



Spark: How Creativity Works

Julie Burstein, Kurt Andersen

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“This is a book about joy, drive and art, work that we’re all capable of if we’ll only commit.” —Seth Godin, author of *Linchpin*

Public Radio International’s Julie Burstein, creator of the award-winning program *Studio 360*, along with its host Kurt Andersen, offers a rare, fascinating glimpse into some of the 21st century’s greatest creative minds—from Yo-Yo Ma and Robert Plant to Mira Nair and Chuck Close, to David Milch and Joyce Carol Oates, to Rosanne Cash and beyond. Fans of Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers*, Daniel Pink’s *A Whole New Mind*, Rosamund Zander’s *The Art of Possibility*, and Lynda Barry’s *What It Is* will be enthralled and electrified by this unique look at the creative process of the world’s most talented and prolific artists.

Spark: How Creativity Works Details

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Author : Julie Burstein , Kurt Andersen

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Kat says

Very nice reflections and vignettes about various people who work in creative fields. Everything from writing to music to visual art is discussed - As a creative myself, I really enjoyed this book!

Susan says

Julie Burstein, producer of Studio 360, here puts to the page the creative lives of actors, painters, singers, musicians, filmmakers, poets, sculptors, writers & a landscape designer who have appeared on that public radio show. While many of their stories and comments are compelling (especially the ones where suffering and adversity factors on their creative output), the book is written in the 3rd person, so some of the immediacy is lost. Also, far too many of the artists went to Yale or Harvard or Princeton, or had parents who actively promoted their talent when they were children, or led privileged lives. So their methods for creative achievement aren't the full story. To put it more bluntly, where's the hope for a poor girl like me?

Kate says

If you are looking for a book that explores the creative process in any sort of systematic way, this is not the book for you. Basically, the author--who is the producer of a New York based public radio show in which accomplished, creative people of all sorts are interviewed--has put 36 vignettes based on those interviews in a book. You can glean quite a bit about creativity from reading about these people's lives, mainly about their creative influences, how they observe the world, how, at times, limitations have ignited their creativity, and how moxie sometimes kept them going. I also noted a certain amount of privilege and influential interpersonal connections in several of the stories--creatives who went to Harvard and Yale, and went on (surprise, surprise) to have successful art careers. Of course, there are also stories of those who come from not much to be successful in creative fields. A wide variety of creative fields are explored; landscape architects, dancers, visual artists, musicians, film directors, and Hollywood sound designers, to name a few. I enjoyed the book enough to give it three stars, but wasn't bowled over by it.

Terri says

I am so excited about this book. It is fascinating to read how successful artsy people excelled.

One of the artists interviewed said, "If you wait for clouds to part and be struck with a bolt of lightning, you're likely to be waiting the rest of your life. But if you simply get going something will occur to you."

I was struck by the fact that overcoming adversity in some way was often the key to creativity.

Chuck Close, a very famous portrait painter, had to overcome prosopagnosia- the inability to recognize

faces. Imagine! because he could not recognize individual's faces he became a portrait painter. He drew a grid on photographs and took the face square by square and created these wonderful portraits, and in the process was able to recognize faces from his artwork. And when you think proopagnosia is enough of a detriment for this portraitist, he has a spinal aneurysm which leave him paralyzed from the neck down in a matter of hours.

The tragically beautiful way that Donald Hall, already a great poet, became greater was through the death of his much younger wife, Jane Kenyon. The grief and mourning that Hall captures in his poetry, *Without*, is something no human being could fake.

When the artist was confined in some way, either by placing his/her own parameters or confined from something beyond his/her control, the art was better.

Ben Burtt, the noise behind Star Wars and Wall-E, limits himself in that the noises he 'invents' come from everyday life and are not simply digitally or electronically produced. The hum of the saber came from the hum of an interlock motor on a projector coupled with the sound from a broken microphone passing by a television set, picking up a buzz from the television.

On and on, I read of these amazing artists who became amazing because they were willing to go through the trials with which their lives had confronted them, and they produced triumphant, glorious art.

Or Ang Lee, a first son of Chinese parents, he was expected to go to college and excel in that way. And yet, he could not push his love of theatre and movies out of his mind. Across the world, James Schamus was growing up watching and loving movies. These two men manage to connect and go on to make incredibly artistic films.

These stories come by way of Public Radio International's weekly broadcast, Studio 360, hosted by Kurt Anderson. Never heard of it before, I am glad to be introduced via this book.

You will be inspired.

Tomika says

Spark gives a good overview of different artist's processes from a variety of disciplines such as painters, playwrights, poets, authors, sculptors, and musicians. I enjoyed reading the thoughts of artists I've long admired and discovering new artists whose work I now want to explore. The last chapter "Getting to Work" I found to be a bit abrupt and leaves me wanting. If you're looking for an in-depth look into creativity this is probably not the book you want but the book may help light your own spark of creativity and inspire you as it did for me.

