



Dancer

Colum McCann

Download now

Read Online ➞

Dancer

Colum McCann

Dancer Colum McCann

Taking his inspiration from biographical facts, novelist Colum McCann tells the erotically charged story of the Russian dancer Rudolf Nureyev through the cast of those who knew him: there is Anna Vasileva, Rudi's first ballet teacher, who rescues her protégé from the stunted life of his provincial town; Yulia, whose sexual and artistic ambitions are thwarted by her Soviet-sanctioned marriage; and Victor, the Venezuelan street hustler, who reveals the lurid underside of the gay celebrity set. Spanning four decades and many worlds, from the horrors of the Second World War to the wild abandon of New York in the eighties, *Dancer* is peopled by a large cast of characters, obscure and famous: doormen and shoemakers, nurses and translators, Margot Fonteyn, Eric Bruhn and John Lennon. And at the heart of the spectacle stands the artist himself, willful, lustful, and driven by a never-to-be-met need for perfection.

Dancer Details

Date : Published February 1st 2004 by Picador (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9780312423186

Author : Colum McCann

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Russia, European Literature, Irish Literature

 [Download Dancer ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Dancer ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Dancer Colum McCann

From Reader Review Dancer for online ebook

Janice says

I debated over 3 and 4 stars on this one. The result of reading this book is that I am now fascinated with Rudolf Nureyev, the man. After finishing the book, I was scouring the internet for more information. That alone is an indication that the book had a big impact on me. But there were parts of it that I didn't care for.

What I liked about the book is that it wasn't just about Rudy, it was also about the settings (Russia, Paris, New York), the time period (WWII, Studio 54, emergence of AIDS), and the people around him (Margot Fonteyn, Yulia, the daughter of his first ballet teacher Anna Vasileva, his sister, even his housekeeper and shoemaker).

What I didn't like was that at times I was confused by who was speaking. This is the first time that I listened to a full cast in an audiobook, so at least the narrator changed with the different characters. But it wasn't clear who the character was. When Yulia first started telling her story, I was really confused. It would have been nice to have the monologue "titled" at the beginning of the section. Towards the middle to the end of the book, it became easier.

One thing that I found interesting was that all of the characters spoke in first person POV except Margot Fonteyn. A male narrator spoke of her in third person POV. Even Rudy spoke for himself. I wonder about the significance of the change in POV for one character.

Lynne Griffin says

Reads like poetry. Another hit for Colum McCann!

Dem says

" This is not a biography, it's a story, a novel, a tale. For a long time I toyed with the idea of calling it a false portrait" Taken from Colum McCann's interview online.

This is the story of the life of Russian Dancer Rudolf Nureyev and the people that surrounded him and for me it was the surrounding characters that took centre stage in this superbly written novel.

I have read a few of McCann's novels some I have liked better than others but this story from the first chapter where Russian Soldiers returning from the Eastern front after World War II are entertained by the young Nureyev had me hooked.

I am not a fan of Ballet and knew very little about the life of Nureyev and really had little interest in this book until I saw it was available in Whisper sync and I really love reading and listening to a book especially I want the correct pronunciation of foreign names people and places. The audio book for Dancer is excellent with different narrators for different characters and I didn't find it at all confusing switching between characters. McCann weaves his magic and tells an astonishing and quite believable story. The characters

themselves are so wide and varied and the story is told from their viewpoints which makes this book so compelling.

While I was quite interested in the story of Rudof, I was fascinated by the story of those he left behind in Russia and in life in general as it was through their voices we hear the real story. I am not sure I would have liked or cared for the dancer himself but I certainly appreciate his art and how hard he worked for the love of dance.

There were times in the story when I didn't care for the scenes of sex or drugs and readers may not like this aspect of the story but I do understand that it belonged in the book.

There is so much about this book that I loved, Colum McCann is a passionate writer and few authors match his insight, attention to detail and searing prose.

This powerful story will loiter in my mind and already I have played wonderful You Tube videos of Interviews and ballet performances by by Rudolf and his partner Margot Fonten.

Gearóid says

Very interesting and of course great writing from Colum McCann.

Madeline says

1. I know only a little about Nureyev (if you want, you can watch him on The Muppet Show, among other things), but while I think more knowledge would have enriched parts of *Dancer*, I am glad that I didn't know too much. It's an odd kind of historical fiction, not quite a biographical novel, but like one: the differences between fact and fiction are blurry. I really liked that experience, and I think it made the book richer.

