



Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy

By Barbara Ehrenreich

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"Fascinating . . . An admirably lucid, level-headed history of outbreaks of joy from Dionysus to the Grateful Dead."--Terry Eagleton, *The Nation*

Widely praised as "impressive" (The Washington Post Book World), "ambitious" (The Wall Street Journal), and "alluring" (The Los Angeles Times), *Dancing in the Streets* explores a human impulse that has been so effectively suppressed that we lack even a term for it: the desire for collective joy, historically expressed in revels of feasting, costuming, and dancing.

Drawing on a wealth of history and anthropology, Barbara Ehrenreich uncovers the origins of communal celebration in human biology and culture. From the earliest orgiastic Mesopotamian rites to the medieval practice of Christianity as a "danced religion" and the transgressive freedoms of carnival, she demonstrates that mass festivities have long been central to the Western tradition. In recent centuries, this festive tradition has been repressed, cruelly and often bloodily. But as Ehrenreich argues in this original, exhilarating, and ultimately optimistic book, the celebratory impulse is too deeply ingrained in human nature ever to be completely extinguished.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Ehrenreich's social history of collective joy, ranging from pagan ritual to rock concerts, comes off as an extended, rambling lecture, taking in a varied array of subjects along the way. Taking the hint, Ward reads Ehrenreich's book with a touch of the lecturer's oratorical savvy, and some of that same figure's dry deliberation. Ehrenreich argues that communal ecstasy has been too often misunderstood as an excuse for booze-fueled sexual bacchanalias, ignoring its political and social components. Ward is neither overly joyous in her reading, owing too much to the nature of her material, nor overly serious, her voice tinged with the slightest hint of charmed pleasure at the prospect of declaiming on Ehrenreich's chosen subject. The unabridged audio is not overlong as audiobooks go, but there are moments where Ward's reading drags ever so slightly, pulled down by a sameness of approach that threatens to inspire the opposite of the ecstatic moments Ehrenreich's book describes. The solid quality of Ehrenreich's prose papers over the gaps and gives Ward's reading the pleasurable (if not quite monumentally joyous) sensation it possesses.

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About the Author

Barbara Ehrenreich is the author of fourteen books, including the *New York Times* bestsellers *Nickel and Dimed* and *Bait and Switch*. A frequent contributor to *Harper's* and *The Nation*, she has been a columnist at *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine.

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