

# The Swans of Harlem

*author: Karen Valby*

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## Synopsis

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author	Karen Valby
readBy	Karlya Shelton-Benjamin, Sheila Rohan, Lydia Abarca Mitchell, Marcia Lynn Sells, Khadija Tariyan McKinney G., January LaVoy
inLanguage	english

**THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW** NOTABLE BOOK • Finalist for the PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography • The forgotten story of a pioneering group of five Black ballerinas and their fifty-year sisterhood, a legacy erased from history until now.   
 “This is the kind of history I wish I learned as a child dreaming of the stage.” Misty Copeland, author of *Black Ballerinas: My Journey to Our Legacy*   
 “Utterly absorbing, flawlessly-researched. Vibrant, propulsive, and inspiring, *The Swans of Harlem* is a richly drawn portrait of five courageous women whose contributions have been silenced for too long.” Tia Williams, author of *A Love Song for Ricki Wilde*   
 At the height of the Civil Rights movement, Lydia Abarca was a Black prima ballerina with a major international dance company—the Dance Theatre of Harlem, a troupe of women and men who became each other’s chosen family. She was the first Black company ballerina on the cover of *Dance* magazine, an *Essence* cover star; she was cast in *The Wiz* and in a Bob Fosse production on Broadway. She performed in some of ballet’s most iconic works with other trailblazing ballerinas, including the young women who became her closest friends—founding Dance Theatre of Harlem members Gayle McKinney-Griffith and Sheila Rohan, as well as first-generation dancers Karlya Shelton and Marcia Sells.   
 These Swans of Harlem performed for the Queen of England, Mick Jagger, and Stevie Wonder, on the same bill as Josephine Baker, at the White House, and beyond. But decades later there was almost no record of their groundbreaking history to be found. Out of a sisterhood that had grown even deeper with the years, these Swans joined forces again—to share their story with the world.   
 Captivating, rich in vivid detail and character, and steeped in the glamour

and grit of professional ballet, *The Swans of Harlem* is a riveting account of five extraordinarily accomplished women, a celebration of both their historic careers and the sustaining, grounding power of female friendship, and a window into the robust history of Black ballet, hidden for too long.

## Reader's comments

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