



The Girl Who Fell Down: A Biography of Joan McCracken

Lisa Jo Sagolla

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Dancer and actress Joan McCracken (1917-1961), commanded a pioneering career that influenced some of the greatest artists on Broadway and in Hollywood. An overnight sensation for her 1943 comedic role as "The Girl Who Falls Down" in the groundbreaking musical "Oklahoma!", McCracken established the prototype dancer-comedienne, headlining in ballet, stage, film, and television productions before her life was tragically cut short by complications from diabetes. Derived from extensive interviews with McCracken's friends, family and colleagues, Lisa Jo Sagolla paints a complex portrait of the petite, blue-eyed and sprightly entertainer as a woman exploiting her mesmerizing beauty and magnetism to succeed in the man's world of entertainment, yet always retaining the persona of childlike pixie she portrayed on stage. McCracken's comic exuberance and athleticism also epitomized a new ballet form that married the European ideas of aristocratic grace and movement with a uniquely American spirit and style. From her beginnings in Philadelphia and New York, to her meteoric rise to fame, to her life-long struggle with the little understood and devastating effects of diabetes, "The Girl Who Fell Down" chronicles McCracken's spirited yet poignant life, including her training at Balanchine's seminal School of American Ballet, her blossoming as a "ravishing talent", with a "crackerjack dance technique" under Agnes de Mille, her supremacy as a performer, her marriages to acclaimed choreographer Bob Fosse and novelist Jack Dunphy, and her ultimate diagnosis with heart disease. Touching yet inspiring, Sagolla's account describes McCracken's lasting influence through her nurturing of husband Fosse's provocative career, her dramatic coaching of actress Shirley MacLaine, and her inspiration for the many dancer-comediennes that followed - Gwen Verdon, Carol Haney, and Sandy Duncan, to name a few. Rich with the social and cultural history of a golden age in show business and teeming with colourful choreographers, dancers and entertainers, this comprehensive and carefully researched biography should introduce Joan McCracken to a new audience of dance enthusiasts.

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