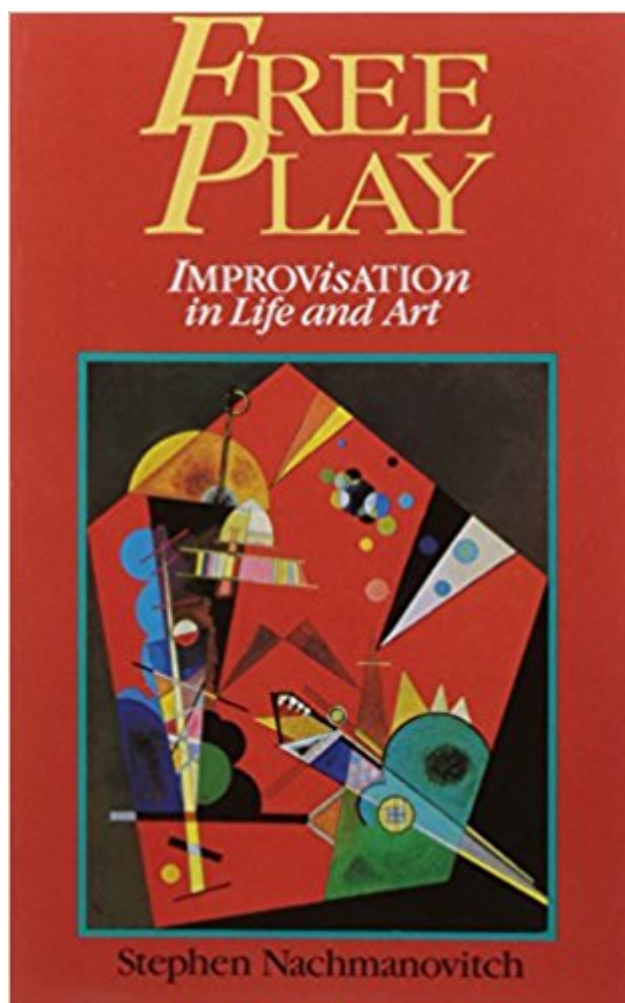


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Free Play: Improvisation In Life And Art



Synopsis

Free Play is about the inner sources of spontaneous creation. It is about where art in the widest sense comes from. It is about why we create and what we learn when we do. It is about the flow of unhindered creative energy: the joy of making art in all its varied forms. Free Play is directed toward people in any field who want to contact, honor, and strengthen their own creative powers. It integrates material from a wide variety of sources among the arts, sciences, and spiritual traditions of humanity. Filled with unusual quotes, amusing and illuminating anecdotes, and original metaphors, it reveals how inspiration arises within us, how that inspiration may be blocked, derailed or obscured by certain unavoidable facts of life, and how finally it can be liberated - how we can be liberated - to speak or sing, write or paint, dance or play, with our own authentic voice. The whole enterprise of improvisation in life and art, of recovering free play and awakening creativity, is about being true to ourselves and our visions. It brings us into direct, active contact with boundless creative energies that we may not even know we had.

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Customer Reviews

"Stephen Nachmanovitch has produced a celebration of human uniqueness. What it amounts to is a guide for getting the most out of whatever is possible" — Norman Cousins, author of The Anatomy of an Illness
"This is an unusually intense, packed, thought-through book on the most difficult subject in the world: mystic creativity. If you want to be intellectually informed about how people actually create things, then you should read it at least once." — Robert Pirsig, author of

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance"Would that Free Play found its way into every school, office, hospital, and factory. It is a most exciting book and a most important one."~•Yehudi Menuhin, violinist"Nachmanovitch tells it like it is in the most important book on improvisation I've yet seen."~•Keith Jarrett, pianist"Free Play is a superb guide for anyone who aspires to create, whatever medium."~•New Woman"This book is important not only because it delves into the creative process, but also because Nachmanovitch creates the opportunity for the reader to get in touch with her/his own creative possibilities and abilities."~•Harvard Educational Review~

(see description)

Since there are so many good reviews I chose begin with something slightly different so you could see the author's background.Dr. Nachmanovitch's PhD dissertation was on the History of Consciousness for an exploration of William Blake. This is significant because of Blake's ideas and friends. Namely Blake was interested in Women's rights, Thomas Paine was in his literary group and among other things Blake favored the freedom of the Colonies from Britain.From this I got a sense that Nachmanovitch is someone I would like to meet. You may want to read more about Nachmanovitch and Blake elsewhere if you find the above a bit sparse.The book asserts that anyone can improvise and that we all improvise every day in ordinary life when we drive down a street or have a conversation. These ideas are elaborated in simple terms showing how improvisation applies to any field not just to Nachmanovitch's field music.I liked the book because it refers to the self in many places as being the source of inspiration rather than some sort of collective consciousness as many books of this nature do. although he does not rule that out - you can make your own choice. However his elaboration makes it clear that within the self there are components that interfere with improv that have to be transcended in order to be creative whether it be in business, medicine, or music. He does make use of snippets from various sources but does not claim that his sources are of particular interest beyond the use he makes of them. For example he talks of Zen and the five fears of Buddhism but doesn't otherwise claim to be a Buddhist. The quality of this work goes way beyond what could be said in a brief review. To appreciate the brilliance of this work read the book - it is well worth five stars!

