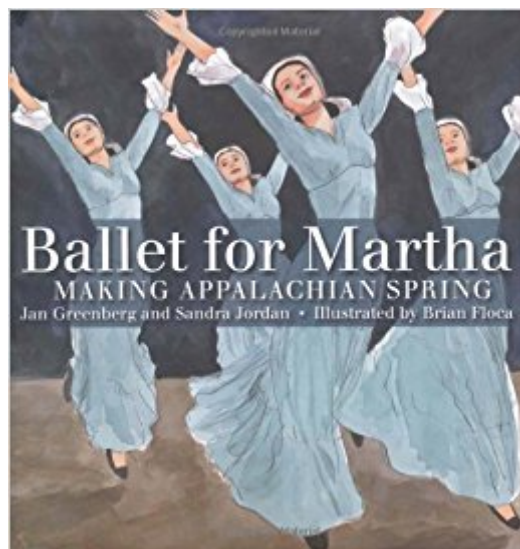




The book was found

Ballet For Martha: Making Appalachian Spring (Orbis Pictus Award For Outstanding Nonfiction For Children (Awards))



Synopsis

A picture book about the making of Martha Graham's Appalachian Spring, her most famous dance performance. Martha Graham : trailblazing choreographer. Aaron Copland : distinguished American composer. Isamu Noguchi : artist, sculptor, craftsman. Award-winning authors Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan tell the story behind the scenes of the collaboration that created APPALACHIAN SPRING, from its inception through the score's composition to Martha's intense rehearsal process. The authors' collaborator is two-time Sibert Honor winner Brian Floca, whose vivid watercolors bring both the process and the performance to life.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (15 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #420,444 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #96 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Performing Arts](#) #278 in [Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Performing Arts > Dance](#) #2605 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Nature](#)

Age Range: 6 - 10 years

Grade Level: 1 - 5

Customer Reviews

Collaboration. True life stories of collaboration told in a picture book format. It's a challenge that I give myself: Name such stories off the top of your head. If you're a children's librarian then surely you can think of one or two, yes? So I start to think about it. Let's see . . . well, there was [Amelia And Eleanor Go For A Ride](#), but that was more a story about two strangers meeting nicely than a tale of collaboration (the same could be said for [When Harriet Met Sojourner](#)). It shouldn't be that hard to think of such stories though, right? I mean, we're constantly telling our kids that cooperation

is an essential skill. We teach them to share. We (hopefully) give them the chance to learn about the essential give and take that exists when two or more people try to create something new together. Yet my mind is a perfect blank until I look over and see my copy of *Ballet for Martha* perched on the arm of my chair. The tale of how a dancer, a composer, and an artist/set designer is a true story that shows how professional adults can work together, regardless of differences in background, ethnicity, or experience. "Sometimes art is made by one artist, working alone, but sometimes it is the result of artists working together - collaborating - to forge something new." New was not an unfamiliar word to dancer Martha Graham. She spent a great deal of her life exploring new types of dance in the mid-20th century. And when she wanted to make a dance about American living, she turned to composer Aaron Copland. With much revision to her vision, Copland wrote for Martha music based on the old Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts". After that, Isamu Noguchi was hired to create the spare sets for the production. The show was called "Appalachian Spring" and it has since become an American classic. The kind that can be recreated and reenacted forever, all because three different people got together to make a ballet that displayed their best works. A "Curtain Call" afterword says more about the lives of each of the three artists and a Notes and Sources section includes a Bibliography, Web Sites, and additional Notes. Now as I see it, it would make very little sense to write a book about the creation of "Appalachian Spring" if you used an overabundance of flowery language. As such, I can't help but think that Greenberg and Jordan made a conscious decision at some point in the game to write the book with plain, simple text. The words are full of description but don't overwhelm Floc's illustrations. Sentences like "The bridegroom twirls with his bride. Then she prances in quick small steps" do an excellent job at conveying precisely what this ballet would feel like to watch. Even before you get to the pictures, the authors have synthesized the show's process into a scant 48 pages. And while the bulk of the focus rests on Martha, the writers continually pull the focus back to the music, the set, the set, the music. Even if Copland and Noguchi aren't prancing around the stage with Martha, they're present in every piece of the dance. They are as much a part of this show as she is. This book works because it doesn't shove them off to the side or conveniently forget about them. After all, all shows are collaborations. And as the very last sentence reads, in cases where new productions of "Appalachian Spring" are mounted, ". . . the collaboration will be created anew." At first I felt that the book was near bereft of conflict. This is Martha Graham we're talking about. She knew what she wanted, she got it, and she was not a pushover. One has to assume that there were moments of tension within this collaboration. Rereading *Ballet for Martha*, though, I located those moments. There was the dancers' initial discomfort with Noguchi's set, for example. Or the fact that sometimes when Martha couldn't get a

