



The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers

Kerri Turner

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Petrograd, 1914. A country on a knife-edge. The story of two people caught in the middle – with everything to lose...

A stunning debut from a talented new Australian voice in historical fiction.

Valentina Yershova's position in the Romanov's Imperial Russian Ballet is the only thing that keeps her from the clutches of poverty. With implacable determination, she has clawed her way through the ranks to soloist, utilising not only her talent, but her alliances with influential rich men that grants them her body, but never her heart. When Luka Zhirkov – the gifted son of a factory worker – joins the company, her passion for ballet and love is rekindled, putting at risk everything that she has built.

For Luka, being accepted into the company fulfills a lifelong dream. But in the eyes of his proletariat father, it makes him a traitor. As war tightens its grip and the country starves, Luka is increasingly burdened with guilt about their lavish lifestyles.

While Luka and Valentina's secret connection grows, the country rockets toward a revolution that will decide the fate of every dancer.

For the Imperial Russian Ballet has become the ultimate symbol of Romanov indulgence, and soon the lovers are forced to choose: their country, their art or each other...

A powerful novel of class turmoil, passion and just how much two people will sacrifice...

The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers Details

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From Reader Review The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers for online ebook

Julia Knapman says

It will be a long time before this book fades from my mind. The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers draws you into the dying days of Imperial Russia, where Valentina, an ambitious ballerina doggedly clawing her way up the social ladder, meets pure-hearted Luka, a gifted dancer who makes her question everything she thought she believed in. Kerri Turner brings to life the chaos of the Russian Revolution, the obscene wealth and dire poverty of the classes, where the splendour of ballet offers both solace and torment. Devastatingly romantic, with lashings of betrayal, violence and breathless suspense, this book had me hooked from the first page, and will enrapture all who read it!

Kerri Turner says

I'm the writer, so of course I love it. Now it belongs to the readers! Enjoy ❤?

Lizz says

The Last Of the Romanov Dancers is set in 1914, in the background of the Russia pre-revolution.

We follow Valentina Yershova, an ambitious ballerina, who's position in Romanov's Imperial ballet keeps her from poverty. She is also one of the many women in this story who have a protector, a man who pays her way in the company and the lifestyle she lives, in exchange for her body.

We also follow Luka, the son of a factory worker, who's dream it has always been to dance.

While this book is not the genre I usually read, I found myself deep in the story of this book, the history, the heartache, the love and the choices we sometimes must choose to make.

Kerri Turner's debut was one with wonderful descriptive detail, with the history of war and Romanov's Imperial Russian Ballet coming to life in the pages of this book and I am excited to see what is next for her.

A huge thank you to Harlequin Australia and Netgalley for this ebook in exchange for an honest review.

Fiction Aficionado says

Though I am both a ballet lover and a history lover, I have a limited knowledge of Russian history. What an engaging, albeit bittersweet, introduction this book was to the subject! Valentina and Luka may have been fictional characters, but their story was very much rooted in the social and political unrest in the years leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917, with the Romanovs, Rasputin, and even Mathilde

Kschessinska, the *prima ballerina assoluta* of the Imperial Russian Ballet, all making their presence known throughout its pages.

Valentina and Luka were fascinating characters: both passionate and driven in relation to their careers, and yet expressing those qualities in such different ways. Their personal stories had so many undercurrents of tension, not least of which was the fact that neither Valentina nor Luka ever felt truly secure or happy as they pursued their professional dreams and, eventually, a clandestine relationship with each other. And on that note, I applaud the author for keeping graphic descriptions of said relationship—and others—to a minimum!

The author's love and knowledge of ballet shines through in a way that will be accessible even to those who know nothing about the subject, but it was the way the historical setting was brought to life, and Valentina's and Luka's stories within that setting, that captured me most and held me fast to the end.

It's definitely a "Brava" from me for this fellow-Australian's debut novel.

I received a copy of this novel from the publisher. This has not influenced the content of my review, which is my honest and unbiased opinion.

Brenda says

It was 1914 in Petrograd and Luka Zhirkov was nervous as he walked into the rehearsal room. His lifelong dream had always been to dance. Now he'd been given the chance to dance with Romanov's Imperial Russian Ballet and he knew that he could go far if he was accepted. His awe at the beauty and talent of Valentina Yershova when he first saw her was such that his desire to dance as her partner one day was foremost in his mind.

Valentina was one of the many who had a protector – a man who would own all but her heart. As Luka's talent grew and his contract was renewed, so too did his admiration for Valentina grow. But they both knew it was a useless fantasy – Maxim would never let her go; in fact, he could ruin Luka's career quite easily. Luka was also burdened with guilt over his role in the war that had invaded Russia – his brother had gone to fight for his country; his father was proud of his soldier son, and ashamed of the son who danced while the country suffered.