2. McCann mixes first and third person narrative passages very effectively, bordering them with information from the historical record (although - as you can tell from the opening page which lists things thrown onstage during Nureyev's first Paris season - dance happily crosses the line between legend and history). The first person passages are from people peripheral to Nureyev's story (I suppose some of them are complete fabrications) - they are all very interesting characters. And they arouse sympathy, although they are less difficult people than Nureyev, so that reaction isn't really much of a surprise. I liked the kaleidoscope effect very much - it really enriched the story. Although I think a more straightforward historical novel would also have been interesting (and containing its own challenges).

3. The first book, with the descriptions of Russia during World War II, is worth a look for itself alone. There is a magnificent and devastating power there. Whether or not you give a damn about dance!

Joyce Williams says

A disappointing read by one of my new favorite authors, Colum McCann. I was so looking forward to an in-depth and colorful account of Rudolf Nureyev, the defected Russian dancer who changed the world of ballet like Jordan impacted basketball. Because his story is told through the perspectives of those who knew him, Nureyev was left undeveloped and the author didn't explore what was going on in Rudi's head. I felt as though I never really understood Rudi's view-- what went into the decision to forever leave Russia, family, friends, he was gay or bi during an unfavorable time, he was surrounded by seedy characters, he seemed to be hooked on drugs, what was it like to fully dedicate to ballet, he had an unusual relationship with an older female dancer... was that all about? These are the things I wanted to know. While there were many interesting parts, I found that the book generally dragged a bit and I found myself expecting more depth. Perhaps I'm unfairly comparing everything McCann writes to his most recent book, *Let the Great World Spin*....now that was an amazing book. And it's this bias, that led to 3 stars.

Charlaralotte says

Fantastico! A brilliantly imagined story about the life of Nureyev. Well-researched and well-written, with all the historical details to flesh out his journey from a small Russian steel town to the Kirov to defection to international fame and finally, the agony of the deteriorating body. Had an all-encompassing sense of historical events shaping the world and Nureyev's life that I wish McCann's more recent book, *Let the Great World Spin*, had reached. As with other writers, he won the Book Award for a later book, rather than this earlier work, which has a great deal more merit.

Elyse says

"Dancer".....by Colum McCann is a breathtaking tribute the Russian Ballet dancer, Rudolf Nureyev..... I mean BREATHTAKING!!!!

This book is a novel, yet Colum McCann took his inspiration from biographical facts from Rudolf's life. WOW.... and what a story!!! Captivating....spanning over four decades. The lyrically powerful prose is seductive....intimate....bigger than life...."dazzling"!!!!

Right from the start when 'Rudik' was a child in the Soviet Union (1941-1956)...we are transported back to the horrors of war. Injured soldiers were being cared for by women. Children have come to entertain their Russian Folk dance.

A soldier with an amputated leg on crutches from tree branches caught Rudik's fascination. His mother couldn't afford carpet in his house.... so between the two, we see a 7 year old's imagination at work. He started spinning on one foot on his own wood floor in his own house.

I thought of 'ALL THE PARENTS' who had these type of determined kids. At an early age, something stands out about their child....a PASSION - 'very young'. Rudolf was one of them.

Years later

A night on stage in London.... still only in in 20's:

"Rudi's body was a thing of the most captivating beauty--hard lines at his shoulders, his neck striated with muscle, enormous thighs, his calf muscles twitching. He took his partner in the air and spun her with remarkable lightness".

Part of a letter to his sister, Tamara, back home in Leningrad (1961 -1964)

"You choose to say my life is a circus now. Nothing is simple, Tamara, not even your attempts at simplification. Why did I do it? It was never my intention to leave. I could have stayed, but if you tread water long enough it is possible you might never learn to swim. I meant nothing by it. Politics is for fat men with cigars. It is not for me. I am a dancer. I live to dance. That is all".

In the way that I passionately love author Amor Towles writing Colum McCann, too, writes floating novels. Every sentence is exhilarating!!!

"Poverty lust sickness envy hope"

Barbara says

I absolutely loved this book. He had me from the initial description of the Russian front and the building of the baths for the soldiers all the way through mid-70s gay life in NYC, a dancer's physical decline, and the end of several character's lives. I think McCann is an exquisite writer, and there were so many sentences that stopped me cold while I read the book, I had to re-read them, and then read them out loud to my companions. I knew almost nothing of Nureyev when I started this book. I have since googled and sought other information on him, as well as studied countless photographs of Nureyev, Nureyev and Eric, and Nureyev and Margot Fontaine.