Colin says

I found the "How Creativity Works" portion of the title misleading. I thought I was going to read something scientific and instructive. Spark really turned out to be anecdotal notes taken from a variety of artists from the radio program Studio 360. Not a complete loss.

Christopher Litsinger says

This is more or less a series of outtakes from Studio 360, so if you like the show, you probably will like the book, although you might just prefer to listen to some podcasts.

It is interviews with creative folks about their own process. I was hoping for a bit of recent social science and research on creativity, but that's just not here.

One note is that this book would be a great candidate to be re-written as an interactive tablet app- it is continually referencing media- videos, art, etc. and I found myself continually looking things up.

Virginia Rand says

Doesn't exactly tell you how to be creative but makes you want to give it a go.

Ninakix says

This book clearly has the aesthetics and values of public radio and podcasts. You can see that from the way in which stories are told and what is presented. But that aesthetic may be better suited to longer, more meandering explanations; most podcast interviews etc are at least half an hour. So, when the profiles are short, just a few pages, it seems to have less impact than the longer profiles. Still, a lot of these stories are really crazy and fun to hear, a book about where and how people get their inspiration.

Kate says

Though I read SPARK: HOW CREATIVITY WORKS through the eyes of a writer, I truly appreciated the common ground that creative people in all sorts of disciplines share...the willingness to take chances and fail, the need to "fill the well" from time to time, taking in scenery and art of other kinds. And the variety of artists included -- author Julie Burstein produces the public radio show STUDIO 360 and draws from a decade of interviews -- is truly impressive, from poets and novelists, to sculptors, landscape artists, photographers, and musicians. The collection of essays and interviews between these pages is both inspiring and comforting, I think, for artists who spend so much time working alone and yet need to know that we aren't really on our own at all.

Ana says

I am not giving this book less than two stars probably because there is a fair amount of people I truly admire in this. The title sets as a premise that we are to expect some explanation to how creativity works from this. There is none. Seaming together the experiences of a bunch of different cool people with some quotes and nice titles does not account for much. Not really. Getting impressions from all these people is a feat, but that does not make it automatically fit for book material. It was also a very annoying read in the sense that,

besides not saying much about creativity or the creative process, it did not even reveal that much about these people's lives. Two-thirds of it is made up of spoilers for movies and plays and books. Why would you waste paper on describing in such detail the scripts and such written by these people, when we can and would probably get a significantly better experience from just seeing the movie or reading their work, instead of talking about them and the way they do the things they do? I wanted more, way more. It was a disappointing read.

Joseph says

At times, this book reads like a "best of" compilation for the author's show, Studio 360. Often, however, the book expands from the show's format and content by providing a more expansive perspective with additional points of view (other than just the subject's) and with more historical angles.

While several sections are wonderfully written and inspiring, there is a certain homogeneity with regards to the subjects and subject matter - progressive-leaning individuals in the arts. There also seems a sense of reverence and self-importance whereby it doesn't probe as much as it should, almost to avoid offending its subjects. Finally, the title is also misleading in that the stories therein focus on a collection of creative "sparks" the subjects have had, rather than really how they came up with these sparks or how one may go about developing their own.

Martha says

I had to read this book for an English Project that involved us picking a topic that we were passionate about, I choose Creative Self-Expression. This book isn't what I was looking for, and to be honest, I don't know what I was actually looking for. This book doesn't really tell you how to be creative, but it makes you want to give it a go. It can inspire you to look for what you love and slowly start from there. It's actually a bunch of interviews piled into a book, some are shorter than others but they are still wonderful. It lists the creative process of some great artists/writers. It shows how they find inspiration to move onto the next thing, but it doesn't tell you how to find YOUR creative process.

The Sunday Book Review says

Rating: 3 out of 3 stars

If you need inspiration, this would be the book for you to get. While this book won't show you how to get YOUR inspiration, it shows us how others have. We follow 35 artists, writers, film makers and more and learn about their road to creativity. We often assume "the greats" were born with creativity flowing like blood through their veins, however after reading their stories, it is surprising what they had to endure in order to get that flow going.

While each story is only about 3 pages long (I do wish they were a bit longer, although then we wouldn't have as many different views), you get an understanding of what each artist values when it comes to creativity. The bottom line: be yourself. Trust your gut and go with the simple ideas before trying to become

"the next great thing". Anyone entering any aspect of the arts should pick this book up. It's a great representation of the real side of things. It's not all peaches and herb. Even the greats had to make due with what they found around them. And for this reason, are able to appreciate what they have accomplished.

Nourkuw says

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