

# BRENDA DIXON GOTTSCHILD

Writer on Dance and Culture

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## About the Book...

### *Joan Myers Brown & The Audacious Hope of The Black Ballerina A Biohistory of American Performance*

by Brenda Dixon Gottschild

In her forthcoming book, Brenda Dixon Gottschild uses the career of Joan Myers Brown (JMB), the legendary founder of the historic Philadelphia Dance Company (PHILADANCO), as a fulcrum to leverage an investigation of the interface between performance, cultural formation, and race politics as evidenced by the development of a dance community in Black Philadelphia and the rise and spread of its influence beyond community and regional borders to national and international distinction.

As shown in Dixon Gottschild's scholarship, JMB's personal and professional histories reflect the hardships, as well as the advances, of African-Americans in the artistic and social developments of the second half of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries.

#### Contents:

- *Prologue*
- *The Backdrop*– 1920s-1940s
- *Spectacularly Black on Black* – 1940s-1950s
- *But Black is Beautiful!* – 1950s-1980s
- *Nose to The Grindstone, Head to The Stars* – *The Philadelphia/Philadanco Aesthetic*
- *Audacious Hope – The House that Joan Built* – 1980s-21<sup>st</sup> Century
- *Epilogue*

#### Contributors

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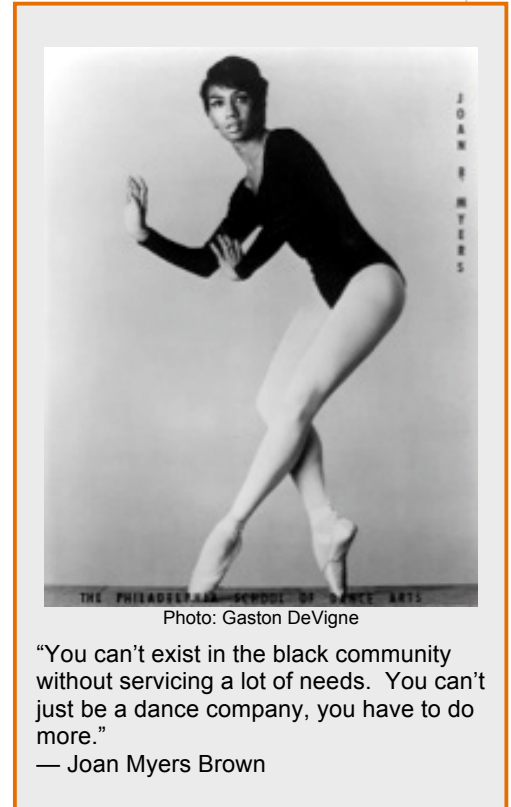
*Ananya Chatterjea* (afterword), Professor, Theater Arts and Dance; Director, Dance Program, University of Minnesota; Artistic Director, Ananya Dance Theatre

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“You can’t exist in the black community without servicing a lot of needs. You can’t just be a dance company, you have to do more.”

— Joan Myers Brown

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*Praise...*

"Joan Myers Brown is a legend in the world of artistic dance. We now have her fascinating story for the world in Brenda Dixon Gottschild's brilliant book!"

— Cornel West, Princeton University

"What a wonderful book for a most creative woman! We thank you for letting us see a "genius" at work."

— Sonia Sanchez, writer, poet, playwright and activist

"Brenda Dixon Gottschild's biography of Joan Myers Brown is an audacious springboard for an exhaustive investigation into the racist social structures of 20th-century America that placed almost insuperable double binds on people of color. How 'JB' and the Philadelphia dance community coped with and surmounted class and color contradictions is a testament of enduring courage, resilience, and self-invention. With its eye-opening analysis of the interplay of skin tone, cultural aspirations, and social status exemplified in western classical dance, the book is not only a fascinating, poignant, and scholarly history, but reads like a house on fire."

— Yvonne Rainer, Distinguished Professor of Studio Art, Performance, and History of Experimental Film, UC Irvine, and a founder of the Judson Dance Theater

"Smoothly-written by our most accomplished chronicler of American dance and race politics, this essential volume demonstrates the impact black Americans have made in the performing arts against long odds. Brown's story will be familiar to every African American girl who ever wanted to be a ballerina. Newly-mined documentation of the vibrant dance cultures of Philadelphia and the inner workings of Philadanco, the internationally-recognized modern dance company that Brown created to international acclaim, provide cogent context to understand dance, gender, and especially race in the American performing arts. Gottschild reveals a hidden history of black ballet crucial to understanding African American presence in contemporary dance."

— Thomas F. DeFrantz, author of *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture*.

"*Audacious Hope*, a critical analysis of the life and work of Joan Myers Brown, is a visionary study that breaks new ground in several ways: It provides a much-needed history of the development of dance in a specific city, Philadelphia, examining its unique racism as well as the more general racist values espoused by the entire country. It integrates oral history with a more general portrait of the community and its sense of identity, offering a commanding overview of the changing beliefs around African-American identity and rights from the 1940s to the present. It details the vital relationship between a company, Philadanco, and its school and the staff who administer both. It shows how there are no rigid boundaries between the worlds of concert dance and entertainment and social dance productions. And it provides a brilliant analysis of the motivations on the part of African-American middle class to assimilate white culture but also to adapt it and make it their own. As in her other works, Dixon-Gotschild gives us a deeply thoughtful and complex rendering of the participation of dance in the formulation of identity and community, one that also provides a powerful revisionist focus on the importance of Philadelphia in the formation of concert dance in the U.S."

— Susan Leigh Foster, Distinguished Professor, Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance, UCLA

"Brenda Dixon Gottschild brings a bracing mix of scholarship and unsentimental compassion to bear on the story of Joan Myers Brown, a classy, feisty, eminently pragmatic visionary whose life and dance company occupy a vivid and important place in the largely unexamined history of dance in Philadelphia, an early and important center for the art as well as Myers Brown's home. "Audacious Hope" is an indispensable good-read about an individual and her epic fight to make a place for herself in a world that did not accept black-skinned dancers like her, and then to build and maintain a major American dance company. But the book is much more. In the detail of the day-to-day work of being a dancer and developing dancers against the odds, so vividly evoked, too, in Myers Brown's pithy and unexpectedly poignant observations, Dixon Gottschild has captured the struggle of black Americans to help shape the culture of their country."

— Jennifer Dunning, former dance critic, *The New York Times*

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