All of the characters are richly detailed. I enjoy the constant shift of perspective and different style of writing that McCann employs to amplify each character's personality and point of view.

Similar to *Let the Great World Spin*, McCann totally captures a slice of NYC in the 70s - a close friend and mentor of mine came out in 1977 and McCann's descriptions of the Rambles, the bath houses, and the general carefree wild sex of the time and place brought back so many memories and stories from my friend's life.

I can't wait to find another book by Colum McCann.

Marianne Timmons says

Colum McCann actually wrote an entire chapter without a period! Now, that takes guts. Before you call the MLA police, let me at least say that it was effective and created a fabulous tone for the coked-up hustler of whom the chapter revolved. That being said, he also chose to go in and out of first and third person narrative and changed narrators often and sometimes without provocation or notice. This wasn't as successful in my opinion. I only say that because I get confused easily...I'm a blonde. You, however, may find it intriguing

and cool. I can only trust my instincts about half the time anyway, so feel free to disagree. I don't, however, want that to cloud the fact that Colum McCann has a true gift of creating voice and mood within the text. It had a real feeling of honest storytelling that I really appreciated.

The story revolves around Rudi Nureyev, the famous Russian ballet phenom who defected in 1961. The book gives an account not only of Nureyev, but the people intertwined in his complicated life both in Russia and the west. Through journal-like accounts and descriptive outside perspective writing styles, you get to know his first ballet teacher, his ballet shoe maker, his dance partners, his housekeeper, his best friend, and others equally.

I can't say McCann made our "hero", Nureyev, a terribly sympathetic character. His temper, his eccentricities, and his bouts with an undiagnosed depressive disorder made him somewhat of a stock character (I'm kind of over the tortured artist thing in books...and life). I guess I just wish I knew maybe a little more about why he was the way he was. It kind of popped out of nowhere and fed into the folk legend of Nureyev's Studio 54 lifestyle. Meh, okay, I get it...he hung out with Andy Warhol and Truman Capote...okay, who didn't?

So, yes, I liked it. Mostly, due to the descriptiveness of the scenery, the authenticity of the humanity within the characters, and originality of style. Didn't change my life, but it's a good read.

Blodeuedd Finland says

It's a fictional story about Soviet ballet dancer Rudolf Nurejev. From his humble and poor Tatar upbringing, to when he studied at the famous Kirov in St Petersburg, to his jump to the west where he was adored by royalty and celebrities. And to his ultimate fall, his love affairs which brings him to his deathbed in Aids.

My problem with real characters is that I always have to google them, so yes I knew that he defected (not like I wouldn't have otherwise, he was too big for Soviet), and that he would die of Aids.)

I loved this book, ask me to explain and I don't know why. It just took me by surprise, McCann is a master with words and he knows how to spin a story. It all begins with soldiers coming home from WWII, and how they are bathed in Rudolfs home town of Ufa. It's glimpses out to the real world and they are shown through out the book.

"They looked out over the steppe and saw the bodies of fellow soldiers, a hand in the air, a knee in a stretch, beards frozen with frost, and they leaned to steal the dead man's clothes before he became stiffened in them, and they leaned in to whisper, Sorry comrade thanks for the tobacco."

Rather than seeing the world through his eyes, we see the world around him through those of his friends, family, and strangers. And in the beginning through his eyes the sentences are short, like thoughts sometimes. He is so busy so he only thinks of the things he must do to get better. The thing I then love is the fact that we see the world though the eyes of others, not only what they think about him, but how they are feeling. Hungry, tired, loved, everything that is crucial in life. I truly enjoy these glimpses into their lives. Some are fictional and some of them are real. McCann is not afraid to show the real world, and not some glamour bubble around one of the worlds greatest dancers.

Even though I do love this book, the end of the 3rd part and the 4th part gets tiresome. There is a lot of how

he screwed everything that moved through out the 60's to the 80's. He really should be in sex addicts anonymous. Not to mention that is what killed him. Not explicit sex scenes no this is not that kind of book. But it's just so much, and it's so depressing.

Still it's a lovely portrait of a man loved by ballet fans. McCann waves the fabric of his life into a wonderful tapestry which I highly recommend to all. He shows him to be what he was, arrogant and temperamental, still loved by all. They couldn't help it.

Michael says

This is certainly one of the very best biographical novels I've ever read. Truly unforgettable portrait of Nureyev and his passion and artistic drive.

