

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### **ACCORDION STORIES FROM THE HEART**

Angelo Paul Ramunni

Self (170 pp.)

\$39.95 hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-9761766-1-9; September 1, 2018

## BOOK REVIEW

A coffee table book pays tribute to the accordion and the people who have been enchanted by its “calming and happy voice.”

This beautifully designed work by Ramunni (*Left Turn, Right Turn, U-Turn*, 2011) chronicles his efforts—in conjunction with the New England Accordion Connection & Museum in Canaan, Connecticut—to amass a large collection of accordions. An unexpected but moving byproduct of this project is a large assemblage of stories about the people who sold or donated those instruments to the museum. The author is a life-long accordion aficionado himself, here remembering the teasing he got for playing “the squeezebox” while growing up on Long Island in the 1950s and '60s. The museum offers visitors a chance to play accordions. In the course of those encounters, Ramunni has often seen people awash in sentimental memories of embracing the instruments when they were younger: “It is often like seeing two people, who were the best of friends in their childhood, suddenly meet again by chance after being apart for many years. It can be an emotional time.” Those heightened feelings of recognition and nostalgia run through many of the tales the author relates. A woman named Carol tells him about her Uncle Vinnie, who only knew how to perform three songs on the accordion he was eventually buried with. There’s a story of a man who taught himself to play the instrument while sitting in a coal shed; a heartwarming reminiscence revolves around a survivor of Russia’s Communist regime who was left virtually nothing by the state except his accordion. Readers also learn about a valuable accordion presented to Pope Pius XII in 1943.

The author clearly doesn’t intend his book to be a history of the accordion. He makes passing reference to its surprising antiquity, dating back to ancient China, but his focus is on far more recent and mostly American conceptions of the instrument. In addition, he doesn’t see this slim volume as any kind of study of accordion music or the mechanics of the instrument. This is an entirely inviting, beginner-friendly work, one that seeks to spread the word rather than instruct specialists. “Just as we have a heart beat as generated by our hearts,” Ramunni writes, “the accordion has a tempo that we give it every time we play a song.” The gallery of short, richly impressionistic stories the author has heard in his quest to add accordions to his enormous collection serves to stress the strong communal aspect of both the music and the instruments. The sheer love and passion involved are easily visible in the lavish book’s dozens of color images by debut photographer Homolka of gorgeous accordions, some of them as intricately exquisite as any prized violin or piano. And that enthusiasm is mirrored in the vibrant vignettes the owners shared with Ramunni—tales of family, wine, celebration, and love.

A vivid and surprisingly involving work about accordions and the stories they inspire.

## EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media’s excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.