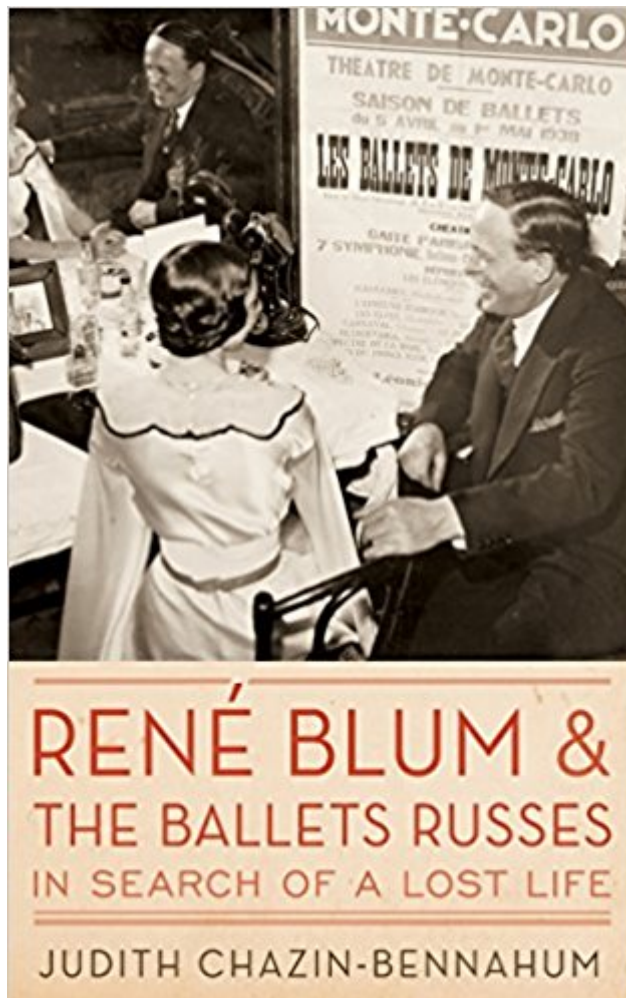




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Rene Blum And The Ballets Russes: In Search Of A Lost Life



Synopsis

The biography of a fascinating cultural hero, Renée Blum and the Ballets Russes uncovers the events in the life of the enigmatic and brilliant writer and producer who perished in the Holocaust. Brother of Léon Blum, the first socialist prime minister of France, Renée Blum was a passionate and prominent litterateur. He was the editor of the chic literary journal *Gil Blas* where he met such celebrated figures as Claude Debussy, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, André Gide, and Paul Valéry. As author Judith Chazin-Bennahum's research illustrates, Blum actually arranged for the publication of Proust's *Swann's Way*. But Blum's accomplishments and legacy do not end there: after enlisting in World War I, he won the Croix de Guerre and became a national hero. And Blum resurrected the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo after Diaghilev's death. Tragically, he was arrested in 1941 during a roundup of Jewish intellectuals and ultimately sent to Auschwitz. Based on a treasure trove of previously undiscovered letters and documents, this thoroughly researched narrative not only tells the poignant story of Blum's life but also illustrates Blum's central role in the development of dance in the United States. Indeed, Blum's efforts to save his ballet company eventually helped to bring many of the world's greatest dancers and choreographers--among them Fokine, Balanchine, and Nijinska--to American ballet stages, shaping the path of dance in the United States for years to come.

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Customer Reviews

"Like a detective, Judith Chazin-Bennahum sets out to recover Renée Blum's fascinating and

