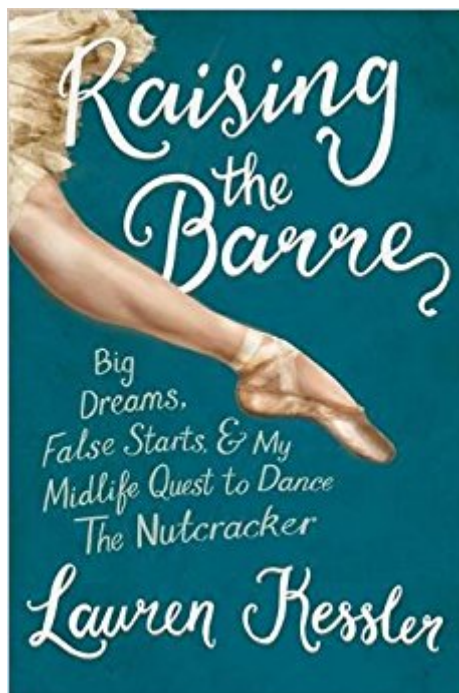




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Raising The Barre: Big Dreams, False Starts, And My Midlife Quest To Dance The Nutcracker



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; along with her youthful self-assurance; and she stepped away from the barre. Fast forward four decades.

Lauren; 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

Publishers Weekly, 10/26/15; [Kessler] inspires readers as she realizes that 'you can't feel the thrill unless you take the risk.' People,

12/7/15; [Kessler's] book is eloquent, funny and so inspiring that readers might want to

“attempt the impossible”; too. —Eugene Weekly, 11/19/15; With a funny and warm writing style, Kessler describes a history of doubts, from the poking comments of her early dance teachers to her powerful drive to succeed in Eugene Ballet Company’s performances; by any means necessary. —Kirkus Reviews, 10/15/15; Kessler has a wonderfully self-conscious mettle as well, not to mention a deft hand with the evocative expression of her inner feelings. She provides a useful vest-pocket history of ballet, and *The Nutcracker* in particular, and she ably captures the abundant physical punishment; An amusingly shrewd memoir of following a lifelong dream. —Library Journal, 12/4/15; This delightful story of one woman’s personal quest will be enjoyed by anyone who thinks age is just a number, but *Nutcracker* fans will find it especially appealing. —PBS’s *Next Avenue*, 12/8/15; Kessler brings the reader along on a 250-page journey that’s brutally challenging, hilariously funny and incontestably inspiring as she tries to morph from fit-but-not-ballet-fit mother and writer to lithe and limber Aunt Rose. —Washington Post, 12/11/2015; Breezy; Inspiring; Kessler’s experience; will resonate with lots of readers; Self-reflective and funny, Kessler has an infectious enthusiasm, and her struggle to balance family, work and her time on social media will be amusingly familiar to many. —Oregon ArtsWatch, 12/10/15 “[An] adventurous immersion into the subculture of ballet, this is a great, inspirational story for someone who is looking for a push to take that leap and do that thing they have been putting off for a really long time. If Kessler can do it, you can do it. —Mediander, 12/17/15; Kessler’s book is well structured, generates suspense and culminates with amusing stories of performance mishaps and the rigors of touring. —

Lauren Kessler is an award-winning author and immersion reporter. She is the author of seven nonfiction books, including *Counterclockwise: My Year of Hypnosis*, *Hormones*, *Dark Chocolate*, and *Other Adventures in the World of Anti-aging*, as well as *My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, a Daughter, a Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence*. Her journalism has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *O, the Oprah Magazine*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Woman’s Day*, *Prevention*, and *Salon*. She also directs the graduate program in narrative journalism at the University of Oregon. laurenkessler.com

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.

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.

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.

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.

There is one word for this book: adorable. From a literary point of view the writer is witty, unpredictable and totally engaging. As a story line, the tale is heartwarming and very moving. Of course it is difficult to imagine that Lauren Kessler would have been given such a glorious opportunity to participate in The Nutcracker had the company been of the status of one of the major companies in America (in fact it is rather shocking that even in Oregon she got that opportunity given the fact that she is not a "real" dancer); be that as it may, her success in reaching her goal and the fact that she did appear in the performances is mind boggling. Her insights into the world of dance, for the good and the bad, are so interesting and right on the head, her love and passion for dance, her understanding of dance, all make the book so worth while reading. However, above and beyond all of this is the writer's total honesty, her humbleness and yet her optimistic determination is so heart rendering. When one finishes the book you must say:Chapeau!! It is a beautiful ending of a beautiful experience. As a book it is a much better read of the ballet world than the movie, The Black Swan ever was!!

Awesome book. I'm an older dancer (in my 50s) and this was exactly what I was looking for. I could identify with everything she wrote about. I take ballet classes, but with grade school to high school students because that's all that's offered in my area. Luckily the owners of the dance school I go to are very open minded and encourage me every step of the way. I highly recommend this book to any older dancer or anyone who is considering going back to dance later in life. It's a testament to those of us who like to prove others wrong that we're too old, too heavy, etc, do dance ballet and go en pointe!! We can and we are!!!

With absolute honesty and clarity, Kessler writes about returning to ballet to pursue her dream of dancing in The Nutcracker. This book was very inspirational and helped me gain the courage to return to ballet class after 25+ years. Kessler's words are analytical and hilarious throughout the book. I found myself hoping the book would never end -- and wondering how she was able to put her body through the rigors of taking Barre classes and company rehearsals. I take ballet classes as an adult and can't imagine how it felt to be at a company class, much less full company rehearsals. Hats off to Ms. Kessler, who is gutsy, witty, and a fabulous writer. If you dance, this is a must-read.

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