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Lucy Moore

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Lucy Moore : Nijinsky: A Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nijinsky: A Life:

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Comprehensive and insightfull bio, accurate conclusions I would say ...By Michael Joseph Wolsey Comprehensive and insightfull bio, accurate conclusions I would say. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Delightful By Martina A. Nicolls Nijinsky is the biography of dancer Vaslav Fomich Nijinsky (1889-1950). Born in Kiev to professional dancers, Nijinsky had an older brother, Stanislav ndash; who damaged his head in a fall at two years of age, was committed to an asylum at 16, and died at 31 in 1918 ndash; and a

younger sister Bronia (1891-1972) and who danced with Nijinsky for much of his life. When his father left the marriage, Nijinsky's mother travelled to Moscow to enrol him in the prestigious Imperial Theatre School (the Mariinsky Ballet). At nine years of age he was accepted in a class of six boys and 14 girls (from an application pool of 100 boys and 200 girls). Of the five other boys, four died tragically in their twenties. Only Anatole Bourman (1888-1962), the author of *The Tragedy of Nijinsky* (2010), outlived them. The Imperial Theatre School was convent-like, rigid, rigorous, competitive, and cut-throat. It was a time when girls were the focus, and boys were their 'lifelines'; partners. Even before he graduated in 1907, he danced with legendary Russian prima ballerina Anna Pavlova (1881-1931) in 1906. After graduation he was dismissed from the Imperial Theatre School for wearing an indecent costume and not apologizing. Nijinsky signed a contract for 1909-10 with impresario Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, commencing an overseas tour as lead dancer. In Paris in 1909 at the opening night of *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, newspaper *Le Figaro* hailed him *Dieu de la Danse* - The God of the Dance. In *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, *Les Sylphides*, *Giselle*, *Carnaval*, and *Scheherazade*, he not only showed his physical strength, but his versatility and his long-held high leaps. He was explosive, exotic, virile, and intoxicating. He was a star. Off-stage he was shy, quiet, aloof, and withdrawn. If he returned to Russia he had to undertake compulsory military service. Hence, from 1910, without a passport, Nijinsky was 'effectively stateless, belonging nowhere but the stage.' He continued dancing in Diaghilev's troop. In the controversial *Le Spectre de la Rose* - where he was literally a flower - his performance was called 'an extraordinary feat of strength and control.' The author suggests his greatest performance was in *Petrushka* as the unhappy clown in 1911. By then he was dancing mainly with Tamara Karsavina (1885-1978). In 1912 at the age of 23, he began choreographing, but the dance troop complained that they could not understand what Nijinsky wanted and they were reduced to counting in rehearsals to follow a rhythm, which the dancers called 'arithmetic classes.' Nijinsky choreographed original ballets, such as *Après-midi d'un faune* (The Afternoon of a Faun) - so original that they were controversial, shocking even the unshockable audiences in Paris. Sensuous, sexual, radical, abstract, jagged steps, frenzied movements, unmelodic, flat-footed, straight-leg jumps, and with body stockings and daring costumes, it was outrageous - it was the 'shock of the new' - it was modern. It was not ballet! And the author's descriptions of these chapters are exceptional. In 1913 on the ship to South America for another ballet tour, Nijinsky unexpectedly proposed to Hungarian socialite, Romola de Pulszky, marrying her in Buenos Aires. He was 24 and she was 21. Subsequently Diaghilev fired him. With two children, Kyra and Tamara, during wartime, Nijinsky was unsuccessful in creating his own dance company, and hence undertook a brief seasonal tour in America. Homeless, stateless, jobless, Nijinsky oscillated between rage, paranoia, and silence as his mental state deteriorated. Over 45 days in Switzerland in 1919, he penned a diary, published in 1999, that was considered 'the only sustained, on-the-spot (not retrospective), written account, by a major artist, of the experience of entering psychosis.' Some colleagues suggested that his breakdown was 'somehow voluntary' - a retreat from struggles. With excessive medication and even shock therapy, he never regained his creative spark. He never danced again. The author's last chapters focus on debatable issues: Nijinsky's mental state, his sexuality, his diary, gender roles, his genius, and the moulders (shapers) of his legacy. While there are photographs of Nijinsky in costume (including some black-and-white ones in the book) no film exists of him dancing. Described as the first full-length biography of Nijinsky for over 30 years, since Richard Buckle's *Nijinsky* (1971), Moore not only covers his major ballets, but also his creative processes, ideologies, challenges, controversies, reviews, and audience reactions. Moore draws on the works of his sister Bronia, his diaries, and the context of the times. It is beautifully written and in a way that captures each step, turn, lift, and leap - the strength of each muscle and the tenderness of each movement. It is a fascinating account of Nijinsky's heady leap to stardom, the rollercoaster ride of his inner demons, and the tragic descent that stilled his creative genius.

'He achieves the miraculous,' the sculptor Auguste Rodin wrote of dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. 'He embodies all the beauty of classical frescoes and statues'. Like so many since, Rodin recognised that in Nijinsky classical ballet had one of the greatest and most original artists of the twentieth century, in any genre. Immersed in the world of dance from his childhood, he found his natural home in the Imperial Theatre and the Ballets Russes, he had a powerful sponsor in Sergei Diaghilev - until a dramatic and public failure ended his career and set him on a route to madness. As a dancer, he was acclaimed as godlike for his extraordinary grace and elevation, but the opening of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* saw furious brawls between admirers of his radically unballetic choreography and horrified traditionalists. Nijinsky's story has lost none of its power to shock, fascinate and move. Adored and reviled in his lifetime, his phenomenal talent was shadowed by schizophrenia and an intense but destructive relationship with his lover, Diaghilev. 'I am alive' he wrote in his diary, 'and so I suffer'. In the first biography for forty years, Lucy Moore examines a career defined by two forces - inspired performance and an equally headline-grabbing talent for controversy, which tells us much about both genius and madness. This is the full story of one of the greatest figures of the twentieth century, comparable to the work of Rosamund Bartlett or Sjeng Scheijen.

“Lucy Moore had not written about dance until this book, but her research and notations are meticulous, and beyond that, her command and authority of describing performance, historical context and Nijinsky’s life of triumph and defeat.” -New York Journal of Books