Poverty and starvation were rife through the streets of Petrograd and when the revolution took hold, the danger was there for all to see. What would be the outcome for the members of the Imperial Ballet and all its dancers? And would Luka and Valentina ever know happiness?

The Last of the Romanov Dancers is the debut novel by Aussie author Kerri Turner, and it was an exceptional read in my opinion. Based on many facts – as told at the end of the novel – I found it to be a poignant, heartbreaking and intriguing historical novel which I thoroughly enjoyed. Well researched, the lives of the characters in war torn Russia were chaotic and filled with envy, jealousies and hate. But above all, their love of the dance shone through. Highly recommended.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publishers for my digital ARC to read in exchange for an honest review.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘Waiting had never been so hard.’

In 1913, Tsar Nicholas II celebrated the tercentenary of Romanov rule in Russia. He ruled over a huge empire which stretched from central Europe to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Arctic to the borders of Afghanistan. But there were many tensions in the empire. In 1914 when the Great War (World War I) broke out, Russia was not well prepared.

Against this backdrop, Ms Turner opens her novel in Petrograd in the autumn of 1914, where the Romanov’s Imperial Russian Ballet is located. Valentina Yershova was a talented dancer, determined to make her way through the ranks. But she knew that talent was not enough. Valentina’s latest protector is Maxim Ilyn. He is influential, well-connected and rich and while Valentina knows that he doesn’t intend marriage, she hopes to change his mind.

Luka Zhirkov, the talented son of a factory worker joins the ballet company. He is a skilled dancer, more talented than many others in the company. He is also regarded as a traitor by his father, who thinks he should have gone to war like his brother Pyotr.

War creates shortages and increases the unrest. People are starving. Many see the Romanov’s Imperial Russian Ballet as symbolic of decadence. The dancers are privileged individuals living a lavish lifestyle while people are starving. Luka knows that he can’t be conscripted to fight while his contract with the ballet continues. And yet he feels uneasy. He and Valentina are drawn to each other, an attraction which has its own risks. Maxim Ilyn does not like Luka and would happily bring him down. Valentina is torn between her desire for security and her growing attraction to Luka.

Do Luka and Valentina have a future together?

Ms Turner brings both the dancers and this hectic period of Russian history to life. The contrasts between poverty and wealth, the insecurity of a dancer’s life, the need to have a patron or protector. There are historical figures here as well, including the infamous Grigori Rasputin, and the fascinating ballerina Mathilde Kschessinska. This is Ms Turner’s debut novel, and I enjoyed it immensely.

Note: My thanks to NetGalley and HQ Fiction for providing me with a free electronic copy of this book for review purposes.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Sue Gerhardt Griffiths says

4.5 stars

GRIPPING. MESMERISING. BEAUTIFUL.

Wow, what a debut! A magnificent and superb page-turner. The last 100 pages had me in tears but it was those final 30 pages that had me sobbing. The entire story though is divine.

For anyone interested in the lives of real life Russian figures, ballet, WWI and the revolution.

Highly recommended.

Many thanks to Harlequin Australia for providing me with a free copy of The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers for an honest review.

Johanna Baker says

A rich tapestry of dance and decadence layered over the desperate backdrop of pre-revolution Russia, Kerri Turner's debut is an incredible journey into the complexities of love, class and a country on the brink of an uprising. THE LAST DAYS OF THE ROMANOV DANCERS is passion and freedom and justice and obsession, it is chasing after your dreams and watching the world burn around you. Meticulously researched, this is one book you will not regret picking up.

bella ? [bella farren] says

I have legitimate heart eyes over this cover, it hit me in my soft spot for Russian architecture

Kylie D says

This is the type of book I wish I could read all the time. Set against the backdrop of pre-revolution Russia, we get a look into the privileged lives of the dancers of the Tsars Imperial Ballet. Concentrating on famed soloist Valentina and up and coming corps dancer Luka, and their illicit love affair, we move from rehearsals, to performances and then to the dancers private downtime. Yet their affair seems to be doomed, as Valentina has a protector, Maxim, a man who has paid for her lifestyle, and his job is to move her forward in the company, in exchange for sole use of her body. As Luka urges Valentina to leave Maxim, the revolution hits, and suddenly not only the exclusive existence of the dancers is in danger, but their lives as well.

This book had everything. Star-crossed lovers, a well researched history, and a realistic look into the lives of the rich and famous in war torn Russia. Kerri Turner's novel is extraordinary, her love of dance shining through. I can't give this book enough accolades, it is one I'll return to again and again. Now, I'm off to buy tickets to the ballet...

My thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Gillian Muller says

This book totally transported me to an era I never knew, but made me feel I was there in the midst of it! Beautifully written, superbly researched, and emotionally engaging. I usually take forever to finish a book, but I struggled to put this one down. I could picture this being a movie! Loved it.

Theresa Smith Writes says

What a glorious cover this novel has! It caught my eye immediately and then the lure of history within the context of ballet and a revolution all sealed the deal for me. There were many elements present to make this story a great one but they didn't quite all mesh together for me. The story itself was very much a surface tale, the romance between the two main characters overshadowing all else, and while I believe it was intended as a grand love story, there just wasn't enough characterisation to pull this off and the way it all played out was predictable in the extreme. However, I do think my disappointment with this novel stems in part from a case of "it's not you, it's me". For a start, I'm not a fan of romance. I don't mind some romantic elements, secondary to the main plot, but where the romance is the plot, with no other forces driving the story, I lose interest. A grand love story is a different kettle of fish, but that's not the same as romance and unfortunately, the two are often presented as one and the same. I approached this novel with an historical fiction lens, not a romance one, so that was my mistake, not the author's. Secondly, this is the third novel I've read on the Romanovs and the Russian revolution. I haven't liked any of them, so it stands to reason that this slice of history might just not be my cup of tea.

Now, I did pull a few things out of this novel that beg for greater attention. The volatility of Petrograd, and indeed the whole of Russia, during this era was particularly well rendered. On a whole, this novel was very well researched and the sense of atmosphere just crackled with authenticity. It was very much a place where people had all or nothing, no in-between whatsoever, and WWI magnified this discrepancy all the more.

'It was true that beggars were rarely seen in this area. There was an unwritten law in Petrograd that, until now, had always been obeyed: the poor would stay within their own areas, moving from home to work to markets, and never venturing into the glistening inner-city world of the rich and privileged. They belonged where the tram tracks stopped and you had to wade through mud to get anywhere; where there was no electricity, and the nights were as black as the insides of your eyelids. Both rich and poor had silently agreed on this so long ago that no one noticed the division any more—until now, when that border was suddenly crossed by one that didn't belong there.'

'He walked away before she could argue or try to follow him. He couldn't stand to be there any more, with people who were so ready to ignore those who had already lost so much and were desperately trying to survive off less food than was left over on the silver plates they dined from. What was more, he needed to get away from them so he could try to convince himself that he wasn't becoming one of them. That he wasn't ignoring his hungry, hurting country just because his own life had been made easier thanks to the ballet.'

Anyone interested in the history of ballet will enjoy this novel. Kerri Turner is a ballet dancer herself and this is very much evident in the way ballet has been brought to life here on the page. The mechanics, the grace, the hard work, the competitiveness, and, much to my delight, the ugly side. I do like it when an author shows us the ugly side of something so beautiful. In this case, it is the way in which female dancers were 'protected', which is just another way of saying: kept as a private prostitute. Valentina's utilisation of this

system is a big reason why I didn't feel that connection to the love story between her and Luka. I also really wasn't convinced by anything that she ever did that she was even worth the risks Luka was taking to be with her.

'Baudruches weren't an option, of course. They were supposedly effective at preventing babies, but had a reputation for being low class because of how widely used they were by prostitutes. They were also said to dull the man's pleasure. Valentina couldn't ask that of Maxim— why would he pay a fortune for her if he couldn't fully enjoy her? Rather than make her his wife, he'd just find some other dancer all too willing to satiate his desires. Maxim wouldn't like being kept waiting for so long. It didn't matter that she was tired, that she didn't enjoy the way his lovemaking became forceful and almost violent after a temper. She wasn't paid to satisfy her own wants.'

'It was a common practice in pre-revolutionary Russia for ballet dancers to take an aristocratic or influential protector to cement their position in both company and society. Given the Imperial Russian Ballet's requirements for a high level of health and cleanliness, their dancers were considered a safe and, perhaps more importantly, respectable alternative to prostitutes.' – Author notes

Like I said above, the ballet world was meticulously rendered and the history well laid out for ardent enthusiasts to appreciate. I wasn't familiar with the differences between the Ballets Russes and the Imperial Ballet prior to reading this novel. I also didn't realise just how much devastation the collapse of the Romanov dynasty had on the entire art of ballet.

'There's a freedom in the Ballets Russes you won't get in most other companies. They aren't afraid to break boundaries. Yet they also desire to drill into the very soul of what each ballet means. That is why Diaghilev attracts the best. Not just dancers, you understand. Alexandre Benois and Bakst have each painted scenery for him; Stravinsky was disregarded in Russia until Diaghilev made his name; and you'll find Jean Cocteau running around and making the dancers laugh during rehearsals. You work hard, though; perhaps harder than in the Imperial Russian Ballet. The Ballets Russes is not a job but a lifestyle.'

