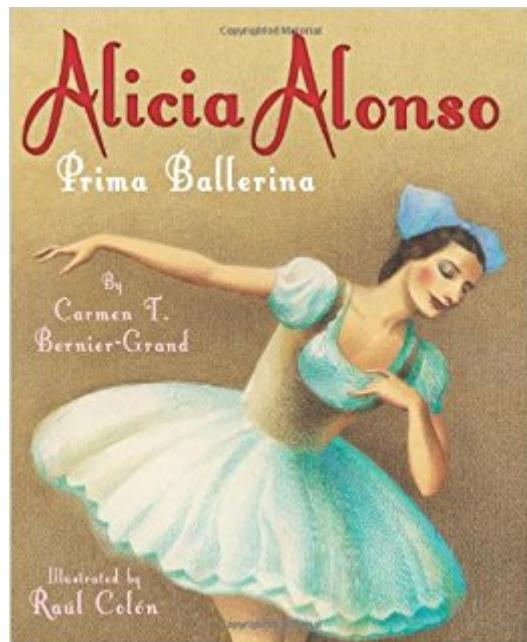


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# Alicia Alonso: Prima Ballerina



## Synopsis

Alicia Alonso's artistic achievements are remarkable, considering that she became partially blind and lost her peripheral vision at age nineteen. From childhood, she exhibited a passion for dancing, studying first in Cuba and later in New York City, where she became an overnight sensation in *Giselle* and was promoted to principal dancer in Ballet Theater. Returning to Cuba in 1948, she founded her own company, which eventually folded due to lack of funding. In 1959 the Cuban government gave her enough money to establish a new dance school, Ballet Nacional de Cuba, which Alonso directs to this day. In elegant free verse and stunning artwork rendered in watercolor, colored pencils, and lithograph pencils on watercolor paper, Carmen T. Bernier-Grand and Raúl Coláin capture the seminal events in Alonso's life. The back matter includes a biography, Alonso's ballets, choreography, and awards, a glossary, sources, notes, and websites.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*STARREDAges 10+ Similar in form and concept to many of Bernier-Grand's previous books, this beautiful volume offers a biographical account of ballerina Alicia Alonso through a sequence of free-verse poems, extensive background notes, and large-scale illustrations. Beginning with Alonso's childhood in Cuba, the book relates how she moved to New York in 1937 and overcame partial blindness to dance again, winning worldwide renown. Alonso returned to Cuba in 1948 and founded a ballet company and a school. Though she later left for political reasons, she returned when Castro came to power. Alonso danced until she was 74 and still leads Ballet Nacional de Cuba. Coláin contributes a series of handsome illustrations created with watercolor, colored pencils, and

lithograph pencils. The verse skillfully distills a lifetime of events and emotions into images of significant moments. Frequently woven into the text are quotes from Alonso, those who knew her, and published works identified in the appended notes section, which is quite informative. Also included in the back matter are a prose biography, a glossary, and a detailed list of sources, which includes several interviews that the author conducted in Cuba. Well-researched and beautifully designed, this is a suitable celebration of a significant figure in the world of ballet. --Carolyn Phelan, Booklist, September Issue\*STARREDAges 10+ Bernier-Grand's (*Diego: Bigger than Life*) free-verse picture-book biography follows one of 20th-century ballet's most gifted--and steeliest--ballerinas, tracing her climb to the rank of *prima ballerina assoluta* and her battle to continue dancing as she loses her sight. Spiced with the Spanish of her native Cuba and full of poignant detail (her husband-to-be, seeing her dance, decides on the spot to study ballet so he can be her partner), Bernier-Grand's account does not flinch from Alonso's complex relationship with the Cuban government ("Why do you find killings by Castro/ more acceptable than killings by Batista?" picket signs read), nor from the physical punishment that is the reality of dance ("Dry blood has glued her toe shoes to her feet"). ColÃƒn's (*Play Ball!*) portraits have the dramatic scale of Depression-era murals; they capture Alonso's grace and celebrate her strength, too. There's little frilliness; Alonso's will to live and to dance seems like a force of nature, and the story, which follows her from childhood through her professional career and into retirement, has the scope of an adult work. --Publishers Weekly, September IssueAges 10+ Alicia Alonso is a prima ballerina who left her native Cuba for the United States at the age of 18. Although her English was limited, Alicia found teachers who could help her develop her skills. At age 20, Alicia suffered two detached retinas which in 1941 was a difficult process to correct and she lost the peripheral vision in her right eye. Alicia refused to quit dancing, working with fellow dancers on ways to help her on stage. When Fidel Castro offered to finance a ballet school under Alicia's tutelage, she accepted. Alicia continues teaching, directing, and choreographing works for the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. Alicia's story is told in free verse and RaÃ³l ColÃ³n's illustrations capture Alicia's gracefulness and strength. This book is inspiring not only for anyone interested in dance but also for anyone facing physical challenges that could prevent them from achieving their goals. Bibliography. Glossary. Timeline. Websites. Charlotte Decker, Educational Reviewer and Librarian, Cincinnati, Ohio. Recommended. --Library Media Connection, January/February Advanced Reviews

Author Carmen T. Bernier-Grand grew up in Puerto Rico. She is the author of several children's books, including *Shake It, Morena* and *Juan Bobo: Four Folktales from Puerto Rico*. She lives in

Portland, Oregon. Illustrator Raul Colon lives in New City, New York. He has illustrated more than 30 award-winning picture books, including *Angela and the Baby Jesus* by Frank McCourt.

I didn't read the book, and wouldn't have been able to without a magnifying glass. It should not be available as a Kindle book as the pages are 'graphics' instead of 'text' and are illegibly small.

I like how they used different types of poetry and lots of onomatopoeia. This really helped to bring along a journey with Alicia and feel what it was like to be a ballerina.

great product and service

I really enjoyed walking through the history and this story. It was done very well and the paintings were great. I would recommend this book to any future or past dancer.

A

Beautiful pictures and a great story!!!! A true story about great ballerina and how she overcame struggles with her vision. Very inspiring!

didn't seem very ebook compatible...the pages don't display well

Alicia Alonso is a fascinating subject. Passionate about dance as a young child, she soared to great heights in the world of ballet. Even when hampered by visual impairments and eventually blindness, she danced magnificently. Dedicating herself to her craft, she was instrumental in advancing classical dance in Cuba by teaching, choreographing and performing. In a profession where most retire early, she continued until she was seventy-four. Although her return to Cuba when Castro took power caused her to be vilified in the West, it did not diminish her status as a prima ballerina. The art work in this book is attractive, capturing the beauty and grace of the ballet. My one gripe is the illustration of her swirling about as a child of five depict a girl clearly older by five. But all the illustrations are superb. I found the picture on page 19 depicting her with her boyfriend especially appealing. Unfortunately, the exuberance of the illustrations is tempered by the life sucking prose. It is dry, boring and at times inappropriate for the intended age group. Why highlight her father's comment that ballerinas are prostitutes? The author could have indicated that he objected and

focused on her courage in following her dream. Why mention that she was impregnated before marriage? Isn't it enough to say that she married and had a child? The author fails to inject any emotion in her narrative. When Alicia and her husband have the opportunity to go on tour, they send their young daughter to live in Cuba with her grandparents. This is said flatly, without emotion. Surely this was a difficult decision, a sacrifice for the art. But it seemed no more heart-rending than packing your winter sweaters away for the season. This author tends to politicize everything. The page long anti- Battista rant was unnecessary especially when the author chose to ignore the oppressive regimes that replaced it. Alonso was committed to her craft and her country, fair enough. She was also afforded freedoms and privileges that her countrymen were not. Instead of an unbalanced political detour, I would have preferred focus on her career. Bottom line, great illustrations, flat footed prose.

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