ultimately tragic life from the margins of history. Weaving him into the tapestry of the Belle Epoque and les annÃ©es folles, she reveals a life devoted from childhood to the arts, a writer-turned-ballet impresario who brought taste, passion, and a rare gift for friendship to everything he did. The brother of LÃ©on Blum, the first Socialist and first Jewish prime minister of France, RenÃ© died in Auschwitz, a victim like so many others of Nazi racial hatred."--Lynn Garafola, Professor of Dance, Barnard College "Chazin-Bennahum has unearthed the truth about RenÃ© Blum's extraordinary vision and artistic contributions. By illuminating the life of an important dance figure via an array of previously unknown primary sources, she also provides a first-rate model for dance biographies yet to come."--Elizabeth Aldrich, Dance Historian "Balletomanes, Francophiles, and students of European cultural history will enjoy this scholarly and meticulously researched work." -- Library Journal "Well researched and fascinating account of the wars of the Ballet Russes and World War II that destroyed so many great artists." -- ART TIMES "We owe her a debt for bringing Blum back into historical view." -- New York Times Book Review "A splendid new biography...For dance aficionados the book is a treasure house of information about life inside a ballet company from both artistic and financial points of view...This book is a wonder." -- Washington Independent Review of Books "Judith Chazin-Bennahum, the author, who researched heretofore uninvestigated archives, has done a heroic job in bringing to a larger public the life and work of RenÃ© Blum, who was perhaps the quintessential embodiment of twentieth century European culture up until World War I and a major force in dance after 1925." -- Art Times "The book is a major achievement in dance history. But Chazin-Bennahum's finest work is her last chapter, a harrowing account of Blum's final days. His heroism and selflessness in an appalling situation will bring tears to your eyes." -- Dance Magazine "This book is a long-needed account of the theater critic, art critic, ballet impresario, cinephile, army interpreter, showman, business director, talent scout and shill - and victim of the Nazis." -- San Francisco Chronicle, Best Books of 2011 "This biography is a must-read for all balletomanes, especially those who are interested in the history of the Ballets Russes and its impact on the development of modern dance...Chazin-Bennahum has brought RenÃ© Blum and his work back into view, recovering the narrative of an exceptional life tragically cut short by the Nazis' barbarism." -- Gay & Lesbian Review "Judith Chazin-Bennahum, in searching for [Blum's] lost life, has done a service - not just culturally, but morally." --DCA News

Judith Chazin-Bennahum, former ballet dancer, is Distinguished Professor Emerita of Theatre and Dance at the University of New Mexico.

There is hardly anything available on Rene Blum's life and this book reveals many of the difficulties experienced by Blum in his role of carrying on the 'Diaghilev' tradition of ballet. With his follow up by his organizing "Ballet de Monte Carlo" after De Basil's thievery of the (his) first company "Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo", and the subsequent selling to Massine's American co-owners, while trying to maintain control of the company. Then with the start of Hitler's WW II adventure and his lost life in prison. It is rather a tragedy that his memoirs were seemingly lost to dance history. The book is greatly appreciated in telling more the history of ballet during this troubled times.

Author Judith Chazin-Bennahum's biography of René Blum is subtitled "In Search of a Lost Life," and she delves deeply into the artistic and intellectual accomplishments of a fascinating critical writer, producer, and creative force in the first half of 20th century French, European and American cultural life. He was an aesthete passionately devouring every aspect of theatre, literature, music and dance between the two World Wars. He resurrected the Ballets Russes after Diaghilev died in 1929, battling with sensitivity the greed and competitive drives for power by Colonel de Basil, and the sometimes irresponsible actions of gifted but often insecure choreographers and dancers. In 1942 Blum lost his life in the Holocaust when Vichy French and German Nazis sent him to Auschwitz concentration camp. He suffered for a year in miserable conditions, yet persisted throughout to educate and inspire other prisoners. The author's exhaustive research has resulted in a richly painted view of cultural life in Paris, Monte Carlo, London, Russia, and later the United States where the Ballets Russes played a central role in the development of American dance. He helped bring the world's greatest choreographers and dancers to the United States, including Massine, Fokine, Balanchine, and Branislav Nijinska. Blum lived a life crowded with literary and art salons, writing art criticism, working as editor of the prestigious literary journal *Gil Blas*, producing opera and theatre works, and above all sponsoring gifted choreographers and dancers through new ballet companies. His close friends included Marcel Proust, and he circulated in artistic groups with Claude Debussy, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, and Andre Gide. Chazin-Bennahum notes that Georges Lecomte, a member of the Academie Francaise, wrote that Blum "organized a union of writers, a kind of federation of intellectuals." Blum was not totally divorced from politics and was a devout French patriot. He served in World War I and won the Croix de Guerre. His brother, Leon Blum, was the first socialist prime minister of France, who undoubtedly influenced René's social conscience. When invited to stay in the United States after the German invasion of France, Blum insisted that as a French citizen he needed to return to his homeland. It was a disastrous decision; due to the war atrocities and destruction Blum's life and accomplishments remained hidden for

many years. This author has resurrected the life of a brilliant cultural hero by gathering an enormous list of his productions in Monte Carlo, notes on each chapter, and a select bibliography. Her book was published by the Oxford University Press in 2011. Jennifer Noyer/Dance Critic Albuquerque Journal

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