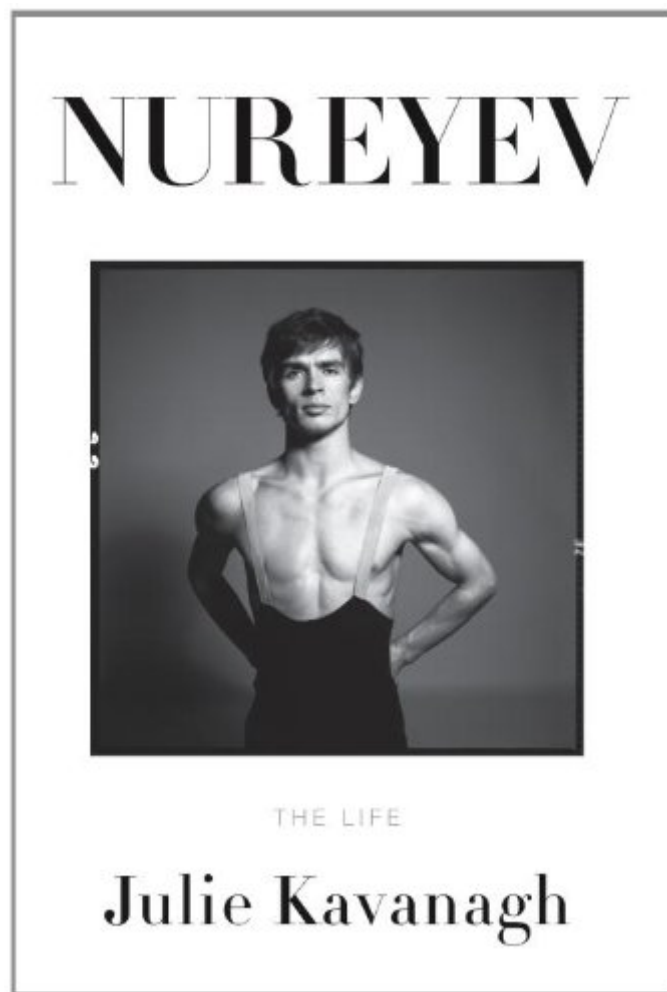


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Nureyev: The Life



Synopsis

Rudolf Nureyev had it all: beauty, genius, charm, passion, and sex appeal. No other dancer of our time has generated the same excitement, for both men and women, on or off the stage. With *Nureyev: The Life*, Julie Kavanagh shows how his intense drive and passion for dance propelled him from a poor, Tatar-peasant background to the most sophisticated circles of London, Paris, and New York. His dramatic defection to the West in 1961 created a Cold War crisis and made him an instant celebrity, but this was just the beginning. Nureyev spent the rest of his life breaking barriers: reinventing male technique, crashing the gates of modern dance, iconoclastically updating the most hallowed classics, and making dance history by partnering England's prima ballerina assoluta, Margot Fonteyn--a woman twice his age. He danced for almost all the major choreographers--Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, Kenneth MacMillan, Jerome Robbins, Maurice Béjart, Roland Petit--his main motive, he claimed, for having left the Kirov. But Nureyev also made it his mission to stage Russia's full-length masterpieces in the West. His highly personal productions of *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *Raymonda*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *La Bayadère* are the mainstays of the Paris Opéra Ballet repertory to this day. An inspirational director and teacher, Nureyev was a Diaghilev-like mentor to young protégés across the globe--from Karen Kain and Monica Mason (now directors themselves), to Sylvie Guillem, Elisabeth Platel, Laurent Hilaire and Kenneth Greve. Sex, as much as dance, was a driving force for Nureyev. From his first secret liaison in Russia to his tempestuous relationship with the great Danish dancer Erik Bruhn, we see not only Nureyev's notorious homosexual history unfold, but also learn of his profound effect on women--whether a Sixties wild child or Jackie Kennedy and Lee Radziwill or the aging Marlene Dietrich. Among the first victims of AIDS, Nureyev was diagnosed HIV positive in 1984 but defied the disease for nearly a decade, dancing, directing the Paris Opéra Ballet, choreographing, and even beginning a new career as a conductor. Still making plans for the future, Nureyev finally succumbed and died in January 1993. Drawing on previously undisclosed letters, diaries, home-movie footage, interviews with Nureyev's inner circle, and her own dance background, Julie Kavanagh gives the most intimate, revealing, and dramatic picture we have ever had of this dazzling, complex figure. NOTE: This edition does not include photos.

