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REVIEWS

books // music // film

RIDING WAVES OF UNDERSTANDING

Gain a deeper grasp of the human condition with these picks from *S&H*.

Fulfilled

How the Science of Spirituality Can Help You Live a Happier, More Meaningful Life

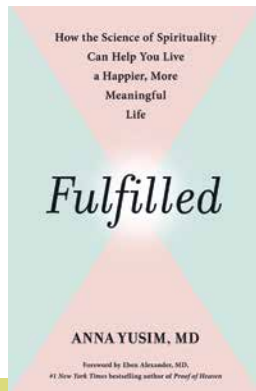
By Anna Yusim, MD

GRAND CENTRAL PUBLISHING

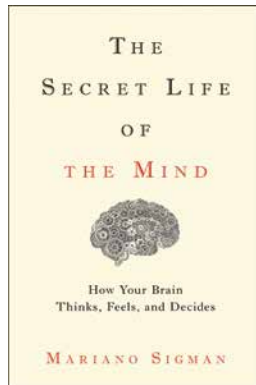
ANNA YUSIM causes doctor envy. This board-certified psychiatrist attended Stanford and Yale, studied the Kabbalah and Buddhism, and trained under South American shamans and Indian gurus. She's in private practice in New York City and if you wrestle with common challenges like depression, anxiety, and fear, she makes you wish you were her patient. Dr. Yusim seamlessly blends the best of Western science with wide-ranging spiritual practices. (Of course they can coexist, despite some people's beliefs to the contrary.)

In *Fulfilled*, she writes that in our complex experience, "what I studied in medical school only scratches the surface about the nature of life, the world, and human consciousness." To reconcile this, she uses diverse sources—including classical psychiatry concepts from Carl Jung; particle physics; loving-kindness meditations; and snippets from popular books, like *The Secret*. Throughout, she provides sources for contemplation and questions for reflection. Since she has treated thousands of patients, Yusim also provides many case studies, which provide fascinating glimpses into how real people came to deal with their own issues with Yusim, via therapy.

My favorite part of the book is on



THERE'S SOMETHING IN
HERE FOR EVERYONE, FOR
WHATEVER STAGE MAY BE
UNFOLDING IN YOUR LIFE.



synchronicity—meaningful occurrences that “can reveal a deep and underlying order in the universe.” There is an exercise on harnessing the power of prayer and surrender that very much spoke to me. But that's the beauty of this book: There's something in here for everyone, for whatever stage may be unfolding in your life. There is a lot in here: death, telepathy, improving relationships, addiction. Yet Dr. Yusim's willingness to transcend the boundaries of any belief system or field of study feels like a significant contribution. —KATHRYN

DRURY WAGNER

The Secret Life of the Mind

How Your Brain Thinks, Feels, and Decides

By Mariano Sigman

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

WE ALL KNOW that the brain is a complex and in some ways mysterious communications center that stores and uses information to influence how we learn, feel, and interact with others. How might better understanding the inner workings of the brain help us to make better decisions, communicate more deeply, and live longer, more productive lives? This is the fascinating question at the crux of *The Secret Life of the Mind: How Your Brain Thinks, Feels, and Decides*, by Mariano Sigman, PhD, founder of the Integrative Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Buenos Aires and a director of the Human Brain Project.

Sigman, a physicist by training, has been studying the cognitive neuroscience of learning and decision making for more than 20 years. He is fascinated by how the brain interacts with the subconscious: where

neuroscience meets psychology. As he says, “neuroscience is another tool in humanity’s ancestral search to express—sometimes rudimentarily—the shades, colors, and nuances of what we feel and what we think in order to be comprehensible to others and, of course, to ourselves.”

This book is a fascinating look not just at the geography of the brain and its various regions, but at humanity. Sigman uses research and his own observations to engage readers in topics as diverse as the cost and benefits of optimism, how solving moral dilemmas shapes our identity, and the chemistry and culture of confidence.

What differentiates *The Secret Life of the Mind* is Sigman’s informal yet authoritative voice and his girth of knowledge. He draws on a wide array of disciplines—biology, physics, and mathematics; psychology, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and medicine; as well as gastronomy, magic, music, chess, literature, and art—to better understand the forces that shape who we are. —JENNIFER HAUPT

All Our Waves Are Water

Stumbling Toward Enlightenment and the Perfect Ride

By Jaimal Yogis

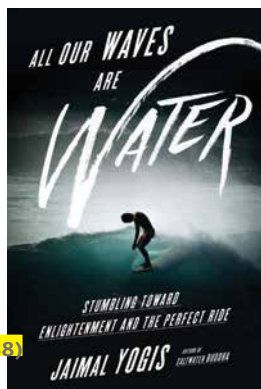
HARPER WAVE

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE for a memoirist is to provide experiences the reader can actually participate in, rather than just summarizing those the author has had. This challenge becomes especially acute when one is writing about spiritual epiphanies, and ones that happened in the relatively distant past.