dance right, "She has a tantrum. She screams. She yells. She throws a shoe. The dancers wait. Martha figures it out." When writing her plan for the ballet to Aaron he had her rewrite her ideas until they made sense. The conflict is there, but it's useful conflict. The kind that includes the kind of give-and-take you need to work on a single vision with someone else. When it comes to establishing a time or era set in the past, *Mad Men's* got nuthin' on Brian Floca, and you can quote me on that. The man's range is extraordinary. One minute it's a cute little mice in books by Avi, the next he's delving into a light fantasy, and then the next thing you know he's taking our men to the moon. *Ballet for Martha* reigns Floca in a bit, after the massive success of *Moonshot* though the two books have more similarities than differences. For example, Floca allows himself the occasional sweeping vista, as when we see the fictional farmer and bride staring out over a vast, near empty prairie. But where *Moonshot* was all about the mechanics and grandiose heart-stopping breadth of space itself, *Ballet for Martha* zeroes in on the individual. That's a funny thing to say, considering that the book is collaboration-based, but it's true. Floca shows us the human body in motion. From Graham's distinctive contraction and release style to the ways in which a person moves in a single space. He's also very good at showing collaborative dancing, where a person is meant to share space and movement with another. In essence, share the spotlight. Which, to a large degree, is the very point of the book itself. Beyond the watercolors, I was interested in the ways in which Floca uses handwriting to make a point. This happens only three or four times in the book, but it was enough to catch my eye. The most riveting picture, possibly in the whole book, is the one Floca created for Graham's 1929 piece "Heretic". There we see a wall of women in black, a single woman in white on her knees before them, and the words "Heretic, 1929" scrawled in white in a lower right hand corner. This imposing use of handwriting stands in contrast to previous page where the black on white writing explains the contraction and release movements so aligned with Graham's work. The only other real time handwriting is invoked comes when Floca illustrates the orchestra. Though the text explains who is present, Floca's handwriting touches on each member's instrument. You might not notice that there is handwriting in the book on a first or second read, but on the third or fourth it catches your eye. Maybe that's why Floca chooses to use it. It's a way of drawing your attention to something in a firm but subtle way. Something to ponder, anyway. The book would pair very well with individual biographies of each of the three collaborators, like Noguchi's bio, *The East-West House: Noguchi's Childhood in Japan* by Christy Hale or Russell Freedman's *Martha Graham: A Dancer's Life* or Mike Venezia's *Aaron Copland* (there's not a lot on Copland out there for kids). Alas, the Bibliography at the back of this book contains a list of titles more appropriate for adults than kids, so you won't find any of these books mentioned there. Still and all, I suspect that there's

enough information in this book to get some people interested in seeking out the original music (or video of the performance on YouTube for that matter). Just as the original ballet was a collaboration between three people, so too is this book. Two authors plus one illustrator equals a way of telling a story that is too often ignored. Practical applications for collaborating with others based on real world events in a picture book form? Rare. Books that read and look this good together? Rarer still. A book that works as both a practical object and a beautiful text. Sometimes we just need stories that show us how to make things.

For a full synopsis see above. As I read this book and neared the end I could have sworn I heard music in my head. When I finished all was quiet. There is so much information, so much beauty, so much dance, so much story. The illustrations are gorgeous and I feel like I have learned about American music, ballet and art, Martha Graham, Aaron Copland and Isamu Noguchi while thoroughly enjoying this book. The story and illustrations flowed smoothly and as the music in my head slowly faded I was happy there was a "curtain call" and to continue reading. Highly recommended for fans of dance, music, art and Americana.

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

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.

This nonfiction children's books 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.

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