel by Mona Simpson--frequently stranded, broke, desperate, abused, or abandoned, yet well served by a fey kind of gumption. During a childhood spent in constant transit between east, west, and south American coasts, Kent studied ballet with Bronislava Nijinska and Carmelita Maracci before entering the School of American Ballet in New York. There she was singled out early, joining the New York City Ballet while still a teenager. Though Kent's narrative bent is too flirty to allow for analysis of Balanchine's work or of her fellow dancers, she shares festively witty peeks at the ballet establishment. Kent also lacks the instinct for sustained introspection, which limits her ability to fathom her family's chronic instability or her own difficult marriage to a drug-addicted, philandering photographer. As a onetime Christian Scientist whose career, paradoxically, was badly, briefly compromised by the effects of amateurish plastic surgery, she is replete with unprobed psychological corners. The story of her losses is at times very painful. Still, Kent can't fail to enchant with her odd tales of artist-friend Joseph Cornell, New York City Ballet colleague Violette Verdy's "yelp therapy," and her own pregnancy ("My stomach was a large, round, hard dome like a planetarium"). -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All

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