

The Creative Spark: How Musicians, Writers, Explorers, and Other Artists Found Their Inner Fire and Followed Their Dreams

Michael Shapiro

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Michael Shapiro interviewed thirty-two luminaries from the arts for *The Creative Spark*.

The book's subjects include well-known and obscure personalities, with chefs, scientists, and musicians among them. Filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola and comedian Joan Rivers are included; the latter is one of several interviewees who has since passed away, giving those interviews the additional gravitas of their "final words" on creativity.

Each interview begins with a brief background on its subject and their accomplishments. Questions are knowledgeable, probing, and thoughtful, leading to moments as when travel writer Dervla Murphy discusses how the genre has changed since her first bicycling trip in the 1960s, or when Melvin Seals recalls his hesitancy to join The Jerry Garcia Band as "a church boy walking into a world of all these skeletons."

More expansive are observations such as Phil Cousineau's presentation of creativity as one aspect of excellence. His commentary draws upon the example of the Greeks; Sophocles and Socrates, he reminds the audience, were also accomplished in other fields, and they relied on a juncture of the mind, body, and soul.

Some interviews ran as little as fifteen minutes, including one with time-pressed Smokey Robinson; others were longer, but all are focused. The artists' discussions are organic and sometimes amusing, and their inclusion is guided by Shapiro's admiration of his subjects. Patterns develop based on proximity to his Bay Area home base; folk rock and Americana are overrepresented among the interviewed musicians, who include Judy Collins, Lucinda Williams, and Lyle Lovett.

Directed by eclecticism and diversity, the discussions of the creative process collected in *The Creative Spark* represent many valuable perspectives.

PETER DABBENE (November / December 2019)

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