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Where The Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, And The Inner Life Of Artists



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John Cage,
Zen Buddhism,
and the Inner Life
of Artists

KAY LARSON 



Synopsis

A "heroic" biography of John Cage and his "awakening through Zen Buddhism" - "a kind of love story" about a brilliant American pioneer of the creative arts who transformed himself and his culture (The New York Times). Composer John Cage sought the silence of a mind at peace with itself - and found it in Zen Buddhism, a spiritual path that changed both his music and his view of the universe. "Remarkably researched, exquisitely written", *Where the Heart Beats* weaves together "a great many threads of cultural history" (Maria Popova, *Brain Pickings*) to illuminate Cage's struggle to accept himself and his relationship with choreographer Merce Cunningham. Freed to be his own man, Cage originated exciting experiments that set him at the epicenter of a new avant-garde forming in the 1950s. Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Yoko Ono, Allan Kaprow, Morton Feldman, and Leo Castelli were among those influenced by his "teaching" and "preaching". *Where the Heart Beats* shows the blossoming of Zen in the very heart of American culture.

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Customer Reviews

"Where the Heart Beats" is fascinating as both a chronological and spiritual biography. It accomplishes that rarest of feats in a book about an artist: not only putting us in Cage's shoes and his times, but also making his creative process come to life--probing into his motivations, his psychic struggles, and the revelations he experiences in such a way that we can see more clearly how his art came to be what it is. Larson proves herself a skillful, authoritative, and compelling guide. Based on her many years as a reporter in the field, she speaks knowledgeably and compassionately about Cage's impact on the contemporary art, music, and performance scene. Drawing on her own strong

Buddhist practice, she illuminates the American Zen world and the profound influence it had on Cage. More important, as a human being, she effectively invites us to engage in a conversation with Cage using our own intelligence and imagination, which is probably the best way to develop a richer understanding of what he was trying to communicate. Her book helps us to value him more and to open up our hearts and minds more fully to his work.

Fascinating. Ready to read it again to my surprise tho big and long but move between arenas and people so very engaging.

Kay Larson delivers a fascinating story portraying Cage's creative process, connecting us to his heart and mind as she paints a colorful portrait with her elegant writing style. This breathtaking story weaves together threads of cultural history as it conveys the tremendous changes sweeping through American Culture following World War II. A time when the Arts in America let go of tradition as they reinvented themselves. Painters, Dancers, Performance Artists, and Poets changed styles. In addition, a tumultuous period when composers began to touch thousands of lives through a spiritual quest. "WHERE THE HEART BEATS" is refreshing, enjoyable, beautifully written, and Highly Recommended.

There are experiences in life where the process of living becomes revealed, much like unwinding a spool of thread. Reading "Where the Heart Beats" is very successful in poetically revealing the layers upon layers John Cage moved through in his art, his music, and his life. I have read other books about Mr. Cage and found this one to hold a very unique and different lens. This book does not critically analyze his musical compositions but instead shares the elements, the essentials, the details that led him down his creative seeking path. It felt like a line moving through time and I can now understand his choices on a higher level. As an artist myself, the process of understanding why one chooses what one does is a great tool. This book gave me hope to keep believing in process and trusting layers do come together to form a whole. Mr. Cage was such a determined being and Larson depicts this perfectly time and time again through her sharing of story. And, I think it is just that, the sharing of story of John Cage, meandering through different creative nodes which brought this book to a place of intimacy. Quite remarkable!!

This is an excellently researched and well-written story. It has moments of almost stream-of-consciousness mixed with straight-up journalism and some Zen language that creates a

book unlike anything else I've read. It's definitely a little long-winded at times, but you kind of just go with it. It paints a picture of the early-to-mid-20th century arts scene, Dadaism, and how Zen concepts shaped not only John Cage's approach towards art, but also the work of other major artists like Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg. Finally it argues (pretty well) that John Cage and Marcel Duchamp basically changed the way the world considers and creates art. This is not my usual fare, but I was totally drawn in.

This book is a singular and thorough trip through the avant garde in the visual and performing arts during the second half of the Twentieth Century using John Cage as guide. It is also a stimulating look into the mind of this seminal artistic figure as he interacts with both artists and Buddhist teachers during this time. Given Ms. Larson's own deep knowledge of both John Cage and Buddhist practice, she brings a special clarity to this intellectual and artistic venture using Cage's own words and her own unique insights into his contributions to music and the visual arts. One is stunned by John Cage's own work as well as the influence he has had with so many significant artists in his lifetime.

From strands of many lives -tracked in memories of conversations, meetings, parties, in old announcement, dusty catalogs, diaries, in interviews and research, Kay Larson gathers intelligence like the MI5 and puts together the story of how Zen Buddhism and John Cage seduced the West. An amazing variety of people and events are assembled--John Cage at Black Mountain, Kerouac on the road, Ginsberg at Columbia, Johns and Rauschenberg meet D.T. Suzuki, D.H. Suzuki at Columbia and the New School, Yoko Ono and Happenings, poetry evenings, the Judson Dance Center, Dick Higgins--and are revealed to have a single unifying source: Zen Buddhism. "Where the Heart Beats" by Kay Larson is an amazing insight into the seeming chaos of movements, styles, and groups that agitated American art of the 1950s and 1960s. NATALIE EDGAR PAVIA

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