

## Dreams Realized: Hard Work, Passion, and Talent in the Life of Nureyev

*The Dancer Who Flew: A Memoir of Rudolf Nureyev.* Linda Maybarduk. Tundra, 1999. 188 pp. \$22.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-415-0.

In *The Dancer Who Flew: A Memoir of Rudolf Nureyev*, Linda Maybarduk presents the professional life of the famous Russian ballet dancer as a “rags-to-riches” success story spanning the divide between a communist east and a democratic west. While some readers may find Maybarduk’s portrait of the dancer highly idealized, the inspiring narrative of how Nureyev’s hard work and determination earned him both success and respect for his artistry in ballet offers an incentive for readers to follow their own dreams.

The pursuit of dreams is a major theme throughout this memoir. The introduction begins with Maybarduk recounting her own childhood dream of becoming a ballerina. After watching Nureyev perform on television, she states, “That night, a dream was born in me”: the dream to dance with Rudolf Nureyev. The narrative of her pursuit of a dream ends with an anecdotal account of its realization: her 1972 performance with Nureyev.

Maybarduk begins Nureyev’s story with a brief, somewhat melodramatic account of the rise of communism in Russia under Lenin and Stalin. She describes the period as “horrific,” “bloody,” and “terrible.” Although she balances this description by noting that, under communism, “daily life improved for many people in the Soviet Union,” the tension between East and West, communism and democracy, plays an important role in the book as it did in spurring many of the events in Nureyev’s life. In a chapter entitled “Freedom,” Maybarduk contextualizes her account of Nureyev’s famous 1961 defection, which marked the beginning of his sensational career in the West, in the political tensions of the Cold War, before proceeding to describe his artistic successes in his first seven months in Europe and North America. While this political background informs, it does not overwhelm the major focus of this memoir: for Nureyev, personal and artistic freedom supersede nationalist loyalties.

In pursuit of this freedom, the Nureyev whom Maybarduk presents is a model of what work ethic and passion can accomplish. The chapter “Performance Day” captures this ethic in a description of Nureyev’s rigorous daily schedule while offering readers an insight into what occurs offstage in preparation for a dance performance. Maybarduk describes how Nureyev’s day proceeded from dance class, which he attended “even if he was tired, injured, or ill,” to rehearsals which ran until lunch. In the afternoon, he would often visit museums or art galleries to continue the cultural self-education he had begun in his spare time while studying ballet in Leningrad. He would then arrive back at the theatre to prepare for the evening’s performance. Before going to sleep at night he would read from favourite authors such as Byron, Flaubert, and Pushkin. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s he danced seven or eight performances a week despite sickness or injury. Maybarduk notes that he seemed “superhuman.” Such details appearing throughout the book contribute to the “rags-to-riches” theme that characterizes this memoir: she repeatedly emphasizes that Nureyev’s success was due to “old-fashioned hard work” as much as to his natural talent.

“Nothing happens unless you make it happen — even if you have awesome talent!” Such quotations from Nureyev, along with repeated descriptions of his ex-

acting self-discipline, may make Maybarduk's portrait of the dancer seem too idealized to those readers familiar with press coverage of his bad temper and controversial personal life. Maybarduk states in the introduction that her memoir "is not a tell-all about his private life." Her account of Nureyev's "professional" life has resulted in a book that emphasizes his accomplishments in dance. With over 70 black-and-white photographs of Nureyev both off and on stage, a brief chart outlining ballet history, and a glossary of ballet terms, the book is directed mainly at young readers, female and male. (Nureyev was the dancer to re-establish male leading roles equal to female ones in ballet.) However, older readers will also enjoy Maybarduk's anecdotes about Nureyev.

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### Rich Parables for Children and Adults

*The Wolf of Gubbio.* Michael Bedard. Illus. Murray Kimber. Stoddart Kids, 2001. 24 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-77373-250-0. *The Floating Orchard.* Troon Harrison. Illus. Miranda Jones. Tundra, 2000. 32 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-439-8.

These two books offer rich parables: one retells an old legend, while the second offers a new and poignant tale of change. Like any good parable, both books straddle the worlds of adulthood and childhood, explaining with sensitivity and simplicity the challenges of human life.

*The Wolf of Gubbio*, nominated for a 2001 Governor General's Award for its illustrations, reworks a legend about St. Francis arriving in the Italian town of Gubbio and encountering there a wolf who has been terrorizing the town. Although the story has existed in various versions since 1226, all versions pivot on the central moment when vulnerable St. Francis confronts a hungry and misunderstood wolf with nothing but trust. When he convinces the townspeople to feed the wolf, they placate the awful horror that was in their midst. Michael Bedard's narrative does not dismiss the religious elements of the story, introducing St. Francis as the Poverello, the leader of "a ragged band of strangers" who are "barefoot" but likely miracle workers. He also asserts the historical veracity of the story, pointing out in an afterword that a large wolf's skull was found under a church floor in Gubbio in 1873. However, the story affects most at the level of parable. It tells us in powerful images that we should confront violence not with more violence but with trust and creativity. Bedard invents a new narrator for the story, a young boy of Gubbio, and we meet him on the last page of the book feeding the large and hungry wolf. Shaping the legend in this way makes it a plea for peace and understanding from the voice of a child whose trust and innocence mirrors that of the Poverello. The illustrations by Murray Kimber are indeed luminous. One of the paintings focuses on the moment of the meeting between St. Francis and the wolf; packed with tension, it is an ideal subject for artistic representation. (Robert Kakagamik, an artist from the Oji-Cree reserve in Sandy Lake, Ontario, has also tackled this narrative moment very successfully.) Kimber's paintings shine forth with the Mediterranean