

# RUDOLF NUREYEV

b. March 17, 1938

d. January 6, 1993

## INTERNATIONAL BALLET STAR

**He is regarded as the greatest male ballet dancer of his generation.**

*“You live because you dance, you dance as long as you live.”*

Rudolf Nureyev was a Soviet-born ballet star and choreographer, celebrated for his athleticism and charisma. He is widely regarded as the greatest male ballet dancer of his generation.

Born to a poor Tatar Muslim family, Nureyev was raised in the Soviet Republic of Bashkir. When he was 6, his mother smuggled him and his siblings into a ballet performance. The experience kindled his lifelong passion.

Despite his father's disapproval, Nureyev snuck off to ballet classes. At age 17, he was accepted into the prestigious Vaganova Academy (Kirov Ballet School) in Leningrad, under the legendary tutelage of Aleksandr Pushkin. A defiant nonconformist, Nureyev learned English and refused to join the Communist youth organization.

After graduation, Nureyev joined the USSR's preeminent dance company, the Kirov Ballet (now the Mariinsky). He garnered praise for the complex emotionality of his performances and the customizations he made to his costumes. He quickly became a Soviet sensation.

On the Kirov's first tour in Paris in 1961, Nureyev electrified audiences and critics. Although the Soviet security forces (KGB) closely monitored him, he flouted the rules, mingling with foreigners and frequenting the city's gay clubs. When the dance company gathered at the airport to leave for London, officials told Nureyev he must return to Moscow. He refused, evading the KGB and seeking asylum in the West.

After defecting, Nureyev briefly joined a French ballet company before going independent. In 1962 he went to Copenhagen to study with Erik Bruhn, a soloist for the Royal Danish Ballet, whom he greatly admired. The two became lovers and artistic collaborators. With Bruhn, Nureyev solidified his belief that a male dancer deserved the same expressive range as his female counterpart. Nureyev transformed the role of the male dancer from a “lifter” to the ballerina's equal.

Nureyev performed with dozens of renowned companies, including the Royal Ballet of London, where he first danced with Margot Fonteyn, a ballerina with whom he established a long, successful professional partnership.

During his career, he worked with more than 40 choreographers on more than a hundred leading roles, many of which were created specifically for him. He was the first and most famous ballet artist to perform with modern dance companies, including Martha Graham.

In the 1980s Nureyev served as chief choreographer and director of the Paris Opera Ballet, creating distinctive versions of classics such as “Swan Lake.” Although he tested positive for HIV in 1984, he continued to work tirelessly until his death.



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