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Ballet For Martha: Making Appalachian Spring



Synopsis

In 1944 the modern American ballet *Appalachian Spring* premiered at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The collaborators behind the performance anxiously awaited the critical response to their artistic achievement: would the world understand what they had done? In *Ballet for Martha*, the journey to this stage and the success shared among choreographer Martha Graham, composer Aaron Copland and artist Isamu Noguchi is expressively captured by acclaimed children's book authors Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan. Together they tell the exceptional story of the collaborative efforts behind the creation of *Appalachian Spring*. Martha Graham, famous American dancer and pioneering choreographer, ignited the process with her innovative dance routines and desire to create a ballet that would represent America. With Martha's spirit and choreography in mind, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Aaron Copland built upon the melodies of an old Shaker hymn to create the original score. He titled it simply *Ballet for Martha*. Upon Martha's request, artist Isamu Noguchi created the stage design for the ballet, using a simple and angular style that reflected the movements of Martha's choreography. This story, first chronicled in the award-winning book, is now brought to life in an original audiobook production by Brilliance Audio. Acclaimed actress Sarah Jessica Parker captures the voices and emotions of Martha Graham, Aaron Copland, and Isamu Noguchi as they work together to produce the dance, score, and set of this beloved American ballet. Accompanying the narration is a full performance by the Seattle Symphony of the very score which fueled and inspired the ballet. Listeners will be delighted by the layered collaborations brought together in this audio production. From the three trail-blazing artists who labored to capture America through lyrical movement, lilting melody, and avant-garde design, to the literary, vocal, and orchestral talents of today, *Ballet for Martha* is a beautiful, musical journey for listeners of all ages.

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Customer Reviews

Gr 2-6—œlf Martha Graham’s choreography for —œ“Appalachian Spring—œ—œ• was a —œ—œ“valentine—œ—œ• to the world, as critics wrote in 1944, then this book is a love letter in return. Simple, poetic prose tells the story of the creation of one of the world’s most-loved ballets and compositions, and Flocâ’s graceful watercolor illustrations take admirers through every part of its development. Written in the present tense, the narrative has a sense of drama that carries readers along as if the events were happening in real time. Fascinating details about the collaboration among Graham, Copland, and Isamu Noguchi (set design) are well documented in the lengthy —œ—œ“curtain call,—œ—œ• notes, and resources pages, which read like a fantastic set of liner notes. Flocâ varies the illustrations from vignettes to bird’s-eye views to landscapes and expertly capture the fluid movements of the dancers. The page layouts are well planned to create the most movement and interest. The authors researched extensively but found a way to crystallize all of the information into a gem that is approachable for young readers. More than anything, this work emphasizes the value of collaboration and celebrates the work that Graham, Copland, and Noguchi did to bring together the performing and visual arts. Readers may be inspired to go to Russell Freedman’s *Martha Graham: A Dancer’s Life* (Clarion, 1998) and should be encouraged to check out one of Leonard Bernstein’s definitive recordings of —œ—œ“Appalachian Spring—œ—œ• and a video of the ballet. Cheri Dobbs, Detroit Country Day Middle School, Beverly Hills, MI —œ© Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to the Unknown Binding edition.

Starred Review Dance. Music. Set. All of these elements contribute to the experience of Appalachian Spring, an American classic that continues to thrill audiences. But authors Greenberg and Jordan are less concerned with presenting the ballet (although readers do get a strong sense of it) and more interested in how such an extraordinary collaboration came to be. How does an idea go from a jotted note on choreographer Martha Graham—œ—œ’s pad to a fierce triumph? In crisp yet patient sentences, the authors begin with a vision: a story to be told in movement and music, an American pioneer tale. Composer Aaron Copland takes his cues from his knowledge of Graham—œ—œ’s powerful yet simple dance style. A Shaker hymn leads him to the music, which

in turn ignites Graham's choreography. But one more element is needed. Enter artist Isamu Noguchi, whose set design is as spare and strong as the ballet. The collaboration continues as the dance becomes fully formed, opening triumphantly in 1944. In this book, too, disparate elements come together. Matching the mood of Graham's moves, the writing is pared down but full of possibilities. Flocke's ink-and-watercolor artwork nimbly shifts from the prosaic (Copland reading Graham's script) to the visionary (a bride and groom on the open prairie) to the several-spread finale of the ballet itself. The book as a whole beautifully captures the process of artistic creation. The extensive back matter that concludes is welcome, but what readers will surely want after putting this down is to see and hear Appalachian Spring for themselves.

