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Vernon And Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution



Synopsis

Vernon and Irene Castle popularized ragtime dancing in the years just before World War I and made dancing a respectable pastime in America. The whisper-thin, elegant Castles were trendsetters in many ways: they traveled with a black orchestra, had an openly lesbian manager, and were animal-rights advocates decades before it became a public issue. Irene was also a fashion innovator, bobbing her hair ten years before the flapper look of the 1920s became popular. From their marriage in 1911 until 1916, the Castles were the most famous and influential dance team in the world. Their dancing schools and nightclubs were packed with society figures and white-collar workers alike. After their peak of white-hot fame, Vernon enlisted in the Royal Canadian Flying Corps, served at the front lines, and was killed in a 1918 airplane crash. Irene became a movie star and appeared in more than a dozen films between 1917 and 1922. The Castles were depicted in the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers movie *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution* (1939), but the film omitted most of the interesting and controversial aspects of their lives. They were more complex than posterity would have it: Vernon was charming but irresponsible, Irene was strong-minded but self-centered, and the couple had filed for divorce before Vernon's death (information that has never before been made public). *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution* is the fascinating story of a couple who reinvented dance and its place in twentieth-century culture.

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Customer Reviews

Eve Golden's many books, particularly *Bride of Golden Images*, *Vamp: The Rise and Fall of Theda Bara*, *The Brief*, *Madcap Life of Kay Kendall* and *Platinum Girl: The Life and Legends of Jean Harlow* are each noteworthy for her thorough scholarship and her own lightness of touch. Clearly, she cherishes the Castles in all their artistry, foibles and their fascinating effect on popular culture, (they were largely responsible for making dancing in public acceptable for middle class people in America). However, Eve is never blind to her subject's faults but has some compassion for them. For example, as Ms. Golden describes him, Vernon was a disastrous business man who would sign any contract put before him and Irene, a wondrous fashion plate and a joy to see move in what few fragments of film remain, was also a bit of a snob, having grown up in a monied family. The delightful stories about a little known period when the Castles became teachers, choreographers, trend-setters and, in their spare time, animal rights activists is captured beautifully as the author conveys the social and economic changes of their era as well as the idiosyncrasies of the individuals who shaped that period.

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