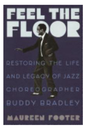

PERFORMING ARTS

Feel the Floor: Restoring the Life and Legacy of Jazz Choreographer Buddy Bradley

by Maureen Footer

Beacon. May 2026. 360p. ISBN 9780807045244. $36.
BIOGRAPHY/DANCE

COPY ISBN

Cultural historian Footer (*Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams*) brings to life one of dance's forgotten virtuosos, Buddy Bradley (1905–72). Born in the segregated South, Bradley lost both parents, left school as a teen, and embarked on an adventurous and profoundly influential life. After learning tap and jazz during the Harlem Renaissance, Bradley rose through the ranks to become a professional dancer, choreographer, and teacher in New York City. Like many Black creatives of the time, Bradley couldn't reach his true potential in the 1920s United States, but he found both work and praise by moving to Europe, spending much time in London. Details about Bradley's personal life and family are scant; Footer instead mostly focuses on his teaching, groundbreaking choreography, and his many credits in early films. Several former students speak reverently of him, constantly referring to his calm demeanor and famous "walk." The irony of this American-born choreographer, teaching American jazz and tap, only finding true success and accreditation in Europe, is a persistent undercurrent.

VERDICT An excellent and overdue portrayal of a backstage trailblazer, showing Bradley's hard work, dedication, and sacrifice to make a life doing what he loved.

Reviewed by Jessica Durham , Mar 01, 2026

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