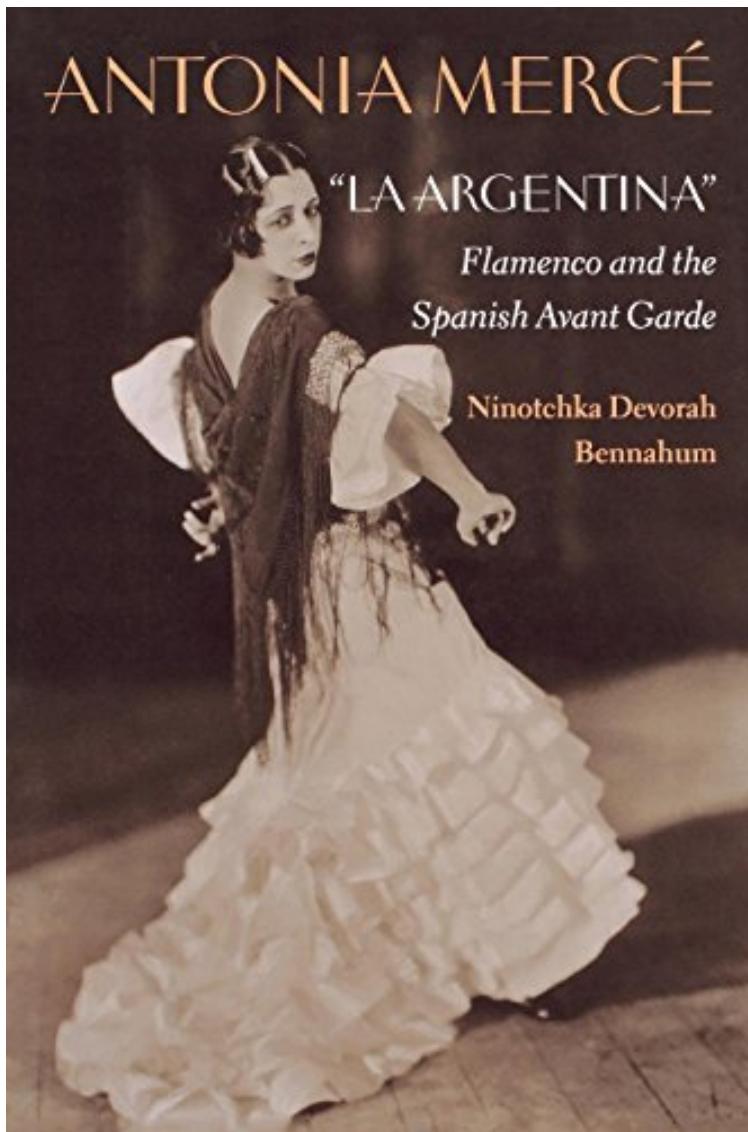


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Ninotchka Bennahum

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Ninotchka Bennahum : Antonia Merceacute;, ldquo;LaArgentinardquo;; Flamenco and the Spanish Avant Garde before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Antonia Merceacute;, ldquo;LaArgentinardquo;; Flamenco and the Spanish Avant Garde:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A pretty and necessary work, but flawedBy L. K. ColemanThis is a pretty book, filled with lots of wonderful historic photos and other memorabilia. It is heartening to see a full work

