



Sounds Like Titanic: A Memoir

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A young woman leaves Appalachia for life as a classical musician—or so she thinks.

When aspiring violinist Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman lands a job with a professional ensemble in New York City, she imagines she has achieved her lifelong dream. But the ensemble proves to be a sham. When the group “performs,” the microphones are never on. Instead, the music blares from a CD. The mastermind behind this scheme is a peculiar and mysterious figure known as The Composer, who is gaslighting his audiences with music that sounds suspiciously like the *Titanic* movie soundtrack. On tour with his chaotic ensemble, Hindman spirals into crises of identity and disillusionment as she “plays” for audiences genuinely moved by the performance, unable to differentiate real from fake.

Sounds Like Titanic is a surreal, often hilarious coming-of-age story. Hindman writes with precise, candid prose and sharp insight into ambition and gender, especially when it comes to the difficulties young women face in a world that views them as silly, shallow, and stupid. As the story swells to a crescendo, it gives voice to the anxieties and illusions of a generation of women, and reveals the failed promises of a nation that takes comfort in false realities.

Sounds Like Titanic: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Sounds Like Titanic: A Memoir for online ebook

Kathy De says

Sounds like Titanic by Jessica Hindman is not just a memoir. It's a work of creative non-fiction. Yes it is the story of a specific moment in the author's life, but it also dances from her youth to the recent past to the memoir's present. The leaps in time are signaled by changes in point of view, from I to she to the inclusive you. These movements keep the writing fresh all the way through.

I enjoyed the personal story of the Appalachian girl, raised to believe she's a star, hitting against reality when she tries to succeed at an elite northeastern university. The memoirist's struggles and perseverance and resilient humor kept me turning the pages. I turned them, too, because the prose is as beautiful as it is lucid and easy to read. And I turned them because of the subtext: this memoir goes beyond unveiling the writer's life to giving a searing critique of 21st century America—its pretenses and willingness to believe lies. The memoirist travels from the northeast to California, to Florida and Kansas and Texas. She sees America from behind the curtains, not just the show but the truth.

I recommend this memoir to anyone who wants to read a funny, honest story about a young woman with high ideals who faces disappointment with a strong heart. But more particularly, I recommend the book to young women in general. The memoir talks about what happens to girls when they grow old enough to “live in the body,” to feel themselves reduced to their physical being—and suggests ways to fight back. Finally, I recommend this memoir to anyone who cares about language, form, and humor—the perfect mix.

Katie says

“There were just some things you couldn't do for money. Not because they were particularly difficult, but because you just didn't want to. Because they weren't worth your life, which might not be worth much, but was worth something.”

God, this book. It's catapulted itself into my favorite books of all time, but how do I even begin to explain why? Yes it's about playing the violin (or not playing the violin, however you want to look at it), but the most important parts of this memoir are not about that at all: They're about growing up in the '90s; they're about the war in Iraq; they're about women's equality, the obsession with reality television, the farce that is “work-life balance” in America.

It's so much easier for me to write about the books I've hated than it is the books I've loved. Hating something is almost always tangible; it's bad writing, a shitty plot, boring characters. To love a book is a feeling. It's a sharp intake of breath, forgetting to exhale, because you can't believe the words in front of your face. Hindman captivates on two fronts: her recollection of touring America as a fake violinist, and more importantly, her uncanny ability to so clearly describe the unpleasant topics society “swept under the rug” for those of us born in the '80s.

She recounts the false promises made to young girls in the '90s:

“Even stranger is that, as people say in the 1990s, *It's the nineties!*, meaning, ‘women are equal now.’ A

teacher tells your class, 'You can be anything you want if you work hard enough,' and then adds, 'This is true for girls now, too.' What no one ever says during your entire upbringing is that there has been a cultural price to pay for equality."