This book had been lying on my shelf for a few years when I finally opened it and found some wonderful advice about how to approach improvisation and composition. Having been a serious

musician for over 35 years, I am pretty confident in my abilities and suffer very little anxiety when I know I will have to improvise for a crowd of people. The one thing that I have noticed--and this book addresses, is that the daily grind, the endless tasks of survival, and just the passing of time can have a negative affect on that part of me from which improvisation originates. It can be very easy to lean-on techniques and tricks that have been ingrained and become like an old pair of shoes, however the freshness and excitement of playing can suffer thus making the improvisation seem "stilted" or "scripted" to the discerning ear. Reading this book illuminated all the pitfalls of trying to perform/compose while being in the wrong frame of mind and suggests zen-like ideas and games to loosen-up so the performer can be in the correct frame of mind thus allowing creativity and spontaneity to flow unimpeded, and that makes all the difference. Yesterday I had a few hours scheduled to compose/record so I re-read several chapters before I headed to the studio. Some of suggestions that I took into the studio were: 1. Approach the subject material in a child-like manner like I was playing my instrument for the very first time. 2. Detatch from reality as much as possible and focus upon a muse or some inspirational event. I thought about this on my way to the studio and reflected upon the spirit of joy present during a recent childrens birthday party. I focused upon how I sat watching 5 children running around the house, tearing up the place all the while playing with great joy and abandon. How they were always in the moment unconcerned about the past or the future. How their play had a sense of urgency and longing as though they were more aware of their mortality than the adults sitting around watching. I have to say that when I completed my work and listened back it was apparent that the message of this book is a very authentic one. The recording engineer remarked that the recording had a sense of urgency, fire, and a longing that at no time seemed stilted or forced, and that the accidents were happy accidents. I was satisfied with the session for I was able to pen the kernel of three new compositions and I look forward to getting back even more prepared to enter the correct mental zone. I was in the zone and know how to get back there when I need to. I spend a great deal of time working my technique yet it seemed that just a little of this book went a long way. If you are unaware of how to improvise or are suffering from "old pair of shoes" syndrome I am sure that a dedicated reading of this book following by some effort will pay those invaluable dividends that are found in the greatest performances/recordings. If nothing more, it will force you to evaluate your approach towards your particular art form and if you are satisfied. There is an Ambrose Bierce story about a shepherd who encountered a gorgeous woman while attending his flock. He had never seen a woman so lovely, so free, just wandering aimlessly about the countryside yet every time he tried to take hold of her she disappeared. This kept happening and he fell into a dispondency until he happened upon a man who was wiser than

he. The man pointed out that what he had encountered could not be tied down at all for it was the spirit of beauty and joy and it had to be enjoyed while it was there for it was both temporal and perennial. I can think of no better example of what I found in this book for I know that when I improvise I am flirting with the immortal and as a mortal I found this bit of wisdom alone makes all the difference. thank you

Improvisation seems to be a black hole in the social dance world. It is one of those skills that oftentimes seems underdeveloped, overdone, misunderstood, or ignored altogether. I have seen salsa instructors teach entire routines based on their own improvisations, only to have them repeated by their students step-by-step on the social dance floor without a thought given to the dynamics of the music or relationship with one's partner. All social dances suffer from a lack of understanding and lack of confidence among its participants when it comes to improvisation. And it seems there isn't really a clear path for learning how to break away from the structure and attain that beautiful - and skillful - quality of spontaneous creativity. Stephen Nachmanovitch's beautiful book offers enriching reflections for any dancer to meditate on. The author himself is a musician and a poet, but he approaches improvisation and creativity in a way that is accessible to devotees of all art forms and every discipline in life that prizes being in the moment. He offers a number of examples from the worlds of art and music, but my dancer's perspective did not have to make great leaps to apply these concepts to the skills required to improvise and express oneself on the dance floor. What I found so refreshing about the book was how rich his thoughts are on the topic. After reading several books on mastery and creativity that seemed superficial, fluffy, and more like self-help literature than deep reflection and analysis, Nachmanovitch's book was a true pleasure to delve into. His writing manages to be at once intellectual and inspiring while covering concepts such as the power of limits and mistakes, the value of inspiration and judgment, and the tension and reward of creative collaboration. These topics touch not only on musicality and improvisation but on technique and partnering as well. Though he never directly refers to the concept, a number of his thoughts seem to coincide perfectly with the conditions and characteristics of flow, and I finished his book with a more well-rounded appreciation of flow in social dance. I found it interesting to read in the author's biography that he holds a PhD in the History of Consciousness. Nachmanovitch's own introduction offers great insight into his vision for Free Play: "I began writing this book as an exploration of the inner dimensions of improvisation. I found it inescapably fascinating that the conception, composition, practice, and performance of a piece of music could blossom in a single moment, and come out whole and satisfying. When I first found myself improvising, I felt with great

excitement that I was onto something, a kind of spiritual connectedness that went far beyond the scope of music making. At the same time, improvisation extended the scope and relevance of music making until the artificial boundary between art and life disintegrated. I had found a freedom that was both exhilarating and exacting. Looking into the moment of improvisation, I was uncovering patterns related to every kind of creativity; uncovering clues as well to living a life that is self-creating, self-organizing, and authentic. I came to see improvisation as a master key to creativity." I always try to balance my reviews by offering constructive criticism and areas for improvement. However, this book did not really allow me room to do so. While some chapters were more interesting and applicable to the world of dance than others, I found so many gems throughout the book and have returned to it often since. While reading it will not directly improve one's improvisation on the dance floor, for many dancers I believe it can provide the mental shift required to open oneself up to inner creativity, outward expression, and meaningful improvisation.

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