California writer Jaimal Yogis occasionally skates a bit close to that line, mainly because he has so many interesting stories to tell that he is always soon moving on to the next one. In his first book, *Saltwater Buddha*, Yogis wrote about running away from home at age 16 to surf in Hawaii and join a monastery. In this follow-up, the peripatetic young writer—always on the lookout for a challenging wave or an opportunity for spiritual enlargement—befriends a cheerful young Buddhist monk in the Himalayas, photographs Franciscan friars in New York, undergoes long meditation retreats, gets emotionally overwhelmed at Jerusalem’s Wailing Wall, and—in Bali—fulfills his quest to surf inside a giant, tube-shaped wave.

The author’s voice is lively, likable, and engaging, and—ultimately—he manages to connect the spiritual impacts of his various experiences and

[\(READ AN EXCERPT ON PAGE 38\)](#)



convey thought-provoking and useful insights. Yogis does particularly well when he writes about surfing, which he describes as a meeting between advanced modern physics and the metaphysical intuition of ancient poets and religious sages—not to mention a dangerous but exhilarating form of meditation. Carried along by powerful waves, he is treated to a profound, nondual connection to the rest of the universe. Ultimately, as the title states, surfing proves a metaphor for a Buddhist worldview, showing that life’s most turbulent waves are not exceptions to it, but part of its essential nature—and that wisdom means learning to ride them with grace. —GABRIEL COHEN

Strange Contagion

Inside the Surprising Science of Infectious Behaviors and Viral Emotions and What They Tell Us About Ourselves

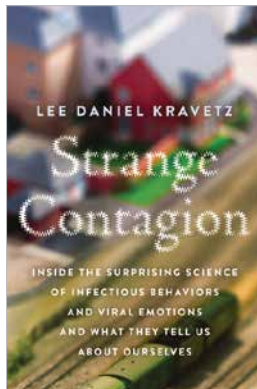
By Lee Daniel Kravetz

HARPER WAVE

DURING AN IMPROV acting class, my instructor told us to “scramble.” We moved around the stage as 16 strangers, randomly and rapidly, trying not to collide. Then our teacher asked us to proceed in an orderly circle. Then scramble. Then circle. Faster and faster, we were able to cohere, like a school of silvery tuna, and I got the sense we were tapping into something innate, a sensation that felt just out of reach. Is it collective consciousness? Mirror neurons? Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of “inter-being,” and has said, “We are here to awaken from the illusion of separateness.” Maybe we aren’t separate at all.

In his new book, science writer Lee Daniel Kravetz provides an interesting perspective on this. He wrote the book because his 2009 move to Palo Alto, California, happened to coincide with the start of one of the country’s worst suicide clusters there, making him a witness to what was to follow. In six months, five students from Palo Alto’s Gunn High School killed themselves by hurling themselves in front of a train. In his book, Kravetz shares how just as the flu or measles are spread, behaviors can be viral as well. You can “catch” violence. Bulimia. Obesity. Suicidal tendencies.

The media have to tread carefully, as covering a problem can lead to social contagion: Even unconscious exposure to an idea and a behavior can guide humans to unintentional mirroring. Obviously, not everyone falls prey. “Then what tips the scale?” Kravetz asks an expert, who answers, “Personal susceptibility. Environment. The unknown.” It’s that last one that makes this book an especially fascinating—and chilling—read. —KDW



Radiance Mixes: Tibetan Bows with the Mantras of Deva Premal

RadianceMatrix
PRABHU MUSIC

PAUL TEMPLE, the artist who goes by the name RadianceMatrix, is a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism whose music naturally embraces the vibrations of Tibetan singing bowls. “I seem to have a lot of karmic Tibetan relationships,” Temple told *S&H*. His second album, *Radiance Mixes: Tibetan Bows with the Mantras of Deva Premal*, folds vocal chanting into the mix for a new take on mantras that Deva has recorded and sung around the world for almost 20 years with her partner, Miten.