Katerina says

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

?????????????, ?? ??????? ??, ???????? ?????????? ? ?????? ??????????
 ?????? ??????

[illegible][illegible]

??? ????? ??????, ? ?????????????? ?? ?????????????.

[illegible][illegible]

Matt says

Very brisk and rather quickly read. I picked this up idly from a friend's bookcase after a night of drinking, since I love to sleep but don't like to surrender that easily, and got through the bulk of it in one extended recumbency (semester's over, not much to do, figure I'd tack another contemporary up while I've got the time). the narrative is ideally suited for this kind of thing. McCann writes with some distinct, succinct, almost punchy sentences which follow each other so fluidly that the reader doesn't really notice how easily the pages are passing.

the story is interesting for people (like me) who revel in tortured artist stories. Didn't know very much about Nureyev and now I'm curious. McCann makes what seems to be a somewhat exaggerated though essentially accurate portrait of the man- aggressive, sexy, willful, egocentric but with an equally irrefutable sensitivity and brutal sense of repressed loss. I was reminded of an anecdote I'd heard about Michaelangelo and how he loved to sculpt out of marble- the "ecstasy", as contrasted to "agony"- and the subsequent image of him as a workaholic who loved his studio and the rigors of the workshop, to say nothing of the final product. Nureyev seemed similar, and it was inspiring to read about his dedication matching his passion and perfectionism. You gotta love to practice, whatever you're doing, don't you? It might well be that whatever you find enjoyably challenging when working on- never mind finishing- might just be your calling. Screw the final product, or the pride of creation. If the moonlighting is fun for you, then you ought to think about sticking to it. Journey not the destination, blahblahblah....

All in all, a very solid story. At points McCann really hit his stride with a sort of deliberate stream of consciousness structure for "Rudi"'s semi-diary as his artistic perfection and public acclaim start to click into place. You really get the sense of what it would be like to be a touring performer, seen of course through Rudi's eyes specifically. The supporting cast of characters- his sensual dance partner Margot, Erik the possibly number 2 dancer in the world, who is also his anguished obscure object of desire, his teacher, his floundering, gradually desperate family snowed in under Soviet repression and totalitarian imprisonment, the bird-flipping 3 year exile Nureyev assumes when the word gets back from Paris that the great ballet dancer might be...um... a 'poofa', and the charismatic, sybaritic Venezuelan Victor, queen of the coke-sodden suckathon in 80's bathhouse NYC who fades out dreaming of ultimate cock and shooting down his poisoned cells himself.

The novel does veer into some sort of overdone, obvious metaphorizing, dangling over the precipice of "Nice Writing"...part of the reason the book moves so floatingly and reads so smoothly is precisely because it's nearly all surface. McCann literalizes so much of the narrative and the motivations for the characters that we know pretty much exactly what we're getting, moment by moment, move by move, word for word. It's not simplistic, really, it's more that the narrative it presented with surface detail which swerves from the more ingrained form of storytelling, which would be to let the diagesis do the talking. The "show" not the "tell", in the irritating and almost irrelevant phrasing of the fiction workshop. It's a surface which necessarily follows the complex, firey, and dynamic characters all right, and therefore expresses their humanity in more complicated forms than simple minimalism would, but for a large part what you see is what you get. It's easy to enjoy but doesn't really hit the kinds of depths which the best of fiction has to offer. The dancing is vivid, but its under glass.

Joseph says

I guess I'm just over the let's-analyze-a-genius genre, and have been for a while. I picked this up when it came across my desk at the bookstore, because I've loved other things McCann has written, but this . . . while it is undeniably beautifully written, and parts of it are quite compelling, it turns out the subject matter just didn't do it for me, and the main character -- real-life ballet superstar Rudolf Nureyev -- is such an irredeemable jackass that I had a hard time really caring about him. I feel like "he's a GENIUS, you know, and therefore we excuse his excesses!" is an old trope with which I long ago grew tired.

Given the way Nureyev died, the book was bound to have a depressingly typical ending for a story about a gay man who lived through the 70s and 80s at the peak of his fame and sexual prowess. The book wisely treads lightly over this topic, but still, it has been done so many times that I'm a little bored even by the hint of it. I realize that (A) the reason so many stories about gay men end this way is because so many lives of gay men ended this way in the 80s and 90s, and (B) McCann doesn't want to just pretend that Nureyev didn't die or something, but it's still ground that's been covered enough times that I'm not that interested in pursuing it anymore.