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Customer Reviews

Although this biography does not add too much new to Solway's (I do not know why Solway's book is not listed in this book's bibliography) it is well researched and comprehensive and had a nice writing style. However for me the purpose in reading biography is to understand how a person developed. The middle of it, that is, the part about Nureyev's working adulthood, is not linear but thematic. The author discusses events concerning topics like filming Nureyev's dancing or his dealings with a particular person that happened ten years apart in the same paragraph and sometimes even in the same sentence. Dates when Nureyev was doing certain things or when certain things happened to him need to be made much clearer. We do not need a datebook of every tour but it is hard to follow how things developed in his life and work when the narrative is not linear and dates are not always stated. I agree with the others that there was not enough analysis of various aspects of Nureyev's life and his motivations in spite of the length of the book. A biography does not have to be a complete psychological analysis but Nureyev himself was pretty self analytic in spite of the fact that (as I read elsewhere) that he never did psychoanalysis because he believed that part of his strength lied in being impulsive and not second guessing himself. As a psychiatric nurse it seems to me that he had a very narcissistic personality and had some manic depressive tendencies. I would not have been surprised if he were also on amphetamines which in these days were not considered illegal substances and this would account for his mood swings as well as excess energy. In spite of the length of the book I believe that I actually got more insight of

Nureyev's personality and motivations from Rudi Van Dantzig's memoir of him.

As I already had a tattered paperback copy of this book, I purchased this one as a replacement. When I finished reading this book in 2008, I was astonished by this incredibly complicated man and the story of his (short) life's journey, but I was not sure that I liked him. I was fascinated by him, so I proceeded to read all (except those publications not translated into English) I could about him. I have also had the pleasure of meeting several people who knew him personally. While they do not dispute Ms. Kavanagh's narrative, they feel that her concentration on his questionable escapades obscures his great art, his talent, his enormous contribution to his discipline and many other positive sides to his personality. They loved him, as did many wonderful people. Apparently, he wasn't always a "bad" boy. The book is long and more of that length could have been devoted to his many triumphs.

A great read due its truly describing the risk taking, persistence, and absolute devotion of a genius and his love for ballet. His mission to restore the ballet in its many forms to all ages all over the world was herculean. Kavanagh allows the reader to feel well deserved empathy toward Nureyev and also respect for his dedication and passion without "glossing over" his humanity.

I admired Nureyev a great deal and certainly recognize his contribution to ballet in much the same manner that I admired Callas and Pavrotti for what they did for opera, but you've got to really, seriously nearly be obsessed with Nureyev to wade through this tome. And, as usual with these tell all bios, you end up liking the subject a lot less than you did before.

Ms. Kavanagh's biography of Rudolph Nureyev provided me with an unexpected education of the world of ballet, about which I have know very little. I bought the book because as a young student I had seen Nureyev in Paris in June of 1961 in Sleeping Beauty at the Palais des Sports prior to sailing home to New York. It was while I was crossing the Atlantic that Nureyev defected. I still have the program from that ballet in Paris. With that much personal interest the well researched book transported me to the event in 1961 with the details of the defection which I have never known and filled in for me all the years afterwards until his death. I never saw him dance again after Paris where he was so impressive I remember how focused I was on his dancing ...really transfixed by his athleticism and presence. This book, which I purchased through , is an excellent preparation for understanding the complexity of ballet and for watching Nureyev's skills on videos...FJ Sullivan

This huge biography is well and sensitively written, well-researched, and generally a fascinating read. Actually, this is my second copy of the book. The first one I lent to someone who never returned it, and I wanted to replace it for my permanent collection. The book is particularly fascinating in its coverage of Nureyev's defection, and the resulting KGB efforts to smear, assault, or assassinate him, and the pressure put on his friends and associates in Russia to persuade him to return. This is the kind of book that bears repeated readings.

My interest in Nureyev began when I read the Solway book on the life of this great ballet star. Until that time, I had only a passing interest in ballet in general and a moderate interest in Nureyev after viewing a Barbara Walters' interview of the dancer. Therefore, I had acquired some knowledge of Nureyev at the time I purchased the Kavanagh book. What initially drew me to this account of his life was Kavanagh's writing experience with the New Yorker. I expected excellent writing and the book did not disappoint. Kavanagh's extensive research, including detailed interviews with friends and family of Nureyev promised a read that was rich in background and first-hand accounts of the dancer. After reading this book, I felt as though I actually knew the man as well as anyone could know another simply through reading about his/her life. Kavanagh's book inspired me to purchase five more biographies of Nureyev, some of which are written by well-known dance critics as well as close friends of the ballet star who change the role of the male dancer more than any other individual in the world of professional ballet.

Good read with interesting photos not normally seen.

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