The Millennial dilemma of working ourselves to death to create self-worth:

"What seems most important is that, for the first time in your life, you chose your health over the extra work that you might have been able to produce, the extra success you might have been able to achieve... And you'll marvel that all it took was someone—someone whom you thought of as brilliant and hardworking—giving you permission not to put work above everything else."

Anxiety as a social taboo:

"Panic attacks serve as confirmation of the very things women spend their lives working to negate: suspicions of female silliness, stupidity, hysteria... At the core of any anxiety is fear, and yours is this: You have lost control over everything. You have spent years working hard under the belief that hard work matters, but you are suddenly struck by the idea that *nothing you do matters*."

And how surprisingly purposeless her dream of being a post 9/11 war correspondent was:

"There is no way to know that the new America will have very little interest in learning anything accurate about the Middle East...it will be more difficult to make a living by providing accurate information about the Middle East to an American audience than it will be to make a living by fake-playing the violin."

I admire Hindman's ability to talk so candidly about the traumatic events of her life. Her story helped me process many of the questions I've had throughout my life but have never received sufficient answers for.

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Stephen says

Let's put it this way, I read this in a day.

It's a fascinating and well-written memoir about a young woman's time "playing" violin in a fake orchestra in New York City.

The Composer, a man never mentioned by name, has written music that sound dubiously like the soundtrack from the movie Titanic. While the musicians "perform" to turned-off microphones, the music blasts from a CD.

The audiences, while being manipulated, are being genuinely moved.

It's about people's willingness to accept the most inauthentic things for authentic reasons. About America's thirst for pleasure rather than for what's real.

It offers interesting insight into the struggles of women in the early part of the 21st century.

Smart, playful and compelling, "Sounds Like Titanic" resonates deep and true. An amazing work.

This was an ARC giveaway in exchange for an honest review.

Amy Bruestle says

I won this book through a giveaway in exchange for an honest review....

Unfortunately I could not get myself to finish this. I really hate not finishing a book and I usually force myself to suffer through it if it's bad or not something I'm into, but now that I am getting older, I am learning that there are tons of books I want to read in my lifetime, and it is okay not to finish the ones I don't like. That might seem obvious to some of you, but my OCD-ness qualities make it difficult for me to do! I don't have much to say about this book other than the fact that I was beside myself with boredom.

Nick Snider says

A memoir centered around working as a fake concert violinist, *Sounds Like Titanic* feels revelatory. Chiccehitto Hindman, as composer, is deft, thorough, and sharp, driving the narrative over mountain passes and across stretching interstates, but never taking the easy road. She looks head-on at American conceptions of success, authenticity, and gender, finding nuance at every turn. *Sounds Like Titanic* is moving, funny, difficult, and stranger than fiction in the way that only real life can be. Hindman's perspective is one-of-a-kind: She examines herself and the world from critical angles yet never shies away from moments of humor or redemption. Just as the memoir challenges our conceptions of what is real, Hindman understands that no one deserves to be a caricature.

Kate says

This is the sort of book you stay up too late reading.

I usually stick to fiction, because a character's life as invented by the author has to be more interesting than the real lives of people around us. But Jessica's account of working for *The Composer* is weirder than fiction. Sure, it's a story about being a violinist in fake concerts, but also manages to be a study on the nature of memoir, reality, growing up female in the nineties, undergraduate class conflict, a tour of America at war, and the unreliable narrator in our own heads.

I really appreciated the vulnerability she put into this book. It allows even a reader with the most boring life to relate to the sometimes crazy experiences the author had. While Jessica is critiquing her young self for her inability to make a living doing something important, I'm admiring all of the ways that she at least tried, harder than most people ever try at anything. Before I even finished reading this book it was obvious that she had managed to do something important and creative: This book is brilliant. I can't wait to read what she writes next.

Missy says

In *Sounds Like Titanic*, Jessica Chichetto Hindman weaves a remarkable tale that is utterly unique yet eminently relatable.