“The album manifested pretty magically,” Temple told



Deva Premal

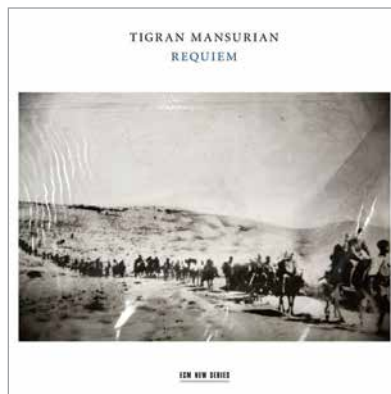
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Requiem

Tigran Mansurian
ECM RECORDS

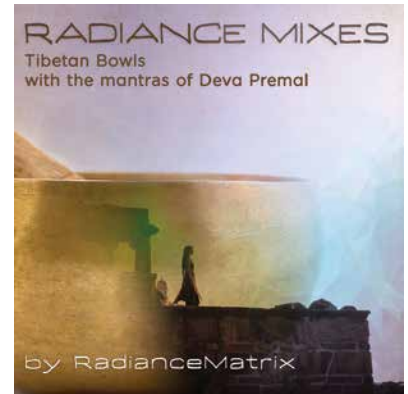
TIGRAN MANSURIAN’S *Requiem*, dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide that occurred in Turkey from 1915 to 1917, operates on multiple levels: musical, cultural, and liturgical. Mansurian told *S&H*, “I have tried to add one more dimension to the universality of our pain by making it more accessible to the bearers of that culture, because suffering and horror inflicted on men by men is, unfortunately, universal.”

Tigran Mansurian was born in Beirut in 1939 to Armenian parents and in 1947 went home to Armenia. In 2004 his album *Monodia* was nominated for a Grammy. *Requiem* was co-commissioned by the Munich Chamber Orchestra and the RIAS Choir Berlin, and recorded in January 2016 at the Jesus-Christus-Kirche Dhalem, Berlin.



S&H. “The bowls are an amazing gift and work very well with Deva’s voice. They are each a whole sonic vortex of magic unto themselves and in combination they go to beautiful spaces. I approach them as a musical instrument rather than just sound healing sessions. The bowls generate Vajra energy—pure diamond light that clears all obscurations.”

Temple has been a part of the management team for Deva and Miten since 2001, and *Radiance Mixes* features nine slow and spacious Buddhist and Hindu chants, including the Mahayana mantra “Om Mane Padme Hum” and the “Gayatri Mantra,” an ancient Sanskrit text that Deva’s parents sang to her while she was being birthed and which she sang years later to her father when he was at the end of his life.



“THEY ARE EACH A WHOLE SONIC VORTEX OF MAGIC UNTO THEMSELVES.”

“The bowls have their own sort of guidance and energies,” said Temple. “I feel there are ancient Tibetans that speak through the bowls and give me a lot of insight about how to work with them.” —JOHN MALKIN

“Some composers have carried the music through the path of logical, systematic unfolding to reach this expressiveness,” Mansurian explains. “Others have turned to symbols of [an] unusual nature that could be exhibited as paradox. It is possible that the latter is what I prefer and what I have put to use in the *Requiem*.”

The caption for the album’s cover image speaks volumes: “Deportees on their way through the desert heading to

Aleppo, Syria.” A place of refuge in 1917, the Aleppo of 2017 has been ruined by war.

The haunting and beautiful choral arrangements of Mansurian’s *Requiem* expand and contract with deep sensitivity and expression. “When I chose to sing Latin in an ‘Armenian musical language’ my principle was, first and foremost, to be faithful to my ‘mother tongue,’ the one I know best,” Mansurian told *S&H*. “It is a known thing that when praying we turn to our mother tongue.” —JM

Pure Comedy

Father John Misty

SUB POP RECORDS

PURE COMEDY by Father John Misty is a striking blues album that's funny and sad, insightful and philosophical. One of the wonderfully crafted tunes is titled "When the God of Love Returns There'll Be Hell to Pay." There's another one called "Things It Would Have Been Helpful to Know Before the Revolution." The album kicks off with a paragraph that can't be beat in terms of expressing the often-mentioned, yet rarely grasped, human condition: "The comedy of man starts like this / Our brains are way too big for our mother's hips / And so nature / She devised this alternative / We emerge half formed / And hope whoever greets us on the other end / Is kind enough to fill us in / And babies that's pretty much how it's been ever since. . ."