The book has many, many merits, and its most compelling sections deal with Nureyev hardly at all, but more with the lives of ordinary Russians and Uzbeks in Khrushchev's Soviet Union. McCann retains his usual excellence at inhabiting the heads and hearts of disparate people, from Soviet dance instructors to Venezuelan hustlers, and the story's third-person sections display the same chilling eye for the devastating detail that he displayed in *Let the Great World Spin*. But for a book that is meant to be a portrait of an explosive and passionate man, it is strange that its most effective passages would be the muted and cold ones that draw pictures of those considerably more ordinary (and less obnoxious) than the putative main character.

Chrissie says

This is fiction, but based on the true life events of the famed Russian ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev (1938-1993). Through fiction the author attempts to show readers not only the external facts of Nureyev's life but also how he perceived his own life. We are not so much told his inner thoughts, motivations and feelings, but we watch what he does and follow the crazed, hyped celebrity life and the frenzied gay-scene that lead to his death by AIDS. He defected Russia in 1961. We see how this impacted his own life and the lives of those left behind. In this book we are shown, not told. What is shown to us is NOT pleasant. I am sure you know of his promiscuous behavior. There is sex and drugs aplenty. This is not a comforting read, no fairy tale. If that is what you want, then look elsewhere. We see Rudi's life through the eyes of both those closest to him and those who only brushed shoulders with him, through famed entities such as Jacqueline Onassis, Andy Warhol, Truman Capote, Erik Buhn, Margot Fonteyn and through fictional characters too.

There is no author's note stating explicitly what is fiction and what is fact, but I am convinced that Colum McCann has mirrored Nureyev's world accurately. I did shore up the facts by reading Wikipedia. I learned much through the fictional characters. They gave depth to the story; some of them I grew to love (Odil and Tom and Anna, to name but three.) Having read this book, I feel I have lived next to Nureyev through his childhood, all the way to his death, ending with a final auction of his possessions. Each episode had a message, none were superfluous. I found neither the sex nor his final illness too explicit; I felt the electricity in the air, the dizzying pace, his fight for perfection in his dance and the sensuality of ballet. Don't expect the life of a true artist to be anything but violent.

The audiobook has five different narrators, named below. In one chapter the reader hops from one character to another, without warning, but I was never confused. The audiobook's narrators did not correspond to one specific character. You could not assume that if you heard one voice you knew which character was speaking since there were many more characters than the five audiobook narrators. The only narrator I was not happy with was Jessica Almasy. Her voice was too sweet, too childish! All the others were great, and Suzanne Toren was f-a-n-t-a-s-t-i-c!!! Is she my favorite narrator? There is a brutal chapter filled with sex and drugs, read by one of the male narrators. That too, with its staccato pulse, perfectly created the world of Nureyev at that time. I believe that listening to the audiobook further enhances the reading experience. The tempo, the dialects, the intonations create an atmosphere that carries the reader beyond the written words.

I feel I know now what moved, motivated and pushed Rudolph Nureyev. I feel I understand him. I pity him and I admire him. Both. When I look at his life I look at it with disgust and admiration. I think the author has done a tremendous job. The way Colum McCann has mixed fact with fiction is really amazing. Five stars.

I have just begun my third book by Colum McCann. It won't be my last. I cannot get enough of his writing. It is fantastic. Why? Well, because he mixes the tragedy of life with humor and beauty. I have just experienced WW2 in Ufa, Russia. The horror of war is painted on a tableau. Next to this are also people laughing, the wonders of a warm bath, the glint of an eye and the sounds of a balalaika and singing. I can't take the horrors of the earlier tableau if I am not given the happiness too. I love seeing both so beautifully depicted one next to the other. Life IS beautiful if we just pay attention and look and listen and smell. What writing! Is this my favorite author?

I am listening to an audiobook with superb narration by several narrators, men and women who expertly pronounce the Russian dialect. Their names are: Jonathan Davis, Nick Pauling, Jessica Almasy, Marc Vietor and Suzanne Toren. All of them are new to me except Suzanne Toren who did a great job narrating Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader. I am so glad I have a long-listen ahead of me, more than 12 hours. :0)

Isidora says

En biografi av Rudolf Nurejev-en av alla tiders största balettdansörer, eller snarare en roman om Nurejevs liv och konst. En rysk roman, egentligen, fast skriven av en irländare från New York.

