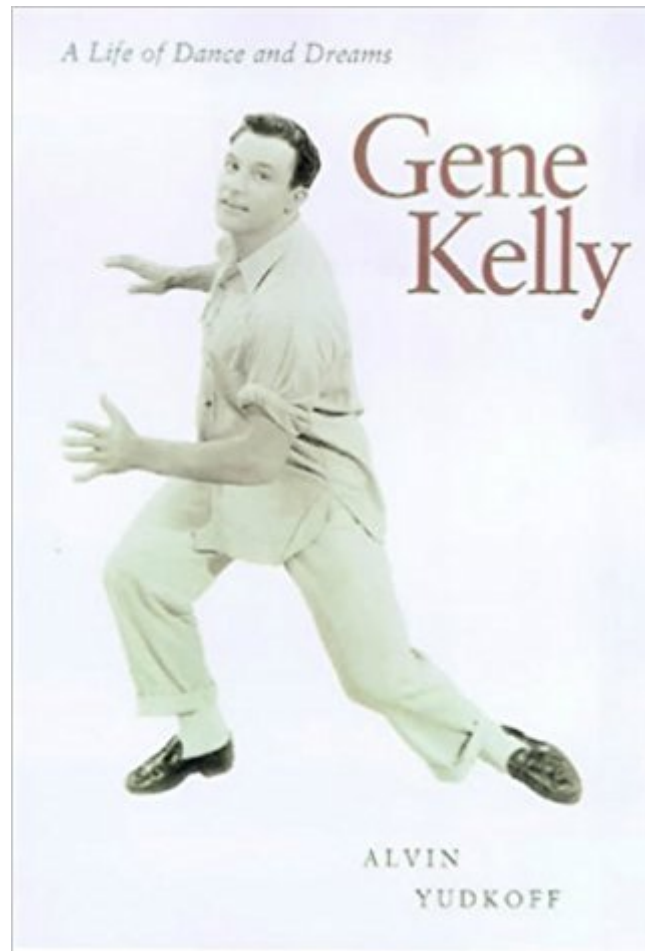




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Gene Kelly: A Life Of Dance And Dreams



Synopsis

In this biography, the dancer, choreographer, actor and director is depicted as the complex and difficult man his family, friends and colleagues knew. The text investigates not only his triumphs, but also his late career struggles, stormy relationships and political ideas.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The major strength of this accessible biography of the great stage and film dancer, choreographer, actor and director is Yudkoff's detailed treatment of Kelly's early years and his struggle to achieve professional success, although Kelly's later years devolve into something of a muddle. Kelly's mother enrolled her five children in dancing school and enjoined them to use their talent to supplement the blue-collar Irish Catholic family's income. Young Gene (1912-1996) complied by teaching children to dance at the local synagogue in Pittsburgh, before working his way through college by dancing in clubs. Later, he jettisoned law school to establish a family business, the Gene Kelly Studio of Dance. Kelly's big break came with the title role in the 1940 musical Pal Joey; he caught the eye of David O. Selznick, who brought him to Hollywood and gave him a part in For Me and My Gal (1942) with Judy Garland. Yudkoff vividly re-creates the famous Hollywood parties that Kelly and his first wife, Betsy Blair, hosted, featuring cutthroat charades and all night political discussions. His treatment of Kelly's personal life is less compelling, however: too much of it is based on speculation. Yudkoff touches on Kelly's left-wing politics during the red scare, but never really explains why Kelly was able to continue working while Blair was blacklisted. Unfortunately, he compresses into one chapter the last 45 years of Kelly's life, in which he remarried twice after a

divorce from Blair, raised two children and undertook many creative projects. B&w illus. Agent, Linda Kroner. (Jan.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Gene Kelly fans will relish this absorbing biography. Yudkoff (a writer and film producer) deftly narrates Kelly's journey from Pittsburgh to Broadway to Hollywood, sensitively telling behind-the-scenes stories and relating the details of Kelly's personal life--from his troubled first marriage, to the highly competitive game parties he held at his house, to his experiences during the McCarthy era. But it is the enormously fascinating material Yudkoff discovered about Kelly's early life that's most impressive. It was, we learn, the determination and intense work ethic he got from his mother as a child that carried him far from poverty in Pittsburgh. He and his siblings spent their youth performing at an impossible number of gigs to fulfill their mother's dreams and, later, to help make ends meet during the Depression. This is the real heart of the story--one of guts and triumph--that sets the stage for Kelly's creative achievements and lasting fame. A well-researched, honest, and respectful work, this is essential for fans and students of film history.-Carol J. Binkowski, Bloomfield, NJ Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I owe Yudkoff an apology and I wish he was still with us so I could deliver it. For years, I had been warned off this book by fellow Kelly fans who hated it. Now, I do have to say that yes, it is a novel and should have been published as one. It's a novelized version of Hirschhorn's Kelly biography and it is very, very well written-a real page turner. It's creative writing and it is very creative. Don't let the blurb from Publisher's Weekly or wherever warn you off. Sure, Yudkoff limns Gene Kelly as sometimes difficult, sometimes selfish, sometimes cynical--in other words, a human being. He also paints Kelly as loyal, honorable, tender, brilliant, and courageous and I might add, loveable. If you're a Kelly fan-as I am-you'll love it.

Really enjoying this book. I've loved learning more about this amazingly talented and hard-working man. Well written, and extensively detailed.