Grades 2-4. --Ilene Cooper --This text refers to the Unknown Binding edition.

Delightful storytelling for young readers; America dances when "Pacific Overtures" meets "Appalachian Spring". All America celebrates when Martha and Aaron and Isamu do the "Shaker." The noted and revered American artist, Isamu Noguchi, born in Los Angeles, was taken to Japan by his mother to meet his estranged father when he was three, and then sent back to America when thirteen to "reclaim his heritage". "Thirteen-year-old Isamu, his suitcase packed with his carpenter tools, traveled alone by steamship to California, then by train to Indiana to a boarding school his mother had read about in a magazine. Like Martha, his first view of the huge American landscape was through a train window. He arrived at the school, only to find that it had been closed to become an army base to train troops for World War I (1914-1918). Isamu stayed with a [local] family in a nearby town [LaPorte IN] until he graduated [from the local Public High School in 1922]." In his own words he had become "a real Hoosier." That historic aside doesn't interfere with the delightfully pictured storytelling that takes a youngster soaring in his mind's eye through Americana.

--Glenn Ralston

This nonfiction children's book celebrates the collaboration of Aaron Copland's majestic, yet playful, "Appalachian Spring", Martha Graham's innovative dance, and Isamu Noguchi's minimalist artistry. The illustrations convey movement and music. The book does a marvelous job of introducing children to ballet, Appalachia, innovators, and collaborators. The only improvement I could see would have been to include a CD of Copland's score. When using this book in a library program I play Copland's piece. I gave this book as a high school graduation gift to a young woman who is a ballet dancer and who has a passion for children's literature. A perfect fit.

When I made this purchase I was not aware that this was a childrens history/picture book of the creative process of making "Appalachian Spring." Although I very much enjoy the drawings and information it is very much a book for children. I think this would be great for a teacher or library that wanted to teach that Graham was more than a cracker. If your looking for a deep, all-telling description of the making of Appalachian Spring...Ballet for Martha this may not be for you. However its a honestly enjoyable picture book for anyone who enjoys Graham.

This book provides an lovely story while sharing history. It's perfect as a read aloud for young ballet lovers or for an elementary student to read on their own.

A remarkable book, by two people who could not have known Martha. Accurate and illustrated by some one with a real feeling for dance. Appropriate for young people and adults with an interest in dance.

This book informs kids how artists become inspired-- by landscapes, story, and collaborations with each other. It also shows them that art isn't always easy. Martha Graham revised her ballet steps over and over again and sometimes faced criticism. Yet she believed in her work. Not just about ballet, the book also reveals the creative processes of composer, Aaron Copland, and sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. The illustrations are magical in capturing the movement and emotional impact of dance.

This is a superb book. Although the subject might seem over kids' heads, Brian Floca's illustrations and the text are so inviting that it's accessible and actually fun, as three very different artists struggle to create one masterpiece. (The evident annoyance of the dancers during one difficult rehearsal was especially amusing.) Adults reading it will be interested to learn more about the three collaborators in the back of the book, and of course aspiring young dancers will get a lot out of it as well.

Ballet for Martha is a wonderful book about the making of Appalachian Springs the ballet. The authors seems less concerned about the actual ballet and instead decided to tell the behind the scenes story of how it was made. Not many people know exactly what it takes to make a ballet; they only see the finished product. There is a lot of hard work and dedication needed to make it a success. The Authors did such a great job at describing this. They stressed the importance of

collaboration, and being able to work with other people, which is a great lesson for students to learn as early as possible. It also explained how Martha's dance style wasn't always liked, but that didn't stop her from doing what she loved. The illustrations in this book are phenomenal. They capture the essence of the story so well, and help the story come to life in such an interesting way.

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