



Faberge's Eggs: The Extraordinary Story of the Masterpieces That Outlived an Empire

By Toby Faber

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In *Stradivari's Genius*, Toby Faber charted the fascinating course of some of the world's most prized musical instruments. Now, in this enthralling new book, he tells the story of objects that are, to many, the pinnacle of the jeweler's art: the Fabergé imperial eggs.

The Easter presents that Russia's last two czars gave to their czarinas have become synonymous with privilege, beauty, and an almost provocative uselessness. They are perhaps the most redolent symbols of the old empire's phenomenal craftsmanship, of the decadence of its court, and of the upheavals that brought about its inevitable downfall. *Fabergé's Eggs* is the first book to recount the remarkable story of these masterpieces, taking us from the circumstances that inspired each egg's design, through their disappearance in the trauma of revolution, to their eventual reemergence in the global marketplace.

In 1885, Carl Fabergé created a seemingly plain white egg for Czar Alexander III to give to his beloved wife, Marie Fedorovna. It was the surprises hidden inside that made it special: a diamond miniature of the Imperial crown and a ruby pendant. This gift began a tradition that would last for more than three decades: lavishly extravagant eggs commemorating public events that, in retrospect, seem little more than staging posts on the march to revolution. Above all, the eggs illustrate the attitudes that would ultimately lead to the downfall of the Romanovs: their apparent indifference to the poverty that choked their country, their preference for style over substance, and, during the reign of Nicholas II, their all-consuming concern with the health of the czarevitch Alexis, the sickly heir to the throne—a preoccupation that would propel them toward Rasputin and the doom of the dynasty.

More than a superb new account of a classic tragedy, *Fabergé's Eggs* illuminates some fascinating aspects of twentieth-century history. The eggs' amazing journey from revolutionary Russia features a cast of characters including embattled Bolsheviks, acquisitive British royals, eccentric artifact salesmen, and such famous business and society figures as Arm and Hammer, Marjorie Merriweather Post, and Malcolm Forbes. Finally, Toby Faber tantalizingly suggests that some

of the eggs long thought lost may eventually emerge.

Darting from the palaces of a besieged Russia to the showcases of New York's modern mega-wealthy, *Fabergé's Eggs* weaves a story unparalleled in its drama and extravagance.

Praise for Stradivari's Genius

“Fascinating . . . lively . . . more enthralling, earthy and illuminating than any fiction could be.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“A celebration of six instruments and the master craftsman who made them . . . [Faber] brings to the subject an infectious fascination with Stradivari's life and trade. . . . He writes with clarity and fluency.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“An extraordinary accomplishment and a compelling read. Like strange totems that cast an irresistible spell, these instruments bring out the best and the worst of those who would own them, and Faber deftly tells the stories in all their rich and surprising detail.”

—Thad Carhart, author of *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank*

“A worthy contribution to the ongoing legend of Stradivari.”

—*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“Fascinating, accessible, and enjoyable.”

—Tracy Chevalier, author of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*



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Faberge's Eggs: The Extraordinary Story of the Masterpieces That Outlived an Empire By Toby Faber Bibliography

- Rank: #566804 in Books
- Brand: Random House
- Published on: 2008-10-07
- Released on: 2008-10-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.55" h x 1.05" w x 6.33" l, 1.34 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 320 pages



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1885 Czar Alexander III presented his wife, Marie, with a spectacularly crafted Easter egg. Over the next three decades, its creator, Carl Fabergé, made 49 more such eggs filled with jeweled surprises and exquisitely detailed paintings for the czar's family. Faber (*Stradivari's Genius*), former managing director of his family's firm, Faber & Faber, describes the eggs in loving, mouthwatering detail, bolstering his claim that the French-born jeweler led the Russian aristocracy to appreciate fine jewelry design over sheer gem size. Fabergé's influence also spread westward. In England, Marie's sister, Queen Alexandra, also developed a passion for Fabergé. Many of the eggs wound up in the United States after the canny businessman Armand Hammer made a deal with the Soviets to buy nearly one-third of them. Eventual owners included Egypt's King Farouk and cereal heiress Marjorie Meriweather Post. Faber frustratingly devotes far more ink to Romanov history and the precious eggs' twisted paths after leaving Russia than he does to the man who designed them. But the details he does provide—such as Hammer's unscrupulous dealings—make for a tantalizing read. 16 pages of color photos. (Oct. 7)

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From Booklist

Faber moves beyond mere description and illustration as he traces the fascinating history and sociology of these turn-of-the-century status symbols. Set against the sumptuous backdrop of Romanov Russia, the story of the creation of the original 50 imperial Fabergé eggs parallels the story of a nation in flux and an imperial family teetering—almost unwittingly—on the verge of extinction. As revolutionary fervor swept across Russia and the Romanov dynasty crashed and burned, these opulent, intricately designed eggs quickly became emblematic of a bygone era. To raise money, the Russian government began selling the gem-encrusted eggs in the mid-1920s, and they eventually became an international sensation. Art, history, business, and culture combine to play significant roles in the odyssey of the coveted Fabergé eggs from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. --Margaret Flanagan

About the Author

Born in Cambridge, England, in 1965, Toby Faber now lives in London with his wife and daughter. He was previously managing director of his family's renowned publishing firm, Faber and Faber. He is also the author of *Stradivari's Genius: Five Violins, One Cello, and Three Centuries of Enduring Perfection*.

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