I have my own personal barometer to indicate whether or not a book is second-rate (or worse). I start counting the typos, and when I hit "five," I officially distrust the author/editors. I hit five by the third chapter and knew I was in for a bumpy ride. This author should have concentrated on spell-checking and fact-checking, rather than obsessing with his thinly veiled, homophobic assertions (as mentioned by another reader, his repeated reference to "Leo McCrary" nearly made

me hurl the book across the room!). This really was a maddening read, and it is hardly the biography that the great Gene Kelly deserves. Makes one even sadder to ponder that Kelly's own autobiography was lost when his house burned down in the 80's. That would have been a helluva read.

This a great book with nice pictures, but the print is far too small.

OK, I've been reading this book for a week now and I'm enjoying it so far. Yes there are some mistakes, but I've read all of the other books about Gene and there are mistakes in all of them. While it's true that Yudkoff did not talk to many people who knew Kelly, this book was written in 1999 and many if not most eye witnesses were dead or close to it. The one glaring mistake is that of having Vera Ellen at his AFI tribute. She died that year and never ever went to awards. She became a recluse for some reason. I do like the way the book covers more than just what happened, but also the emotions and back stories. Yudkoff did have Lois McClelland's diary for some of the inside intrigue for later in the book. Lois was a constant in Gene's life from 45 to the early to mid 90s. No one knew him better. This is just a beginning review and I'll finish when I finish the book.

WONDERFUL!!!

I totally agree with K. Cooley's review. I'm halfway through reading the bio and glad I borrowed it and didn't buy it. His "poetic license" usage is absurd. He should have written a novel with GK as main character. To brazenly write supposed thoughts of Gene Kelly is ridiculous. How could anybody say this is a great or even good bio of the man? I might look for the Hirschhorn book and get some factual information on this talented guy, Gene Kelly. I doubt I would ever read another book written by Alvin Yudoff.

Ugh, where to begin? As others have written before me, there are so many basic errors in this book that I wonder at the author's "research." If he had spent more time getting the facts straight instead of pretending to know what Gene Kelly was thinking during the AFI tribute, then this book may not be the shambles we readers have had to endure. As I was reading, finding the errors actually became a game for me. I would sit there with my book and pen and paper, just daring Yudkoff to pitch out another mistake. Here are the ones I found: (I'm sure there are several others.) 1. Shirley Maclaine's dress at the AFI Tribute is BLACK not RED. An error that is SO basic, it shows how

careless this author is throughout the entire book.² In *For Me and My Gal*, Judy Garland's character was NOT engaged to the George Murphy character. Hey Yudkoff, it would help if you saw the movies of the person about whom you're writing, don't you think???

³ Again, in *For Me and My Gal*, the Judy Garland and Gene Kelly characters are NOT "immediate sensations," as the author states. Sheesh.

⁴ Yup, another one regarding *For Me and My Gal*: the "author" (I'm beginning to use this term more loosely) states that Gene Kelly's character is a solo act in Europe. NOT TRUE. Watch the movie you careless dolt!

⁵ In *Living in a Big Way*, Yudkoff says that there is a dance with a trained dog and a dance with a statue. AHEM! They are the same dance. Yikes, this is getting embarrassing! I'm glad I'm not this author!

⁶ Here's one of the worst: When Yudkoff refers to Vera-Ellen's character in *On the Town* as "MISS SUBWAYS!" Oh my gosh. Her title was "Miss Turnstiles." Hmm...sounds like someone really needs to sit down with some of the movies before writing any more books.

⁷ Now here's something I've never seen before in any book, using the exact same quote TWICE. On page 197 and on page 202 he uses the same GK quote in referring to the pioneering on-location film technique of *On the Town*. (Of course, by this time, who knows if those are even real quotes? So much has already been fabricated!) SHAME ON THE AUTHOR, THE EDITOR, and THE PUBLISHER who bought the book!!! Gene Kelly fans have waited for 20 years for an updated biography of this legendary dancer, choreographer, and director. The readers deserve better and so does Mr. Kelly himself.

Other annoying things are the way the author's internal monologue Gene Kelly is having with himself at the AFI Tribute (which I gave up on and stopped reading) basically just criticizes and insults everyone. And don't even get me started on the way he keeps hinting at homosexual rumors and portrays a young Betsy Blair as this side of a nymphomaniac. Plus, the book only focuses on about half of Gene Kelly's life. Twenty years are sideswiped in a couple of paragraphs and 40-some years are glossed over in a few pages. How about giving Gene Kelly some credit for being a single widowed father who raised his two younger children who lost their mother to cancer at ages 8 and 11? How about informing your readers that this generous father turned down numerous projects so that he could provide a stable home for his children and this was when he was in his 60's? All Yudkoff cares about are the glamour days. Not a nice way to treat your subject, who you claim to admire.

If you're as frustrated as I am, do what the author did, just learn what you can about Gene Kelly from the 1974 book written by Clive Hirschhorn. You get several treats in one: ACTUAL quotes from Gene Kelly and those who knew him, ACTUAL facts about the man, and a thoroughly enjoyable read.

As for this book: IT IS A DISGRACE! The entire thing is written like the author is wearing a neon sign saying, "Hey everyone! Look at me! I'm writing a book about Gene Kelly!" OK! So you wrote your terrible book, now do

something useful like apologize to your readers. If I was Betsy Blair, or Kerry, Timothy, or Bridget Kelly, I would sue the pants off this guy. Ugh, ugh, and again I say, UGH!

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