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# Nureyev: The Life

*Julie Kavanagh*

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**Nureyev: The Life** Julie Kavanagh
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 l961 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 l993.

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.

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