about a creator within that larger genre of "Spanish Dance," and it is a work filled with lots of information. It brings to life, at times in great detail, the character of Antonia Merceacute; and the era in which she lived. This is a work that should appeal to dance enthusiasts, dance historians, and lovers of Spanish dance, and for the majority of such individuals it should fill what has mostly been a large blank. I should leave my review there, and if this were a work of love by a lay-person enthusiast, I would. What nags, however, is that (a) the author is a university professor and (b) it is published by a major university press. One therefore has a right to expect that the manuscript was properly reviewed and edited. Perhaps it is a result of the relative obscurity of the subject, perhaps also the author's lack of command of the subject's principal language, Spanish, but the book nevertheless contains a great many annoying errors that can be misleading to other serious researchers who might rely upon this work. Not only that, the author often interjects equally annoying opinions and characterizations, some anachronistic, some irritatingly "PC". Room allows but one example of historical error. At p. 17, the author places total blame upon Franco and his style of fascism for the destruction of "the essence of Spanish life and culture," and that during his reign "Spain would return to the repressive fascist state it had been during the Inquisition (1478 - 1834)." Granted, Franco's regime was no picnic, but this is "over the top" PC speak: By the time Franco entered Spain from North Africa as a rebel, the country's only alternative to the Nationalists of which Franco by default became the leader (after the deaths of three other generals) was a Stalinist puppet government that was busy exterminating any opposition to its own brutal policies. England, the U.S., and the rest of Europe other than Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy turned a blind eye and offered no support of any kind. And it was Mussolini who first came up with "Fascism" after the end of World War I, so how was Spain a "fascist state" four centuries before? And Franco's repressive government provided asylum from the Nazis to any Jews who could show they were Sephardic - something the U.S. never did; and it was Franco's government which in 1968 officially repealed the order of expulsion signed by Fernando and Isabela in 1492- something which the so-called Republican Government never did. On the same page the author has Ernest Hemmingway fighting in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade alongside George Orwell! Did anyone check this manuscript? The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was composed of North American volunteers. Orwell was British, a devoted Socialist, and after a brief stint as a journalist covering the Spanish Civil War he joined the Lenin Brigade in Barcelona, not the Lincoln. His experiences there lead him to write several exposeacute;s of Soviet style brutality, betrayal, lying and corruption, and later his classic work, *Animal Farm*. Hemmingway only appeared as a journalist and never joined any brigade. (That was why he was able to visit Spain multiple times during the Franco years, something he never would have been allowed to do if he had fought for the Republic.) Then there is the pseudo-academic clap trap: p. 31 "Further, one must ask whether Flamenco performers' prejudice against the Spanish castanet was a Franco-era hold-over or a postmodern reaction to a light-sounding, aristocratic instrument that viewed the castanet as a conflation of eighteenth- and twentieth-century socioeconomic and political values." Oh, please. (And the Flamencos do use castanets, but they also know when their use is appropriate and when it is not.) The author also commits the sin of falling so in love with her subject that at times the book becomes more panegyric or hagiography than a biography. Reading this book alone, one would think that Antonia Merceacute; single handedly invented the theatrical version of Spanish dance and was the first to include flamenco. In fact, she was one of many - a significant one, no doubt, but not the only one. An example is the author's approving quote from her subject: (p. 71) "At the beginning... dance maestros rejected my 'revolution of classical dance.' Now all dancers are not only trying to imitate my way of dance, but my gestures, and the way I comb my hair. In all academies, my dancing alone is being taught." The author only stated that here Ms. Merceacute; was "neither modest nor unsure of herself" but was "absolutely aware of what she had accomplished." Sure, according to Ms. Merceacute;; but this is more an example of her at times insufferable arrogance, a trait she shared with her most famous male dance partner, Vicente Escudero (whom the author states point blank was "a Gypsy" from Valladolid - but that was information from the lips of Escudero himself, always a dubious source of information). And there is no balance. For example, the author neither noted nor quoted Merceacute;'s admissions that there were dancers who could teach her a thing or two. For example, after seeing the then aging Gypsy, Mariacute;a Gracia Corteacute;s Campos, "la Golondrina," dance at a private party, in awe she had to ask her host, "Do I dance well?... If only I could produce in public half the emotion I feel now! Look how I am!" whereupon she placed her cold and trembling hand in that of her host. (Quoted in "El baile flamenco," Aacute;ngel Aacute;lvarez Caballero, p. 165) Antonia Merceacute; was indeed a dance great, but, contrary to what is implied in both the title and in the body of this book, she was never a flamenco great - was, in many ways, the opposite of a flamenco. Her contributions lay in choreography and theatrical presentation, which the author properly notes.

The first major study of the Spanish choreographer who invented the modernist Flamenco ballet form.

"Bennahum has revived the memory of a vital mover and shaker of the dance community; and in doing so she also examines Merce's role as a feminist and modernist. A fascinating chunk of dance history restored to public eyes."-- Dance MagazineFrom the Publisher7x10 trim. 86 illus. (26 color). LC 99-35663About the AuthorNINOTCKA DEVORAH BENNAHUM, choreographer, cultural historian, and native of New Mexico, is an Assistant Professor of

Communication Studies, Performance Studies and Theater at Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus. In 1986, she received her doctorate in Performance Studies from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. In 1991, she founded The Route 66 Dance Company to bring flamenco, modern, and ballet dancers and musicians together. She is contributing editor for Dance Magazine. She writes on ballet and flamenco dance for The Village Voice, the New York Times, the Albuquerque Journal, and elsewhere and teaches dance history for American Ballet Theater's summer intensive program for pre-professional dancers in New York City. She lives in SoHo, New York.