Years before he reinvented himself as a solo artist, Father John Misty was Josh Tillman, who played drums in the Seattle band Fleet Foxes. This third album under the newish moniker is a contemporary tragicomedy that could be viewed as a collection of 21st-century sardonic poetry.

"They build fortunes poisoning their offspring / And hand out prizes when someone patents the cure / Where



GUY LOWMEDES

did they find these goons they elected to rule them?" asks Misty in the song "Total Entertainment Forever." Another doozy from the same song: "And how's this for irony? / Their idea of being free is a prison of beliefs / That they never have to leave."

"Leaving LA" is an epic 13-minute ballad that is a sad reflection of the current times, with a compelling orchestral arrangement by Gavin Bryars. Misty reports, "Anything else you can get online / A creation myth or a .45 / You're going to need one or the other to survive / Where only the armed or the funny / Make it out alive. . ." —JM

REVIEWS // film

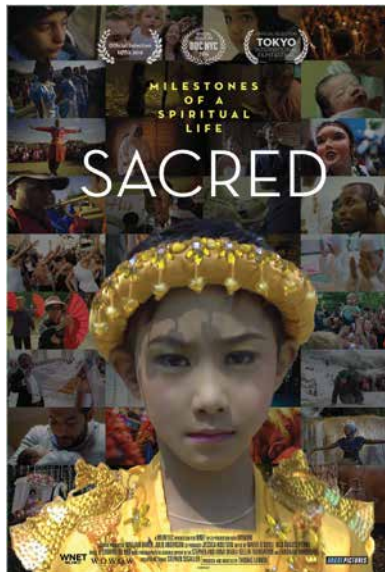
Sacred

Thomas Lennon

ARGOT PICTURES

DIRECTOR THOMAS LENNON'S film examines the role of faith by following various rituals from different religions and countries. Shot by more than forty crews from all over the world, *Sacred* offers up images of circumcision ceremonies, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and ordinary prayer—in places as varied as a Ukrainian center for Orthodox Judaism, the holy city of Mecca, Palestinian refugee camps, burial sites for Ebola victims in Sierra Leone, and Angola Prison in Louisiana.

Other films have, of course, achieved this montage-like approach to exploring humanity's differences and similarities—most notably, Ron Fricke's *Baraka* and Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*. But Lennon's approach is more of a hybrid: He delivers gorgeous, striking images and lovely music, much as Fricke and Reggio did, but he also gives his subjects a voice. So we hear, on the soundtrack, these people's deepest



hopes and fears and their thoughts on what spirituality means for them.

The results vary from the mundane to the transcendent. The area of politics—and of the conflict between religions—is only touched on briefly, which perhaps speaks to the film's more optimistic outlook. This may make it feel as though a part of the story isn't being fully told, especially with regard to organized religion. Nevertheless, as a viewing (and listening) experience, *Sacred* is never less than hypnotic. —BILGE EBIRI

COURTESY ARGOT PICTURES



Nise: The Heart of Madness

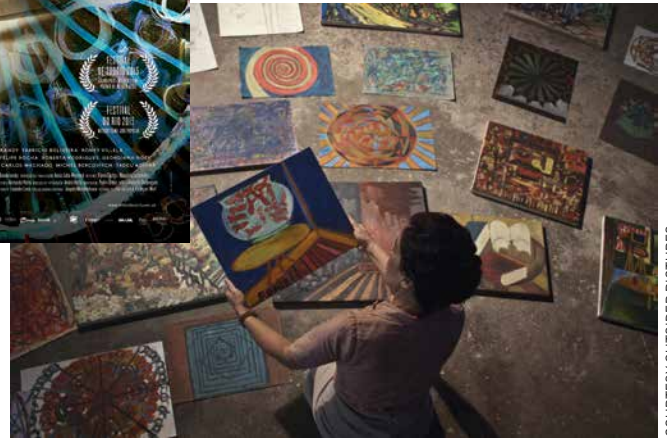
Roberto Berliner
OUTSIDER PICTURES

NISE DA SILVEIRA was a Brazilian psychiatrist who revolutionized the way mental patients were treated in the 1940s and '50s. This elegantly made biopic shows her struggles against the medical establishment and the status quo. Because of both her political beliefs and her refusal to go along with electroshock therapy, she's demoted to the "occupational therapy" wing of the hospital where she works. There, she discovers mental patients being treated worse than animals, subjected to callous disregard and even contempt by the staff. *Nise* not only shows how these troubled men and women can be treated via art and other creative acts, she also makes sure that hospital workers treat them differently—a holistic approach to medicine, *avant la lettre*.

