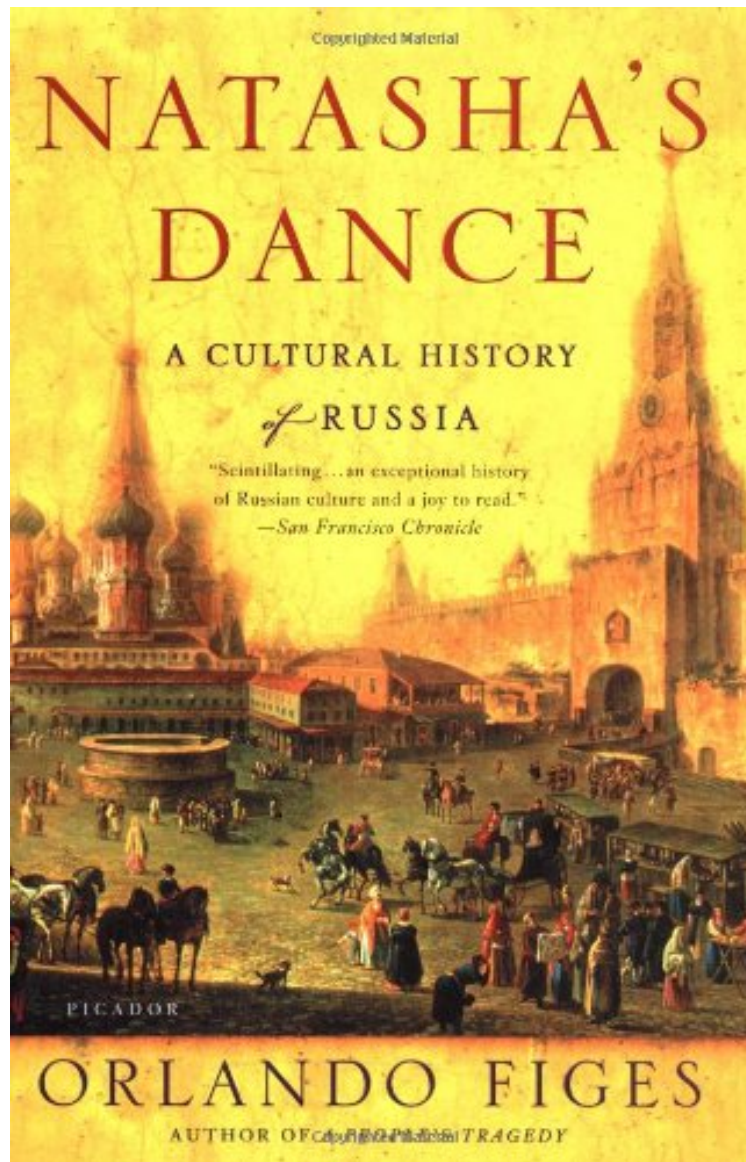


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Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia

Orlando Figes

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Orlando Figes : Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Cultural perspective through a looking glass. By Nashville CapitalistCare to understand the world at large, then it means revisiting the past. Easy to forget world history from college. Natasha's Dance is an enjoyable read told in a story format that ends in the 60's. Bought the book and am

interested in learning more.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Indispensable Companion to Tolstoy's War and PeaceBy omnishamblesWhether you are a first time reader of War and Peace or returning to it, this book by Orlando Figes will make a dramatic difference in what you will get out of that classic (and no doubt other classics of Russian literature.) Not only is it a fast paced and utterly absorbing history Russia but Figes specifically follows the fortunes of the Volkonsky dynasty, key figures of whom form the basis of the fictional Bolkonskys (father Count Nikolay and Prince Andrei). The chapter 'Children of 1812' is a dazzling account of the period that shapes the characters and fortunes of the young men like Pierre, Andrei, Nikolai and Dolokhov of War and Peace. The book is a very fast 600 pages (excluding notes etc) and very well worth the investment. If nothing, read the chapter "Children of 1812" and those Free Masonry and War sections will be as compelling to you as they were to the original Russian readers. And you will understand why Speransky's "precise, mirthless laughter rang in Prince Andrei's ears long after he had left the house."0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I Caught Myself Giggling and Enjoying This BookBy CpronzoI really enjoyed this book. You can tell how knowledgeable the author is in regards to this book. It covers a wide range of topics. It is not a boring read and I caught myself giggling a few times. It is a book that keeps you reading it. You come away feeling knowledgeable and understanding what you have read. Also, the author of this book is a good friend of my professor's and very glad he made us read this book! It really was great.