Colum McCann skriver om den unge Rudik som dansar för de skadade soldaterna på sjukhuset hemma i Sibirien. Om nittonåringen som dansar på Kirovteatern i Leningrad. Om avhoppet till väst 1961, om alla år när han var en av de största stjärnorna och de mest omskrivna personerna i världen. Men även om hårt arbete, blod i dansskorna, jetsetlivet, bastuklubbarna, pojkarna och männen som Rudi raggar upp. Och så om hans kärlek till mamma i Sovjet. Författaren talar genom en rad personer som känner Nurejev och ibland genom dansaren själv.

I boken får vi träffa flera andra intressanta karaktärer, första dansläraren, hennes man och dotter, Margot Fonteyn, skomakaren, vännen Victor, osv.

Boken är underbar. McCann skriver med sällsynt klarhet. Så intensivt att man tappar andan. För mig är de delar som utspelas i Sovjet nog bästa i boken. Och så porträtt av Margot Fonteyn. Författaren har så mycket kärlek för sina karaktärer.

Jag rekommenderar denna bok varmt. Den är min starkaste läsoplevelse på länge. Colum McCann är en ny bekantskap för mig men jag kommer säkert att läsa mer av honom.

Gretchen says

Beautiful!!! That is the word which best describes this biographical novel of Rudi Nureyev the great Russian ballet dancer who began life as a boy in communist Russia to later defect and live a glamorous life of opulence around the world. Rudi's story is told from the point of view of those nearest and dearest to him and while at times he seems almost completely unsympathetic based on his compulsive and diva like behaviors, the author strives to find his most human qualities and paints a beautiful picture of a haunted man. Though the book never explicitly states the cause of Rudi's death, it is painfully obvious based on his promiscuous lifestyle and the descriptions of his declining health that he was among those felled by AIDS before the disease became known as it is today. Reading this book, I wanted to find a tape so that I could see the dancer in all of his glory as he had been described so brilliantly upon the page. This is by far one of my best buys off of the Barnes and Noble Bargain shelf to date.

Caroline Anna Bock says

Colum McCann, admittedly one of my favorite writers (Transcontinental, Let the Great World Spin), wrote *Dancer* in 2003, and a new paperback edition with was on my library's shelves.

Dancer

I had never read this early novel of his—so I picked up the deckle-edged paperback, and I was blown away. This is the story of the great Russian dancer Nureyev re-imagined from his brutally rough upbringing in the Russian hinterlands (a city called UFA, where he grew up speaking Tatar), immediately after the ravages of WWII to his wild, erotic days as a premier dancer with Margot Fonteyn after he fled to the west to his decline, which tracked the rise of AIDS in the gay community, though the latter is not explicit, it colors the end of the novel with sadness. It's erotic—the description of dance as sex, sex as dance. Nureyev loved women—and men, and loved dance most of all. It's emotionally-charged; the writing swirls and pirouettes and comes back to earth with such grace that anyone who loves the highs and lows of a great story should read this novel. It's not for the faint of heart at times—it's written in multiple points of view that one must keep close track—not for those who would fail to look death and sex straight in the eye. *DANCER* is for the reader who wants to soar.

--Caroline

Caroline Bock

Suzanne says

Dancer is a work of fiction about the life of Rudolf Nureyev. I am a balletomane. I first became enchanted with the art form when I read a book about Vaslav Nijinski in high school. Then my aunt took me to see the

Royal Danish Ballet perform Coppelia at NYC's Metropolitan Opera House. I was hooked. While I never got to see Nureyev dance, SHE did. And seeing Nureyev with Margot Fonteyn was the catalyst that ignited HER interest in ballet. Today my son is training to be a professional ballet dancer, and I have a special interest in male danseurs.

Going from Nijinski to Nureyev, you see an obvious connection. It's not about their nationality, however, it's their state of mind. They were both men obsessed with their art. It drove Nijinski to madness. I believe Nureyev suffered from another form of mental disability. Dance became so much a part of him, that he did not relate well to others. He seemed to lack empathy. His best friends, Erik Bruhn (who was his lover) and Margot Fonteyn, did indeed love him, but it perhaps it was because they understood and respected his passion for dance.

McCann captured Nureyev quite well. There was a real sense of his dance-focus, and his self-centered personality. The author also expertly lays the backdrop of Soviet Russia, along with the staggering fame, paranoia and hard-hitting party life that led Rudi down a perverse path that would eventually kill him. My only complaint was the way the McCann changed narrators - often and in a confusing way. There were many times it took me pages to figure out who was telling the story.
