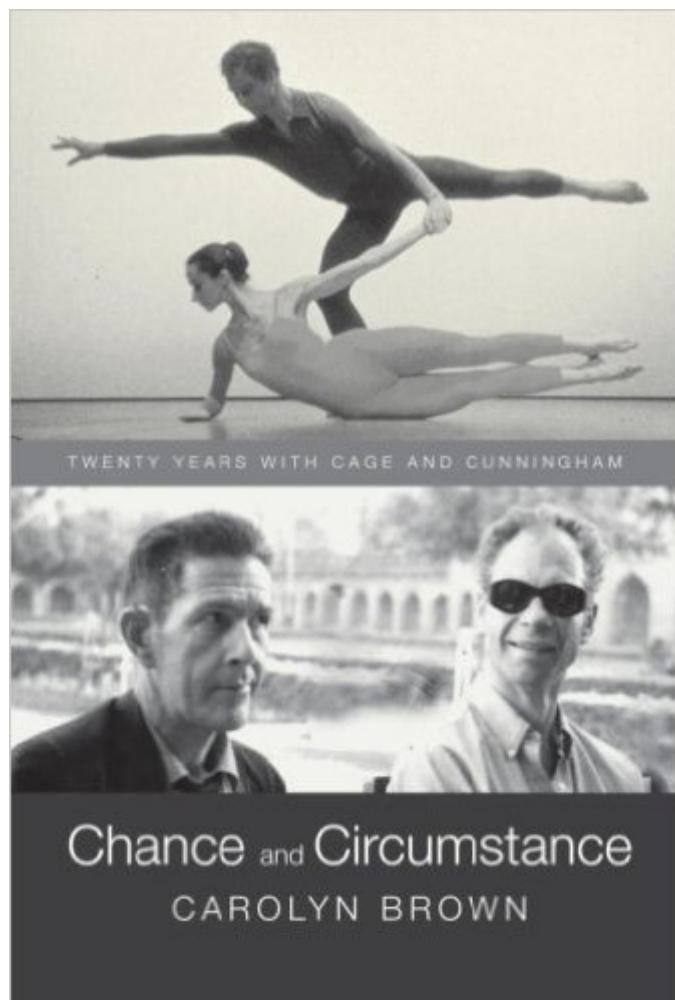


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# Chance And Circumstance: Twenty Years With Cage And Cunningham



## Synopsis

The long-awaited memoir from one of the most celebrated modern dancers of the past fifty years: the story of her own remarkable career, of the formative years of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and of the two brilliant, iconoclastic, and forward-thinking artists at its center—“Merce Cunningham and John Cage. From its inception in the 1950s until her departure in the 1970s, Carolyn Brown was a major dancer in the Cunningham company and part of the vibrant artistic community of downtown New York City out of which it grew. She writes about embarking on her career with Cunningham at a time when he was a celebrated performer but a virtually unknown choreographer. She describes the heady exhilaration—and dire financial straits—of the company’s early days, when composer Cage was musical director and Robert Rauschenberg designed lighting, sets and costumes; and of the struggle for acceptance of their controversial, avant-garde dance. With unique insight, she explores Cunningham’s technique, choreography, and experimentation with compositional procedures influenced by Cage. And she probes the personalities of these two men: the reticent, moody, often secretive Cunningham, and the effusive, fun-loving, enthusiastic Cage. *Chance and Circumstance* is an intimate chronicle of a crucial era in modern dance, and a revelation of the intersection of the worlds of art, music, dance, and theater that is Merce Cunningham’s extraordinary hallmark.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a former student and long time friend of Ms. Brown and Merce Cunningham, I was moved and delighted to revisit the struggles, perseverance and creativity that went into daily life during the

years Ms. Brown spent in the Cunningham Company and to understand, from her viewpoint, the inner workings of Merce's choreographic process. I learned so much and appreciate the knowledge, skill and levels of artistry, friendship and as well as travail that made those years so vital. Thanks,  
CB

The wonderful thing about this book is that it gives a very close-up view of the Cage/Cunningham world, especially in the early years of the Cunningham Dance Company. It also presents the two major figures, John Cage and Merce Cunningham, in a critical light. We see them both as the towering creative forces that the outer world knows, as well as the difficult, moody, and complicated people they really are, or were. The book is exhausting in the way it reveals Brown's life as a dancer, and the tensions and struggles of the Company. Perhaps it could be a few pages shorter, but (in the first half of the book) the insights into the world of modern dance in general, and the NY avant-garde in the 1950's and 60's in particular is fascinating and valuable. It's also a good example of why people should keep detailed journals.

This book is an excellent opportunity to examine Merce Cunningham's work. Carolyn Brown was probably his favorite dancer. She was intimately connected to Merce and John Cage. Many will come away with a more real understanding of what "chance" means to this work. This is very much a dancer's view of things. I only wonder why it took her thirty-five years to write this book. She confesses to the book deal being offered and signed almost as soon as she retired. There are telling comments on State support of the arts and on unions.

Merce Cunningham and John Cage are two of the most significant figures in dance and music in the second half of the 20th century. Cage, who is arguably the most influential artist of the second half of the century, has been much written about, and was himself a prolific author. Cunningham has also published influential books, and the two have been the subject of numerous documentaries. But not until now has there been an insider's view of what it was like to be an intimate part of the Cage-Cunningham inner circle, a world that included artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, composers Earl Brown, Morton Feldman, and David Tudor, and many others. Brown has written an honest, sincere account of what life was like touring the US in a VW bus with Cage at the wheel, stopping for picnics along the way. Moreover, while Brown clearly adores both Cage and Cunningham, she doesn't hesitate to provide occasionally hair-raising accounts of things said and done by these two artists that seem incongruous with the myths built up around them. In that regard,

Brown renders them human in a way I have never previously encountered. Reading that Cage, while in his cups one night, held forth on how turned on he was by Merce, should finally set the record straight (pardon the pun) about Cage's sexuality. The book is a treasury of great anecdotes about Brown's life on the road with an astonishing group of artists, and I felt privileged to have been privy to the journey. It is also a savvy analysis of Cunningham's choreography from the perspective of someone who actually danced it. This book should be required reading for anyone seriously interested in understanding the lives and work of Cage and Cunningham.

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