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The Fiddler in the Subway: The Story of the World-Class Violinist Who Played for Handouts. . . And Other Virtuoso Performances by America's Foremost Feature Writer

Gene Weingarten

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"Gene Weingarten is the best writer in American journalism." —DAVE BARRY

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Gene Weingarten : The Fiddler in the Subway: The Story of the World-Class Violinist Who Played for Handouts. . . And Other Virtuoso Performances by America's Foremost Feature Writer before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Fiddler in the Subway: The Story of the World-Class Violinist Who Played for Handouts. . . And Other Virtuoso Performances by America's Foremost Feature

Writer:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The best writing I've ever read
By R. Gjendem
What happens when you pick up the last book you will ever read? When the writing is so good that it will ruin everything else for you? Gene Weingarten's writing did that for me. This book is a collection of feature writing he has done at The Washington Post. Two of the pieces won Pulitzer Prizes. Only three stories in — The Great Zucchini, The First Father and The Ghost of the Hardy Boys — and I thought, "If you want to write, read this book. If you want to teach others to write, use this book. When I write, I want to write like this." It is beautiful, masterful stuff. Reading further, I thought, "I can't recommend this book. I just can't. It will ruin every other writer for you until the end of time. I don't know if I can read anything else after this book." Then I mustered my best Jimmy Dugan voice and yelled, "There's no crying in journalism! Why is he making me cry?" I read "Pardon My French" on the 72nd anniversary of D-Day in Normandy. It's the one that made me laugh out loud. Then giggle at how delicious it was that he found just the right way to get the most honest responses from French folks. He calls it the Machine. I call it hilarious. Every paragraph in "Fatal Distraction" is a punch to the gut. I almost couldn't bear to read it. But I let Weingarten take me by the hand and gently lead me through the horrific experiences of the people in this piece. Weingarten quotes Franz Kafka: "The meaning of life is that it ends." This is the heart of everything he writes. This is what breathes life into every word. Is this the last book I'll ever read? Well, no. I could no more stop reading than I could stop breathing. I will, however, measure everything else I read against Weingarten's writing. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful collection
By Stephanie Patterson
This is a fabulous collection of essays. I first learned of Mr. Weingarten when a friend sent me his essay on Joshua Bell's stint as a busker in the Washington Metro. The question was "Would people on their way to work in the morning stop to hear the playing of music by an exceptional musician?" The short answer: No. But Mr. Weingarten's account of the 45 minutes that Mr. Bell played and most people failed to listen is fascinating. He won a Pulitzer Prize for this story in 2008. In 2010, he won the Pulitzer a second time for "Fatal Distraction" an essay in which he takes a look at a diverse group of people who have one thing in common—they forgot that they had left their infants in closed cars and the infants died. Mr. Weingarten is known for his wonderful humorous essays and there's a nice selection here: an account of the life of "The Great Zucchini," a man who entertains at children's parties, a rueful look back at The Hardy Boys, a series of books the author loved as a child, and one man's attempt to find out what the French really think about Americans. Highly recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very nice collection of Weingarten's favorite columns
By gary neidlinger
Very nice collection of Weingarten's favorite columns. Although primarily a humorist, he can pull the very deepest emotions to the surface. A good quick read that can be put down today and picked up tomorrow without losing your train of thought.

GENE WEINGARTEN IS THE O. HENRY OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM Simply the best storyteller around, Weingarten describes the world as you think it is before revealing how it actually is—in narratives that are by turns hilarious, heartwarming, and provocative, but always memorable. Millions of people know the title piece about violinist Joshua Bell, which originally began as a stunt: What would happen if you put a world-class musician outside a Washington, D.C., subway station to play for spare change? Would anyone even notice? The answer was no. Weingarten's story went viral, becoming a widely referenced lesson about life lived too quickly. Other classic stories—the one about "The Great Zucchini," a wildly popular but personally flawed children's entertainer; the search for the official "Armpit of America"; a profile of the typical American nonvoter—all of them reveal as much about their readers as they do their subjects.

