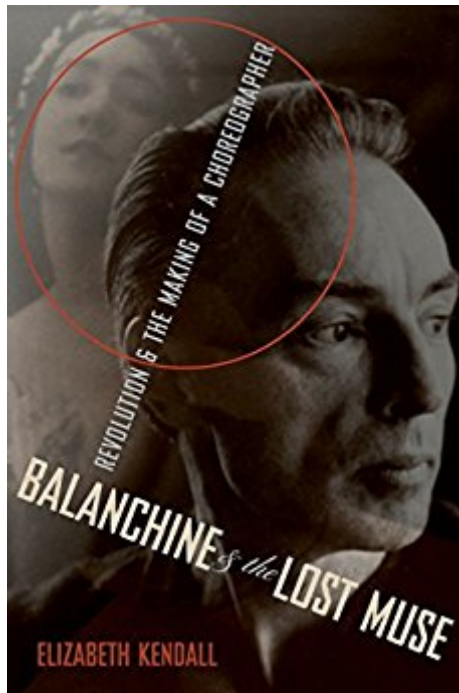


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# Balanchine & The Lost Muse: Revolution & The Making Of A Choreographer



## Synopsis

Here is the first dual biography of the early lives of two key figures in Russian ballet: famed choreographer George Balanchine and his close childhood friend and extraordinary ballerina Liidia (Lidochka) Ivanova. Tracing the lives and friendship of these two dancers from years just before the 1917 Russian Revolution to Balanchine's escape from Russia in 1924, Elizabeth Kendall's *Balanchine & the Lost Muse* sheds new light on a crucial flash point in the history of ballet. Drawing upon extensive archival research, Kendall weaves a fascinating tale about this decisive period in the life of the man who would become the most influential choreographer in modern ballet. Abandoned by his mother at the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet Academy in 1913 at the age of nine, Balanchine spent his formative years studying dance in Russia's tumultuous capital city. It was there, as he struggled to support himself while studying and performing, that Balanchine met Ivanova. A talented and bold dancer who grew close to the Bolshevik elite in her adolescent years, Ivanova was a source of great inspiration to Balanchine--both during their youth together, and later in his life, after her mysterious death just days before they had planned to leave Russia together in 1924. Kendall shows that although Balanchine would have a great number of muses, many of them lovers, the dark beauty of his dear friend Lidochka would inspire much of his work for years to come. Part biography and part cultural history, *Balanchine & the Lost Muse* presents a sweeping account of the heyday of modern ballet and the culture behind the unmoored ideals, futuristic visions, and human decadence that characterized the Russian Revolution.

## Book Information

File Size: 4699 KB

Print Length: 303 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (June 7, 2013)

Publication Date: June 7, 2013

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00CWD0U44

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #823,508 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #12

inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Arts & Photography > Dance > Ballet #101 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Dance > Ballet #145 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Dance

## **Customer Reviews**

I literally could not put this book down when I was reading! It provides a completely new understanding of Balanchine's education and upbringing and the artistic and political environment of the Petersburg (and Petrograd, and Leningrad...) of his youth. No other existing biography or history comes anywhere close to the detail and insight that Kendall provides. Along the way you'll get a crash course in the history of the early Soviet Union, all the more interesting for being told through the perspective of artists. Balanchine fans will appreciate his life and work in a whole new light, including the influence of his "lost muse," Lidia Ivanova, who died in a mysterious boating accident shortly before Balanchine left Russia. In addition to Balanchine, Kendall provides fascinating new background on dancers Alexandra Danilova and Tamara Geva and the two great ballet pedagogues of the twentieth century, Preobrazhenska and Vaganova.

This is an important book for anyone interested in Balanchine's works and early life. The author has a poetic imagination and gives substantive details about Balanchine's early works. She gives a fascinating account of Lidia Ivanova, and describes the incredibly stressful and chaotic environment in which these young artists found themselves during and after the 1917 revolution(s).

This was the most comprehensive study of Balanchine's early life I've ever read. His family tree, his school days and his early marriage and career. It describes his amazingly rich background in music, dance and the changing culture of the time. His first muse and her affect on his life and his early works of genius are carefully and lovingly described. Elizabeth Kendall is a scholar who has written a spellbinding book.

This is a fascinating read, one I couldn't stop until finishing the story that centers on George Balanchine but goes deeply on his life when he entered ballet school unwillingly as a child and follows him through the period of revolution and unrest in St. Petersburg for 10 years. Detailed research is the basis for a story that would be unbelievable if not based on evidence obtained by the author in three languages. As she speculates toward the end about how the early experiences may

have shaped Balanchine's creative work in America, I am willing to consider these possibilities when I see the ballets again. And the story of the lost muse, Lidia Ivanova, who never lived long enough to be famous in the world outside Russia's turbulent world during her adolescence.

This book is interesting for the period it describes: life in pre-revolutionary Russia and the birthpains of the Maryinsky ballet School at that time. You learn something about Balanchine, i.e. how he was chosen to enter the famous school, his early leanings towards choreography and the fate of many dancers, some known, some unknown during this period. All of this is very interesting, especially the historical part of how Russia goes from a Czarist regime to one of disorder, anarchy, hunger and suffering. However, the main gist of the book is on this somewhat unknown ballerina who Kendall claims was Balanchine's inspiration. Although the details of her life are very interesting there is little proof, at least in the book that she was "Balanchine's muse". Balanchine seems to have been an aloof, detached figure all his life, from childhood on and there is very little investigation into the workings of the man's mind and soul, perhaps because he was so aloof and perhaps, in the long run, very few if any, got to know the real Balanchine. Perhaps this is true of all geniuses. Still a good book, but not a great one.

A fascinating portrait of Russian life during the period at the end of the Tsarist reign and the violent transition to Communism. It also reveals wonderful heretofore not so well known details of Balanchine's early years that influenced his life and work.

Balanchine's creative, non-amorous, relationship with Lydia Ivanova has been noted in previous publications. She was a brilliant dancer - the prototype of the "Balanchine ballerina" - and a budding choreographer who drowned, at the age of 20, under unclear circumstances. Kendall discusses the conspiracy theories born of this tragedy, but does not endorse any. This is her approach: to base her conclusions on archival and/or interview evidence; and to make clear to her readers that, when she is speculative, she is speculative indeed. Kendall has managed to find quite a fair amount of new information about Balanchine and Ivanova. She sets her narrative tightly in the context of Russian/Soviet society and culture between Balanchine's birth and his emigration. Her love of ballet shines in her often-poetic prose, especially in her analysis of *Serenade*. Its semblance to *Giselle* has been noted by many. Kendall does not push too hard the idea that *Serenade* is a recollection of, or tribute to, Ivanova; nor even that this is a ballet about death. Balanchine strongly disliked interpretations, and Kendall by-and-large adheres to that.

This Book is a MUST own for ANY Balanchine Lover..... You will learn New interesting things about Russian Ballet. and MR. Balanchine's approach to choreography. :)

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