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Up Front: Toni Bentley

By THE EDITORS
Published: January 22, 2009

Toni Bentley, who reviews Akim Volynsky’s “Ballet’s Magic Kingdom” on the cover, performed with [New York City Ballet](#) in the 1970s and ’80s.



Illustration by Joe Ciardiello

Toni Bentley

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[‘Ballet’s Magic Kingdom,’ by Akim Volynsky: Appraising Grace](#)
(January 25, 2009)

“Dancing for Balanchine, as one of his girls,” she said in an e-mail message, “was all about getting one tendu right. Morning, noon and night, trying to get it right. He said if you could do this one movement well, you could dance anything. But now, the fact of having been in his world during his lifetime is really nothing less than a miracle. I do not know who, or what, I would be without his influence. He was, to me, a Sufi master who used ballet as the language for his lessons.” About Balanchine’s famous dictum “Don’t think, just do,” Bentley said: “This is quite the challenge, to leapfrog over one’s demons. Great dancers have a kind of powerful physical intelligence that is not measurable by any known means — it is neither verbal, mathematical, nor emotional. But it is profound.”

Bentley is finishing a book about Balanchine’s “Serenade”: “This ballet, to [Tchaikovsky](#), is 75 years old this year and was the first ballet he made in America. It is about the evanescence of beauty, loss, sweetness and fate, a kaleidoscope through which one can view Balanchine carrying ballet from the 19th century through the 20th to the beyond — all in 32 minutes! And one can glimpse the many levels of his soul. Though he’d hate me saying that.”

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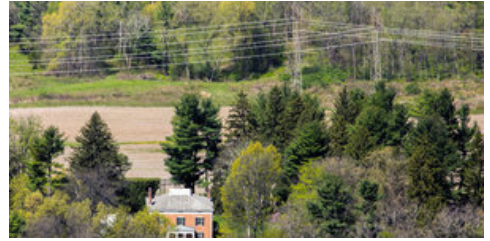
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