From Publishers Weekly
What happens when you set one of the world's most renowned violinists at the entrance to one of the nation's busiest subway stations during rush hour to play some of the world's most beautiful and haunting music? Will harried commuters, enchanted by the music, linger for a few moments and let the music wrap their souls in peace? Will they appreciatively toss a few coins or dollars in the violinist's case? Conspiring with violinist Joshua Bell, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Weingarten discovers that Bell's virtuoso performance of several classical pieces does little to stop commuters in their tracks, and he reports on this conundrum in the column from which this collection of previously published newspaper columns takes its title. With his incisive wit, Weingarten ranges over other topics, from the possible affair of Woodrow Wilson and Mary Hulbert to the children's entertainer, the Great Zucchini, whose often squalid personal life contrasts dramatically with his life on stage entertaining three- and four-year-olds at Washington, D.C., area birthday parties. Weingarten travels in search of a town worthy of being called the "armpit of America" and discovers it in Battle Mountain, Nev., a town whose defining image for the journalist is a 40-foot-high neon Shell gas station sign with the "S" burned out. Entertaining and funny, Weingarten's stories depict the poignancy of the human condition. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
From Booklist
It's no surprise that a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner would have something useful to say about writing, but Weingarten exceeds expectations in his passionate, irreverent, and instructive introduction to this superb

retrospective collection. And the essays themselves prove that this former editor and feature writer turned columnist and “investigative humorist” is one helluva storyteller and a master “stunt” reporter. A troublemaking truth-seeker, Weingarten set out to determine which town truly deserves to be designated “the Armpit of America.” He tracked down the girl he had a crush on in second grade, rode a bus in Jerusalem to get a sense of what it feels like to live with terrorism, and convinced virtuoso violinist Joshua Bell to pose as a street musician in the Washington, D.C., subway. But Weingarten is more than a provocateur. Each of his cockeyed adventures, thanks to his narrative skills and intellectual ethics, yields genuine feelings and discoveries. And for all his daggered humor, Weingarten never condescends. His curiosity is a form of empathy, his cadenced writing testimony to his caring about life, clear thinking, and beauty. Per Simon Schuster’s Web site, change title and subtitle in bib data to: *The Fiddler in the Subway: The Story of the World-Class Violinist Who Played for Handouts. . . And Other Virtuoso Performances by America’s Foremost Feature Writer?* --Donna Seaman “Gene Weingarten is the best writer in American journalism. He’s a master at finding a story that nobody else would have thought to pursue, researching it doggedly, and telling it in such a riveting way that you feel as though you’re reading a terrific novel.” --Dave Barry, author, humorist, and columnist “‘The Great Zucchini’ is the greatest feature story ever written.” --Erik Wemple, *The Washington City Paper* “Giving Gene Weingarten the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing was like giving Martin Scorsese the Oscar for Best Director: it’s not about what he did that year, it’s about what he’s been doing for decades, better than anybody, even before people started to notice. He’s the best non-fiction writer in America, and only a few of us knew it. Now, with this anthology, we get to say: Told ya.” --Peter Sagal, host of NPR’s “Wait, Wait ... Don’t Tell Me” “It’s no surprise that a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner would have something useful to say about writing, but Weingarten exceeds expectations in his passionate, irreverent, and instructive introduction to this superb retrospective collection. And the essays themselves prove that this former editor and feature writer turned columnist and “investigative humorist” is one helluva storyteller and a master “stunt” reporter. . . Each of his cockeyed adventures, thanks to his narrative skills and intellectual ethics, yields genuine feelings and discoveries. And for all his daggered humor, Weingarten never condescends. His curiosity is a form of empathy, his cadenced writing testimony to his caring about life, clear thinking, and beauty.” --Booklist “Every page is a pleasure. . . . A sparkling collection of features by the Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post columnist, there are plenty of smiles and laughs scattered throughout the uniformly strong pieces assembled here. But the author is about more than grins and giggles. In even the slightest of the essays—seeing his daughter off to college, honoring the memory of his childhood baseball hero—his storytelling, keen observation and deft reporting startle and amaze. . . . Weingarten reliably delivers the goods.” --Kirkus (starred review)