



The Great Nijinsky; Written and Illustrated by Lynn Curlee

Charlesbridge Teen, 2019

9781580898003 (Hardcover)

*Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Range: 7 and up

BOOK SYNOPSIS

A tragic story of a cultural icon—dance prodigy, sex symbol, LGBTQ+ pioneer. This compelling work of narrative nonfiction chronicles a life of obsessive artistry and celebrity of Vaslav Nijinsky.

With one grand leap off the stage at the 1909 premiere of the Ballets Russes's inaugural season, Nijinsky became an overnight sensation and the century's first superstar, in the days before moving pictures brought popular culture to the masses. Perhaps the greatest dancer of the twentieth century, Nijinsky captured audiences with his sheer animal magnetism and incredible skill.

He was also half of the most famous (and openly gay) couple of the Edwardian era: his relationship with Serge Diaghilev, artistic director and architect of the Ballets Russes, pushed boundaries in a time when homosexuality and bisexuality were rarely discussed. Nijinsky's life was tumultuous--after marrying a female groupie he hardly knew, he was kicked out of the Ballets Russes and placed under house arrest during World War I. Unable to work as he once did, his mental health deteriorated, and he spent three decades in and out of institutions.

Biographical narrative is interspersed with spotlights on the ballets the dancer popularized: classic masterworks such as *Afternoon of a Faun*, *The Firebird*, and of course, the shockingly original *Rite of Spring*, which caused the audience to riot at its premiere. Illustrated with elegant, intimate portraits as well as archival art and photographs.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

“While contemporary conceptions of sexual identity and mental illness cannot easily be superimposed over historical biographies, readers nevertheless are presented with a full picture of Nijinsky's life.” – *School Library Journal*

“Beautifully designed, the book is punctuated with theater program–like spreads with brief descriptions of ballets accompanied by Curlee’s striking jewel toned portraits and archival photographs.” – The Horn Book

“Curlee . . . engaged in extensive research and details major events in Nijinsky's life . . . Quotations from contemporaries and occasionally the dancer himself breathe further life into the narrative.” – *Kirkus Reviews*

“The book’s spacious pages—heavily illustrated with original paintings, vintage photos, and simulated programs—elevate the moving story, making for a memorable volume that captures the dancer’s singular talent, fame, and notoriety.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“Curlee’s narrative is lucid and smooth . . . This elegant volume has a place in any collection.” -- *Booklist*

“Absolutely a must for all ballet companies and students of the dance.” – Kenneth Von Heideke, founder and artistic director of Von Heidecke's Chicago Festival Ballet

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- 2020 YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adult finalist

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Publishers Weekly Q&A with Lynn Curlee](#)
- [Deborah Kalb Q&A with Lynn Curlee Blog Post](#)
- [The News Gazette Article on *The Great Nijinsky*](#)
- [Teacher Dance Blog Review](#)

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.