Early on in this hard-to-put-down memoir, Hindman switches from first to second person because, she posits, “For many people, myself included, sitting down to write something in first person feels like the worst type of fakery.” Hindman knows a thing or two about fakery, having traveled across the country playing her violin with the mic turned off as music music that ‘sounds like Titanic’ blared from a CD player – “doing the Milli Violini,” as she calls it. By “faking you,” Hindman says, “I am finally able to say what I want to say.” And does she ever have a story – a bizarre, troubling, hilarious, uniquely American and thoroughly female story – to tell.

Hindman recalls being told as a child by her fellow Appalachians that she had “reeyell talent” as a violinist, but the bright star she was in her small mountain town soon diminished under the bright lights of New York City. It turns out that Hindman’s “reeyell” and undeniable talent lies in her ability to draw the reader into a truth that is stranger than most fiction. However, as a female reader who has smiled because it is expected and “easier” (for everyone else), who has felt less than because of her small town-ness, who has felt like she is faking it, who has struggled with finding “life in the body,” *Sounds Like Titanic* rings true – and resonates deeply.

Jessica ? says

I know I'm posting this review early, but I just have to share.

I'm going to cut to the chase and just come out and say that this is one of my favorite books that I have read in a long time and I want every woman I know to read it and we will all be in one huge book club.

On its surface, it is a memoir of a woman who spends a few years of her young adulthood faking it as a professional violinist. The Composer, a man who is never named specifically, has written simplistic orchestral music that sounds suspiciously like the Titanic theme song, and pays semi-professional musicians to fake-play along to a soundtrack. The crowd never knows the difference, and the author becomes an accomplished violinist who really isn't that great.

Yet, there are nuanced layers to the story that make it rich and engrossing:

- Ms. Hindman had a world-class education in Middle Eastern studies during 9/11, but no one was interested in what she had to share.
- After growing up in Appalachia and finding herself living among the children of the 1% in New York City, she feels that she must (literally) work herself to death to validate her existence.
- Fascinating discussions on what she refers to as "life in the body" -- the struggle every woman has in coming to terms with her body and the space it inhabits.

I'm calling this is as my favorite book of 2018.

arc received from the publisher

David Rigel says

Profound! Groundbreaking! Passionate! I could not put this book down!

In her debut memoir, Hindman used her experiences as a fake violinist to explore, dissect, and critique an American Dream birthed from the generation of adolescents in the 90's. Jessica Hindman flawlessly braids together a memoir that explores societal/cultural norms, and their injustices—most notably the reoccurring theme of a woman stumbling to live “in the body”. The success of the memoir is a testament to Hindman's knowledge and dedication to her craft—and the emotional vulnerabilities displayed on the page through precise introspection. Every word in this memoir has a purpose and carries immense weight which allows readers to marinate in her rich, entertaining language. Hindman pays respect, and attention, to her native lands of the Appalachia making it a character of its own—fleshed out, complex, captivating, heartbreaking, fascinating—and does so by utilizing the setting as a means to analyze herself, family dynamics, socioeconomics in academia, the War on Terror, and the unique struggles that came with a life birthed from the Appalachian mountains. Hindman managed to do all the above seamlessly alongside her thought-provoking tales of touring as a fake violinist. Impressive!

A unique, heartfelt memoir that everyone needs to read.

Michaela says

dnf p. 31. Written in the 2nd person. Grew tired of reading the word, "you," in every line incredibly quickly. (She referred to herself as, "You.") Did not find a character to get invested in as no one here had any personality. Timeline kept jumping. I couldn't figure out what was going on, or indeed if anything was going on, & I started to fall asleep the 2nd time I tried to read it. So I'm done.

Wynne Kontos says

I was practically salivating for a copy of this before its February release date, and the buyers at my store graciously tracked one down for me (as well as a colleague who had heard how I bad I wanted to read it.)

The premise was really, really cool. While attending Columbia University in NYC circa 2002, Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman joined a classical music ensemble as a violinist, that as it turned out, wasn't playing music at all but mimicking along to pre-recorded, half-plagerized music that "sounds like 'Titanic.'" If you are like me, and "Titanic" was the seminal film of your childhood/young adulthood, then you know exactly what penny whistle whining music I'm referring to.

Hindman's account of being a New York college student forced to reckon with the insurmountable wealth one tends to encounter at institutions like Columbia (I have many CU friends, and myself received a Masters from NYU) and what type of wealth one tends to be slapped with upon arrival in NYC, read all too true. Having grown up in Appalachia, the daughter of middle class parents that made them upper class in their small, rural community, Hindman had to adjust her thinking about class and money almost immediately. How one intuits these lessons as a part of one's personality, and how that tends to happen in a uniquely New York way when you move to the city, Hindman writes about with a deftness only gathered from true experience.

Those New Yorkers reading this are nodding because they know exactly what I (we) are talking about. In fact, reading about such an ingrained truth in such precise detail can become a little grating. But that's not to say Hindman didn't capture it well, because she did.

In a desperate attempt to pay her tuition, Hindman takes the violinist job and soon learns the pitfalls of the

ensemble she's just joined, and its ruthless leader, The Composer. He's never named, only referred to as such, and some shoddy Google searches have turned up nothing. (Don't worry, I will keep trying.) Having played the violin since childhood, but giving up the dream in order to pursue Middle Eastern studies, Hindman is excited to be a "real violinist." Cue CD player blasting prerecorded music, her slave labor work as an ensemble member and the psychotic behavior of The Composer and you have a recipe for mental health disaster. Soon Hindman finds herself spiraling into an anxiety landslide, unable to trust or control her own emotions, but desperate for the meager cash flow the job provides. And the ego boost so often gained, however momentarily, when some hick in Kansas thinks she's playing the violin beautifully.

There are parts of this memoir that really shine, that highlight the class disparity and the impossible-ness of being a functioning millennial in society (despite the fact that Hindman herself is not a millennial.) Finding work that provides benefits, health insurance, security, money--these are luxuries to so many of us. Hindman knows that, she sees how she has floated on the periphery of so many aspects of her life, as a writer, a musician, a college student, a New Yorker, an Appalachia resident. Her ability to be objective about herself is notable, especially for a reader like me. There's nothing I hate more than a memoir that lacks objectivity. But this didn't need to be an entire memoir. In an effort to spread it to 249 pages, Hindman ruminates several times over about her failed attempts to become a Middle Eastern correspondent, even in the ruin directly after 9/11, but she writes sparingly about her fellow ensemble players, perhaps because she never really got to know many of them well due to their work environment or the fact that they often can't cut it and quit. She categorizes the fans of The Composer's music and her rural neighbors back home, in a somewhat compassionate but clearly categorized way. The Trump-voter comparisons, the eating tuna fish casserole in Walmart clothes comparisons, the NRA supporting, Muslim hating, hardcore Christian comparisons are there in between the lines or spelled out directly. They're deplorables, but Hindman is all too ready to explain why in artful terms.

Sometimes she's talking about the differentiation in class that we often must live as young people to understand. Sometimes she's talking about these deplorables, and how exposure to our common man is the only way to understand we're not that different. Sometimes she's talking about job security, or overpriced education, or Middle Eastern conflict, or New York City, or the fact that The Composer is not only a fraud but once tried to kill a member of their ensemble by letting him nearly freeze to death in an unheated camper traveling through Montana in the winter time. But there's not enough depth, enough originality, enough consistency to quite meld it all together. The writing is strong, but it feels like you're being ping ponged around through the different parts of what was once a long form essay, watching the author pad it to memoir length.

Lastly, because The Composer's identity is never revealed, it seemed glaringly obvious. I'm sure that it was to protect his anonymity as well as to hit us with this literary device that every time his "name" is mentioned we're reminded of what role he is meant to play (and does only in imitation.) But I found myself at every instance DESPERATE to know who he was. There are so many context clues the anonymity seemed a little pointless, her feelings of revulsion so strong that when she decides at the end of the book to protect him I felt confused and a little tricked. Here we've read about this conman who has virtually abused Hindman and her coworkers for years, like I said, nearly KILLED a man (the words "he was capable of killing me" are almost used verbatim) but in the last minute she decides not to reveal what he said to her in their most "honest and revealing" conversation. Hasn't the ship for protecting him or his character SAILED AT THIS POINT? Pun intended. 247 pages of essentially demonizing this man just to save him in the last two. Are we that worried about legal? That's what the naming device felt like, what this build up to a conversation we're not allowed to be privy to felt like: the legal team at W. W. Norton sending gentle reminders through the editing room.

As a long form piece in New York Mag or in the Sunday Times or literally ANY long form essay location that would've been so lucky to get this piece, it would have gone viral in .2 seconds. Hindman can write, she

knows people, she's not afraid to get dark. Whether the book form will have the same effect remains to be seen, though I will be interested in what else Hindman creates. And I'm sure if Jack Dawson was still alive, he would be too.

Michael Waddell says

This is an amazing story! I found myself shocked by many of the twists and turns in the author's life, the bizarre situations she found herself in, the ways she found to get by through all of it. But what really makes the book great is the author's style: direct, curious, unflinching, playful. Nearly every page has something that makes me think about some unobserved detail in life -- what we mean by "make a living", how it's often the most inauthentic things that authentically touch people's lives, how smiling is so often demanded but can signal unseriousness. I've read books that delighted in these sorts of observations before, but they were usually using them as distancing techniques, wry, above-it-all. *Sounds Like Titanic* is nothing like that. Somehow it manages to be clever and playful, while still being vulnerable, compassionate, and honest. An amazing book.

Cambria DeLee says

It usually takes me a few weeks to a few months to read a book. I frequently have to go back and re-read parts because I've forgotten important information that should have stuck with me. I read *Sounds Like Titanic* in one day! I kept telling myself I'd put it down after the next chapter, but I always wanted to know what was going to happen next. I gave myself breaks for lunch, dinner, and the gym, but that's about it! The main character had many similar thoughts and experiences that I had during that part of my life, except that her's were WAY more interesting! I'm so glad that she didn't focus on a love interest at any point. It is extremely refreshing to read a book about a woman that doesn't revolve around a romantic relationship. I can't wait to see what Jessica Hindman comes up with next!

Nate says

Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman has written a memoir of "holy shit allegro" proportion. Her time-hopping memoir spans from rural 1980s West Virginia, to 2001 Cairo, Egypt, to major cities across the United States as a violinist on a mysterious, PBS-favorite composer's *God Bless America Tour*. At its heart, *Sounds Like Titanic* is Chiccehitto Hindman's journey of wrestling with *life in the body*, navigating the crooked gaze of America in its large cities and small towns. It's also a distinctly 21st century coming-of-age narrative: Chiccehitto Hindman achieves academically, working obsessively to do so, but it's only at the end of the memoir, years removed from the company of well-off classmates with sights set on Wall Street and "playing" violin that she is truly happy with her position in the world. Chiccehitto Hindman's journey is her own, but her insights are those that, if you're a certain age, you know to be true. When future readers want to know what America was like in the early years of the 21st century, *Sounds Like Titanic* will be one piece of literature they turn to.

Kristina Brodbeck says

Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman's memoir is captivating and thought-provoking. The way in which she transitions from the first person "I" to speaking from "you" pulls the reader through the transitions of time. The reader is brought back to a post-9/11 world of uncertainty and facades. While it may not be the intention of this memoir, the book allows us to begin trace our new history as a reality television-obsessed culture and perhaps begin to understand how America's thirst for pleasure rather than authenticity led to the election of a reality television host as POTUS. SOUNDS LIKE TITANIC is timely and relevant.
