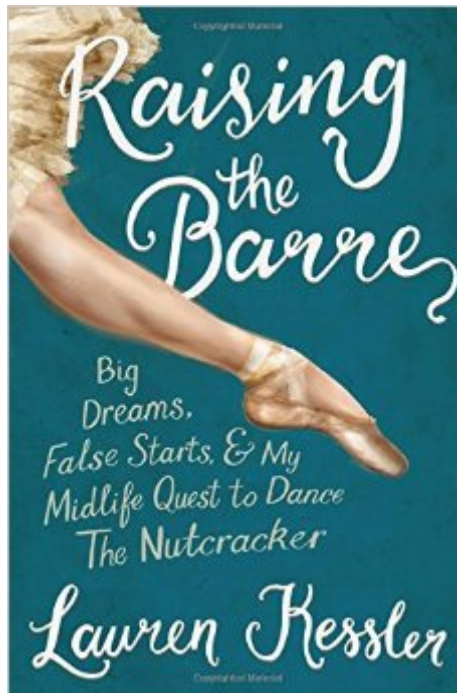


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Raising The Barre: Big Dreams, False Starts, And My Midlife Quest To Dance The Nutcracker



Synopsis

Like generations of little girls, Lauren Kessler fell in love with ballet the first time she saw *The Nutcracker*, and from that day, at age five, she dreamed of becoming a ballerina. But when she was twelve, her very famous ballet instructor crushed those dreams—and along with her youthful self-assurance—and she stepped away from the barre. Fast forward four decades. Lauren—and suddenly, powerfully, itchy restless at midlife—embarks on a “Transcontinental Nutcracker Binge Tour,” where attending a string of performances in Chicago, New York, Boston, and San Francisco reignites her love affair with the ballet—and fuels her girlhood dream. What ensues is not only a story about *The Nutcracker* itself, but also an inside look at the seemingly romantic—but oh-so-gritty world of ballet, about all that happens away from the audience’s eye that precedes the magic on stage. It is a tale told from the perspective of someone who not only loves it, but is also seeking to live it. Lauren’s quest to dance *The Nutcracker* with the Eugene Ballet Company tackles the big issues: fear, angst, risk, resilience, the refusal to “settle in” to midlife, the refusal to become yet another Invisible Woman. It is also a very funny, very real look at what it’s like to push yourself further than you ever thought you could go—and what happens when you get there.

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Customer Reviews

Just as I was about to hang up my ballet slippers at seventy-one years of age. I read about Lauren’s book in *People Magazine*. To me *Raising the Barre*, is the best D.I.Y. book for aging dancers ever written. Yes I enjoyed all the history, but mostly I enjoyed all the exercise tips to prepare a dancer

for the overwhelming demands of class and rehearsals. I especially enjoyed the detailed explanation of the dancers belt. They never explained it in quite that way at my beginning ballet class. I started ballet at age sixty-seven. This is my third season dancing in the Nutcracker. My thanks to Lauren for giving voice to the challenges all Adult Class dancers face in an art dominated by fabulously fit twenty year olds.

I loved this book- the writing was accessible and funny, the voice felt intimate and open, and the story was relatable and moving. I literally couldn't put it down and finally finished it in a four hour fevered nighttime read. The story is Lauren Kessler's own personal narrative but while reading it I couldn't help thinking about my own "ballet dream"- a dream or passion that I let go of as a kid because I thought I wasn't enough (or I just wasn't) and those moments where Kessler looks back it felt like...a lot of things at once: personal, painful, darkly and pointedly funny. I can also say that I laughed out loud (like, really) four times. There's also a boatload of history about the Nutcracker and ballet in general that was really interesting. But this book really isn't just for people who love ballet or even know anything about it - it's about doing something new, shaking up your life and letting go of some of that junk you started believing when you hit puberty. Loved it, loved it.

Can a midlife woman who gave up on ballet as a young girl join a professional company and dance in The Nutcracker? I'm a big fan of Lauren Kessler -- reading her books is like catching up with a good friend over an Americano. This book is no exception--Kessler investigates the history of The Nutcracker, travels the country to watch different companies dance the holiday classic, and documents her struggles and triumphs in relearning the art of ballet. You'll be cheering for her every step of the way.

So enjoying reading Lauren Kessler's book, Raising the Barre! I love how readable the book is, like having a conversation with your best friend. I am enjoying the historical background about ballet, ballet stars, coaches, troupes, and ballet companies. I love reading about someone who immerses themselves into a topic and Lauren does not disappoint - I've learned more about ballet reading her book than I have learned about ballet in my lifetime! A wonderful step into her experience.

I was a professional ballerina in NYC. I've directed many Nutcrackers since and I've heard her story many times from cast members. "I always wanted to do this and never thought I could." But Lauren captured so much with her skills of choosing the words and phrases that spoke as easily as our

center allegro speaks to us. I marvel at her precise language. It took me back. I loved every moment.

An interesting book about an interesting quest. If you like ballet and enjoy humor and challenges, this is a good read. The author attempts a seemingly impossible feat -- to be in the cast of a professional production of The Nutcracker -- and, even though she hasn't been in a ballet class since she was a kid, spends a year in furious ballet study and preparation.. The hope, of course, is not to be able to don toe shoes and tutu and be part of the snowflakes corps, but to simply participate in the production that she loves. In the process, she finds out what drives a ballet dancer, what goes into the serious training, why a certain body type is a requirement, and the less-than-glamorous aspects of training and touring -- and she does it with humor and grace. She has a wonderful writing style that keeps one reading and wanting to find out how her adventure turns out . My past includes studying and performing as a dancer, so I was especially intrigued, and wondered how on earth this middle-aged non-dancer was going to prepare herself to perform with a ballet company. Good book. I recommend it, especially if you want to learn more about the world of professional dance.

Not quite what I expected. A little too much midlife crisis and a not enough actual dancing. She did share some neat facts about ballet and she writes well-- but as a dancer who didn't start until I was in my 40s -- I wanted more dance and less self-help.

Absolutely loved reading this book! She did what, oh admit it, some of us wish we could do by pursuing that seemingly impossible dream, taking on the challenge, and finding that moment in the spotlight that makes it all worthwhile. I have to give her a lot of credit for just trying and not giving up. In that sense, it's a very inspiring read, for me especially. I work in a job where it's high stress, actual entitlement is common, and demands can be constant, not to mention full of policy and procedure. I also have a crippling physical (but otherwise invisible) disease for over 20 years, since my youth. I enjoyed ballet classes as a child. I can't touch my toes again just yet due to how my disease steals away flexibility, but reading Lauren's own story inspired me to finally try. She inspired me to order some basic ballet workouts to indulge my own childhood nostalgia for ballet on my own time. I also have a lot of anxiety/panic related history and this book was an absolute wondrous escape for me into another's world where she faced her fear and danced with it, twirling away. I loved this book!

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