Beginning in the eighteenth century with the building of St. Petersburg and culminating with the Soviet regime, Figes examines how writers, artists, and musicians grappled with the idea of Russia itself--its character, spiritual essence, and destiny. Skillfully interweaving the great works--by Dostoevsky, Stravinsky, and Chagall--with folk embroidery, peasant songs, religious icons, and all the customs of daily life, Figes reveals the spirit of "Russianness" as rich and uplifting, complex and contradictory--and more lasting than any Russian ruler or state.

From Publishers WeeklyEven if one takes nothing else away from this elegant, tightly focused survey of Russian culture, it's impossible to forget the telling little anecdotes that University of London history professor Figes (*A People's Tragedy*) relates about Russia's artists, writers, musicians, intellectuals and courtiers as he traces the cultural movements of the last three centuries. He shares Ilya Repin's recollection of how peasants reacted to his friend Leo Tolstoy's fumbling attempts to join them in manual labor ("Never in my life have I seen a clearer expression of irony on a simple peasant's face"), as well as the three sentences Shostakovich shyly exchanged with his idol, Stravinsky, when the latter returned to the Soviet Union after 50 years of exile ("`What do you think of Puccini?' `I can't stand him,' Stravinsky replied. `Oh, and neither can I, neither can I' "). Full of resounding moments like these, Figes's book focuses on the ideas that have preoccupied Russian artists in the modern era: Just what is "Russianness," and does the quality come from its peasants or its nobility, from Europe or from Asia? He examines canonical works of art and literature as well as the lives of their creators: Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky, Chagall, Stanislavsky, Eisenstein and many others. Figes also shows how the fine arts have been influenced by the Orthodox liturgy, peasant songs and crafts, and myriad social and economic factors from Russian noblemen's unusual attachments to their peasant nannies to the 19th-century growth of vodka production. The book's thematically organized chapters are devoted to subjects like the cultural influence of Moscow or the legacy of the Mongol invasion, and with each chapter Figes moves toward the 1917 revolution and the Soviet era, deftly integrating strands of political and social history into his narrative. This is a treat for Russophiles and a unique introduction to Russian history. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Figes (history, Univ. of London; *A People's Tragedy*) describes the twists and turns of Russian history through cultural and artistic events from the founding of Rus in the 12th century through the Soviet era. He uses Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as a centerpiece of art imitating life. The title of Figes's book comes from the scene in which Natasha Rostov and her brother Nikolai are invited by their "uncle" to a rustic cabin to listen to him play Russian folk music on his guitar. Natasha instinctively begins a folk dance that is prompted by "unknown feelings in her heart." Tolstoy would have us believe that "Russia may be held together by unseen threads of native sensibilities," writes Figes. Nowhere is the clash between the European culture of the upper class and the Russian culture of the peasantry more evident. "The complex interactions between these two worlds had a crucial influence on the national consciousness and on all the arts of the 19th century." This interaction is a major feature of this book, which traces the formation of a culture. The writing style is distinctly nonacademic, making for a very enjoyable read. Recommended for academic and public libraries. Harry Willems, Southeast Kansas Lib. Syst., Iola Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist The author of *A People's Tragedy* (1997) takes on the massive task of giving historical perspective to Russian culture and is--for the most part--successful. He manages fairly well to balance hundreds of great names, from Pushkin to Nabokov, with those that are less known to the general public, although he gives short shrift to early twentieth-century Silver Age writers like Blok and Bely. The Futurists, with the exception of Mayakovsky, are barely mentioned. Against this history-by-personality Figes contrasts European St. Petersburg and Russian Moscow. Large sections treat the cultural influences of the peasantry, the Mongols, and the Orthodox Church. The chapter on the Soviet period is elegiac (to put it mildly), and there's a wistfulness to the chapter on Russian emigre culture in Berlin and Paris. However, other than mentioning film director Andrei Tarkovsky, Figes doesn't seem to

care much about Russian culture of the past 40 years. Perhaps a second volume is forthcoming that will document the history of Russian culture into the twenty-first century. Frank CasoCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved