

High Hopes: A Memoir

By Anne Abel

The Boss stirs life in this touching memoir of a healing rock 'n' roll pilgrimage, inspired by Abel attending her first-ever concert—at age 59—and discovering transcendence. “For three-plus hours, Bruce Springsteen had made me feel like I had a chance,” writes Abel, who admits that, before this, she had only the vaguest idea of who Springsteen even was. She caught six more shows over the next six months. These, too, proved cathartic and transformative for Abel, who has endured depression since her teen years and never found any treatment offering “significant relief.”

Facing 60, Abel embarked on a bold rock 'n' roll pilgrimage: traveling alone to Australia to see Springsteen and his band “prove it all night” at eight different shows. In the music, Abel finds more than pleasure and abandon. An interview in which drummer Max Weinberg links his art to the concept of the seder inspires a surprising emotional breakthrough in the exercise room of an Aussie Hyatt. Weinberg “established order, seder, for the band,” Abel writes—the same stability and encouragement we owe those we love. She develops this idea throughout the book, tying it to heartbeats, gravity, James Brown, and the responsibility to let loved ones explore while providing them a “strong center.”

Abel’s account of following the beat of her own drummer finds her making fresh discoveries about herself, her relationships, and how to live life for all it’s worth. She meets some of her heroes, including Weinberg, Joan Jett, longtime Springsteen manager Jon Landau, and perhaps most fruitfully, critic Dave Marsh. She frankly addresses despair and doubt—both as a parent and as an all-in consumer of deeply commercial art—including the morning she castigates herself as “stupidly gullible” and “fooled by the Springsteen Money Machine.” But such qualms are fleeting, as the next show stirs the feeling of being “reborn at a gospel revival.” Springsteen devotees will love this, but Abel’s self-discovery, powered by urgent art and performance, transcends fandoms.

Takeaway: Rousing memoir of self-discovery Down Under at Bruce Springsteen shows.

Comparable Titles: Cindy Ingram’s *Art Is About Being Whole*, Jonathan D. Cohen and June Skinner Sawyers’s *Long Walk Home*.

Production grades

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