'Sadly, the Russian Revolution saw the end of the Imperial Russian Ballet. There have been other companies bearing the name in the decades since, but they are not a direct descendant of the original; it was disbanded, and ballet was shunned post-revolution as a reminder of the hated elite the country had overthrown.' – Author notes

Luka, as a dancer with the Imperial Ballet, was protected from conscription, and despite the relief this brought him, it was also a heavy burden that he carried. Particularly since his brother was a soldier at the front. It was also the cause of friction between Luka and his father. In terms of characters, Luka was fleshed out more thoroughly than Valentina, but then, he was also a more appealing character to become invested in. He opened the novel and also closed it. Valentina remained more distant throughout and I can't help but wonder if the novel wouldn't have been strengthened if it had been exclusively told from Luka's perspective. He certainly felt things more deeply, not just at a personal level, but at a civic one as well.

'The woman was dressed in a worn sheepskin shuba, and Luka knew instinctively she was a factory worker. She had that perpetually underfed hollowness to her face and a lack of hope in her eyes that made her fit in with this crowd in a way Luka no longer did. He offered her a smile, wondering if perhaps she had seen him dance and wanted to say hello. It would be the first time anyone had ever recognised him and it coming from the area he'd grown up in would be some kind of validation. But the smile died as he saw what she held in her hands, and his stomach flipped like he might vomit. It was a white feather, so like the one he'd handed to Valentina at Mathilde's country house. But this was not a symbol of a dream waiting to be fulfilled.'

‘Have you heard what the men lucky enough to return from the front are saying? The things they’ve had to do out there, the decisions they’ve had to make? There’s nothing noble about this war like we were told when it was first declared. I believed that lie; I was proud of one son for fighting in it, and ashamed of the other for not. But what those men have seen and done … no ruler who cares for his people could force men to go through that.’

I’ve included a lot of quotes within this review in the hopes that it will help you form an impartial view on this novel and be able to decide for yourself if it’s for you. I don’t want to discourage anyone from reading it, particularly if you favour Russian history and/or love the ballet. And if you’re a fan of romance, then this story likely has all the feels for you. I just felt that there were all of these stepping stones crafted but none of them had been lined up to make a solid path. But it is a first novel and I feel it does hint at great things to come from Kerri Turner.

‘I’d been on my own stage forever, and suddenly I saw the world for what it is—its potential for pain and loss, yes, but also for love that isn’t defined by any parameters. A world where a woman who once had everything could lose it all, but still find something to give to those that were forgotten or ignored. I had always believed Mathilde to be the very worst example of what was wrong with Russia—I guess the revolutionaries and I had that in common. It took two revolutions, a civil war and countless deaths for me to realise: we can be so much more than our circumstances make us appear.’

Thanks is extended to HQ Fiction via NetGalley for providing me with a copy of *The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers* for review.

AusRomToday says

The Last Days of the Romanov Dancers is a stunning historical fiction story that encapsulates the time, location, and mood of Russia during WWI through the eyes of Valentina Yershova and Luka Zhirkov, dancers in the Romanov Imperial Ballet Company.

Turner's knowledge of ballet is impeccable as his her ability to delicately weave the tumultuous and often fragile waves of human nature and emotion that occurred in the face of class division, familial disapproval, and the pressures of giving one's body, but not her heart, to her country and ballet company.

We're predicting this will be the book everyone talks about in 2019; it's a must read and five stars from AusRom Today.

ARC copy gratefully received from Harlequin Books

☆ BJ's Book Blog ☆Janeane ☆ says

ARC received via Netgalley for an honest review

The Last Of the Romanov Dancers is story set in the back ground of pre-revolution Russia.

Kerri Turner's debut sets real life figures amongst fictional characters in the Imperial Ballet, where ambition walks and money talks.

It did take me a little while to get into this book, and I did consider DNFing at one stage, however I think that had more to do with me and end of year burn out rather than the book. Once I got past that stage I couldn't wait to turn each page.

Luka and Valentina's story is not always an easy one to read, which is to be expected with the time it is set. Despite all the differences, you can't help but want them to be together.

I got swept away with this story, and even though I knew where the story would eventually take us, I enjoyed the journey.

I am looking forward to what Ms Turner brings us in the future.

Helen says

The Last of the Romanov Dancers is the debut novel by Aussie author Kerri Turner and is a good combination of fact and fiction on a well versed topic but with a fresh twist. An intriguing historical venture into Russian ballet during the dying days of the Romanov rule.

Full review at:

<https://greatreadsandtealeaves.blogspot.com/2018/07/the-last-of-romanov-dancers.html>