This is a heartfelt, respectful film, and it eventually focuses its attention—wisely—on the patients themselves, the individuals whose lives are affected most by Nise's therapies. It would have been easy for *Nise* to become just another movie about just another hero doctor. But the film practices what it preaches, by presenting these people as, well, people—individuals with their own stories and their



THESE TROUBLED MEN AND WOMEN CAN BE **TREATED VIA ART** AND OTHER CREATIVE ACTS.



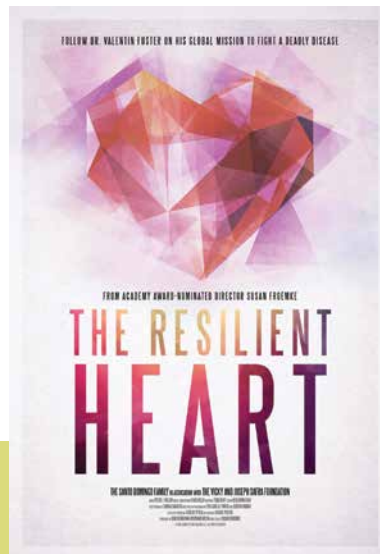
COURTESY/OUTSIDER PICTURES

own lives. And while there's plenty of drama here—both in Nise's efforts with treatment and in her locking heads with superiors and with some patients' families—the film never plays things for cheap effect. The result is a historical movie that's genuinely humanistic and quite powerful. —BE

The Resilient Heart

Susan Froemke
MERMAID MEDIA

DR. VALENTIN FUSTER has dedicated his life to promoting cardiovascular health, and he's convinced that the way to do it is to get to people on a philosophical and moral level. Susan Froemke's film follows the renowned cardiologist around the world as he speaks to children, adults,



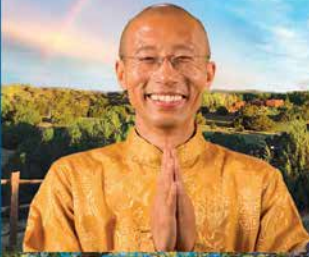
professionals, and community medical workers—always with the goal of intervening as early as possible, to get people to change their habits and to start living healthier lifestyles. And every place he visits, whether it's Kenya, or Harlem, or Grenada, has its own story and its own unique challenges.

This could have made for a very dry movie, but Froemke's approach is immediate and intimate, getting up close with Fuster and showing his emotional reactions to the people he's interacting with. This is not a man who minces words. And in many ways, trying to convince people to change their ways is a lot harder than treating them later for serious health

issues. This is a film of boundless compassion, about a figure who is trying to save millions of lives by reaching out to them—and there is real excitement in that journey. —BE

TRYING TO CONVINCING PEOPLE TO **CHANGE THEIR WAYS** IS A LOT HARDER THAN TREATING THEM LATER FOR SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES.

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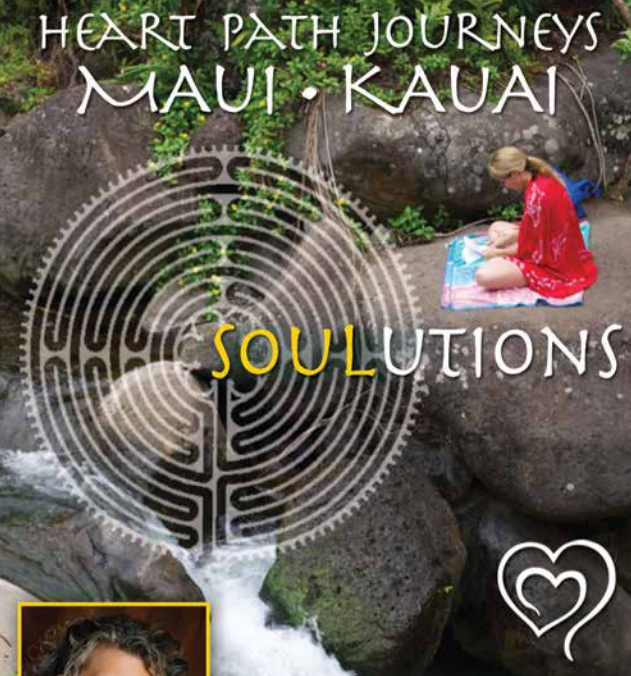
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