**The Alex Quartet by Tessa Duder**

*The Alex Quartet* presents Tessa Duder’s four seminal *Alex* novels in one paperback 600 page edition, just over thirty years since the strongminded teenage character made her debut in New Zealand fiction. Now, at long last, these wonderfully human and feminist books are being made newly accessible to a whole new generation of young Kiwi women.

Alex is no ordinary fifteen-year-old. She is a champion swimmer with the chance to compete at the 1960 Olympics in Rome. But she’s also a high school student, talented at acting, dancing, piano, and with her own ideas and thoughts about herself and how the world should be. *Alex*, *Alex in Winter*, *Alessandra: Alex in Rome* and *Songs for Alex* follow the ebbs and flows, and the extreme highs and lows of Alex’s life as she trains for her dream, with all the five o’clock in the morning starts and media attention it entails. They track her as she falls in love and makes mistakes, as well as when she succeeds beyond her wildest imagination.

Set in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and first brought to life in the late 1980s, Alex’s struggles have stood the test of time. Duder brings her so energetically to life that she could have been created today as well as thirty years ago. Her problems are so honestly told. Alex isn’t afraid to talk about things like her period and to stand up for herself in a world that thinks girls aren’t as tough or as fast or as capable as boys. *Alex* delves into stress, friendships, relationships, and knowing yourself. This is not a book about swimming, but a coming of age novel in every sense. It’s non-put-downable, as well having ideas which carry real weight. All of these four books have won numerous accolades, which are richly deserved. In this edition, each book flows seamlessly on from the next, as though they were always intended to be published side by side.

I think I first read *Alex* in my early teens. Rereading it in this new edition, I couldn’t contain my wonder at the realism with which Tessa Duder is able to deliver the thoughts of this young girl, how many issues she touches on, how relevant to me her words still are. Her writing voice is phenomenally powerful and this comes across in her most enduring creation. Duder’s Alex is masterful – I wish I could find more words to describe the veracity of this audacious girl, with all her faults. She lives messily and completely. She is so very different from who I was as a fifteen-year-old, and yet I recognised so much of myself in her. She encourages us to be stronger, to fight for others, to love, to learn, and to fight for ourselves.

Alex is a wāhine toa whose story every girl should know. Every daughter, sister, deserves to read these books.

Reviewer: Susannah Whaley

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