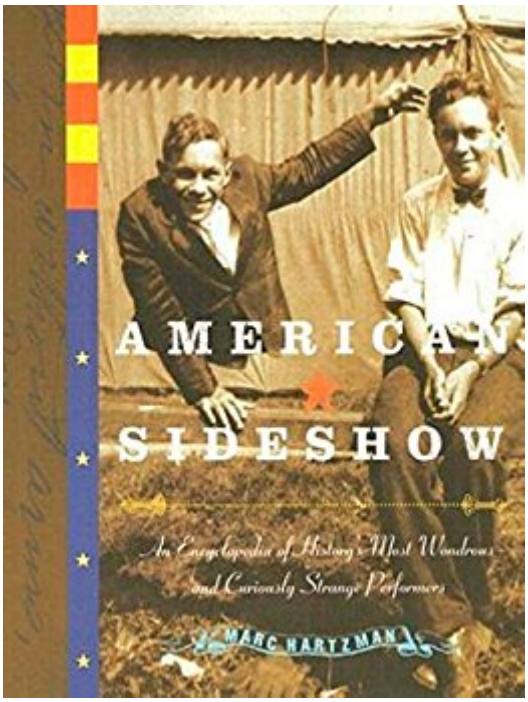
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American Sideshow



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Synopsis

A fascinating look into the history of the American sideshow and its performers. Learn what's real, what's fake, and what's just downright bizarre. You've probably heard of Tom Thumb. The Elephant Man. Perhaps even Chang and Eng, the original Siamese twins. But what about Eli Bowen, the legless acrobat? Or Prince Randian, the human torso? These were just a few of the many stars that shone during the heyday of the American sideshow, from 1840 to 1950. American Sideshow chronicles the lives of truly amazing performers, examining these brave and extraordinary curiosities not just as sideshow performers but as people, delving into the lives they led and the ways they were able to triumph over and even benefit from their abnormalities. American Sideshow discusses the rise and fall of the original sideshows and their subsequent replacement by today's self-made freaks. With the progress of modern medicine, technological advancements, and the wonderful world of body modification, abnormalities are being overcome, treated and even prevented: Siamese twins can now be separated, and in addition to this, tongues can be forked, horns surgically implanted, and earlobes removed. There are also, of course, modern-day giants, fire eaters, sword swallowers, glass eaters, human blockheads, and oh, so much more. These fascinating personalities are celebrated through intimate biographies paired with stunning photographs. Approximately two hundred performers from the past one hundred and sixty years are featured, giving readers a comprehensive and sometimes astonishing look into the history of the American sideshow

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Customer Reviews

was looking for more info on Frances O'Connor. not very informative on that subject but still learned some new stuff.

When one reads the thumbnail (few are any more detailed than this) biographies of several fat ladies, a pall of sameness settles over it all. Part of it comes from the subject: fat ladies tend to have very similar situations and experiences, as do dwarves, giants, conjoined twins, etc., and to read of several is inevitably to read pretty much the same story.This author enhances that experience by writing them mostly in the same words, very often cliched ones at that. His attempts at humor are pretty much at the level of nudge, nudge, wink, wink: if there is any sense of wonder here, it seems to hover around the sex lives of the subjects.Yes, he is sympathetic to these folks, and few thoughtful people could really argue with the proposition "what else are they going to do for a living?" (I was blown away by the earnings he reports--$100 a week back in the day when $1 could buy 10 pounds of hamburger! It was often a very good living indeed.) Sadly, the sideshow has become passe, and with it a way of life that gave strange people a community--obviously often a rich and supportive one.

Love this book! So interesting and humbling.

Marc Hartzman has undertaken an ambitious project: a chronicle of those showfolks who performed in America's sideshows from circa 1830 to the present. Starting with the golden era under P.T. Barnum, Hartzman gives the reader brief biographical introductions to these unusual performers. Hartzman's prose offers a good humored look at the place where truth and hype converge in the lives of these human oddities. The text is accompanied by rare photographs from the author's and other collections (including that of yours truly).I find it gratifying that whereas most books focus on sideshow's illustrious (or dubious) past, Hartzman also takes time to acknowledge the contemporary performers and showmen keeping the tradition alive out there on the sawdust trail.The short, the

tall, the fat, the tattooed, the conjoined, the hirsute, the limbless: they’re all here to discover inside Hartzman’s tent.

This book was completely fascinating. Each story was so interesting. Great way to learn about the old American sideshows and the "freaks" who made them possible.

This book is informative, thorough and makes a lively read.Hartzman obviously has a lot of passion and affection for his subject. He has detailed the lives of many odd, strange and unique human beings in a refreshingly straight forward manner. He has a light touch and a wry sense of humor that pokes through from time to time. It is apparent that this was a labor of love and the author brings the book right up to date with a review of contemporary performers who are bringing various aspects of the sideshow to modern audiences. The book opens in the ’golden age’ of the sideshow, from the 1830s, through the Barnum years up to the early 1900s. A time when the only way rural working people could be ’amazed and amused’ was when the circus or the fair blew in to town. Hartzman documents some of the most famous performers and human exhibits of that period. He continues through the ’silver’ age, around the end of WW1 through to the Vietnam era. And finishes with the ’modern’ age. The three sections document nicely the rise, decline and subtle rebirth of this unique corner of American theater.In a world where reality TV rules supreme, it is gratifying to read a book that is dedicated to celebrating those who truly kept it and continue to keep it very real.Highly reccomended. The pictures alone are worth the price of the book, stop reading and order it.

I’ve been eyeballing this book for about 4 years and I just couldn’t bring myself to buy it. I got a gift card for the holidays and it was first on my list. The pictures are nice- but not all performers have pictures. The brief biography’s are good, some are to short. But I love this stuff, I can’t get enough information or pictures of these old performers. I should have been alive during these times. Super interesting book!!

"They" are people first. Many have been shunned, abused and used. The Sideshow has given them community and family. Too bad it has become politically incorrect. A penchant abounds to fix people who are different. Again such people are alone and shunned if they’re not fixable.

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