



Dancer: A Novel

By Colum McCann

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From the acclaimed author of *This Side of Brightness*, the epic life and times of Rudolf Nureyev, reimagined in a dazzlingly inventive masterpiece—published to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Nureyev's death

A Russian peasant who became an international legend, a Cold War exile who inspired millions, an artist whose name stood for genius, sex, and excess—the magnificence of Rudolf Nureyev's life and work are known, but now Colum McCann, in his most daring novel yet, reinvents this erotically charged figure through the light he cast on those who knew him.

Taking his inspiration from the biographical facts, McCann tells the story through a chorus of voices: there is Anna Vasileva, Rudi's first ballet teacher, who rescues her protégé from the stunted life of his town; Yulia, whose sexual and artistic ambitions are thwarted by her Soviet-sanctioned marriage; and Victor, the Venezuelan hustler, who reveals the lurid underside of the gay celebrity set. Spanning four decades and many worlds, from the horrors of Stalingrad 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, Margot Fonteyn 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.

In ecstatic prose, McCann evokes the distinct consciousness of the man and the glittering reflection of the myth. The result is a monumental story of love, art, and exile.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A chorus of voices breathe new life into the story of Rudolf Nureyev, one of ballet's greatest performers, in this vibrant, imaginative patchwork of a novel by Irish expatriate McCann (*This Side of Brightness*, etc.). As a seven-year-old peasant boy in 1944, Rudi dances for wounded soldiers in a hospital ward during World War II. By the mid-1950s he has outgrown life in the tiny Soviet town of Ufa, his unfailing determination to perform (against the stern wishes of his father) driving him into the wider world. It is his stubborn persistence more than his natural talent that distinguishes him, but his first teachers see great potential in him, and he is accepted into a ballet company in Leningrad. He defects to France and later moves on to Italy, where "the ovations become more exhausting than the dance" and he is sucked into the drug and disco culture of the late '70s, even after his partner Margot Fonteyn urges him to stay focused. A relationship with New York gay hustler Victor Pareci allows Rudi to indulge his wildest impulses, but his brashness and self-absorption are tempered when he journeys back to his homeland in 1987 in the touching conclusion. The sections narrated by different characters, some central and some marginal, create a kaleidoscopic effect. Faithfully capturing the pathos and grim poverty of the Soviet Union at mid-century, McCann also reveals a splashy tabloid affinity for the excesses and effects of fame and notoriety. Though the focus here is narrower than that of McCann's previous works, the novel is a lovely showcase for his fluid prose and storytelling skill.

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From Library Journal

McCann's latest (after *Everything in This Country Must*) is hugely ambitious: a fictionalized account of the life of Rudolph Nureyev—the Cold War danseur noble lauded as the world's first "pop star dancer"—as told by those who knew him. Among the narrators are the irrepressible Yulia, the daughter of Nureyev's first ballet teacher; Margot Fonteyn, Rudik's brilliant dance partner; Victor, a gay hustler from the Lower East Side with a penchant for blow, bath houses, and back talk; and others. What emerges is a pastiche of both the man and the myth, the disparate voices combining to create a lyrical and variegated portrait. The narrative technique can, however, be disorienting and even frustrating, as the reader cares more about some narrators than others and is loath to depart from them. McCann also has a somewhat irksome tendency to over-explain moments he should allow to resonate on their own. Still, the work hangs together well and is finally an enormous achievement. Both the Soviet Union of the war-torn 1940s and the displacement and hopefulness of an exile's life are perfectly evoked, and Nureyev—impossible, erratic, and brilliant—is a golden flame that sets everything ablaze. Recommended for all contemporary fiction collections.

--Tania Barnes, *Library Journal*

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From [Booklist](#)

For three decades, the legend of ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev spread from continent to continent: the semicultured boy from Ufa who takes the Leningrad dance world by storm; political asylum in Paris; the amazing partnership with Margot Fonteyn; the matinee idol dancer; the hyperactive sex life; the enfant terrible. Actual events and qualities of Nureyev's public persona are tossed together in this novel, and his legend, nearly 10 years after his death, becomes myth. Some of the characters are real (Fonteyn, for instance), while others have sprung from the author's imagination. McCann is such a good writer that, real or not, the characters' powerful voices lead the reader to suspend disbelief on an entirely deeper level. Only dance writers and true Rudi fanatics will be able to distinguish the real from the imaginary, and one even suspects they might have some problems. Still, even those who have never been to a ballet—or seen Nureyev

dance--will find this book enjoyable. *Frank Caso*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rebecca Burks:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite book and reading a publication. Beside you can solve your condition; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled *Dancer: A Novel*. Try to face the book *Dancer: A Novel* as your pal. It means that it can be your friend when you truly feel alone and beside regarding course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortunate to suit your needs. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know almost everything by the book. So, let us make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

Doris McNeal:

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