

Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life

By Steve Martin

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The Emmy and Grammy Award-winner's candid, spectacularly amusing memoir of his years in stand-up

In the mid-seventies, Steve Martin exploded onto the comedy scene. By 1978 he was the biggest concert draw in the history of stand-up. In 1981 he quit forever. *Born Standing Up* is, in his own words, the story of "why I did stand-up and why I walked away."

At age ten Martin started his career at Disneyland, selling guidebooks in the newly opened theme park. In the decade that followed, he worked in the Disney magic shop and the Bird Cage Theatre at Knott's Berry Farm, performing his first magic/comedy act a dozen times a week. The story of these years, during which he practiced and honed his craft, is moving and revelatory.

Martin illuminates the sacrifice, discipline and originality that made him an icon and informs his work to this day. To be this good, to perform so frequently, was isolating and lonely. It took Martin decades to reconnect with his parents and sister, and he tells that story with great tenderness. Martin also paints a portrait of his times: the era of free love and protests against the war in Vietnam, the heady irreverence of *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* in the late sixties, and the transformative new voice of *Saturday Night Live* in the seventies.

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Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life By Steve Martin Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

At age 10, Steve Martin got a job selling guidebooks at the newly opened Disneyland. In the decade that followed, he worked in Disney's magic shop, print shop, and theater, and developed his own magic/comedy act. By age 20, studying poetry and philosophy on the side, he was performing a dozen times a week, most often at the Disney rival, Knott's Berry Farm. Obsession is a substitute for talent, he has said, and Steve Martin's focus and daring--his sheer tenacity--are truly stunning. He writes about making the very tough decision to sacrifice everything not original in his act, and about lucking into a job writing for *The Smothers Brothers Show*. He writes about mentors, girlfriends, his complex relationship with his parents and sister, and about some of his great peers in comedy--Dan Ackroyd, Lorne Michaels, Carl Reiner, Johnny Carson. He writes about fear, anxiety and loneliness. And he writes about how he figured out what worked on stage.

This book is a memoir, but it is also an illuminating guidebook to stand-up from one of our two or three greatest comedians. Though Martin is reticent about his personal life, he is also stunningly deft, and manages to give readers a feeling of intimacy and candor. Illustrated throughout with black and white photographs collected by Martin, this book is instantly compelling visually and a spectacularly good read.

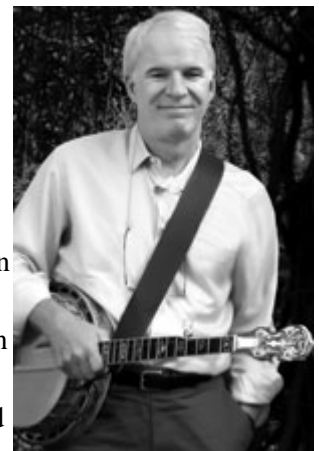
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Three Bonus Deleted Passages from Steve Martin's *Born Standing Up*

On Returning to Disneyland

Ten years later, after the Beatles, drugs, and Vietnam had changed the entire tenor of American life, I returned to the magic shop at Disneyland and stood as a stranger. As I looked around the eerily familiar room another first came over me, a previously unknown emotion, one that was to have a curious force over me for the rest my life: the longing tug of nostalgia. Looking at the counter where I pitched Svengali Decks and the Incredible Shrinking Die, I was awash with the recollection of indelible nights where the sky was blown open by fireworks and big band sounds drifted through trees strung with fairy lights. I remembered my youth, when every moment was crisply present, when heartbreak and joy replaced each other quickly, fully and without trauma. Even now when I visit Disneyland, I am steeped in melancholy, because a corporation has preserved my nostalgia impeccably.

Every nail and screw is the same, and Disneyland looks as new now as it did then. The paint is fresh, and the only wear allowed is faux. In fact, only I have changed. In the dream-like world of childhood memories, so often vague and imprecise, Disneyland remains for me not only vivid in memory, but vivid in fact.



On Meeting Diane Hall

During the day, I attended Santa Ana Junior College, taking drama classes and pursuing an unexpected interest in English poetry from Donne to Eliot. I would occasionally assist on a college stage production--never appearing in one--as a member of the crew. Years later I was looking through a box of memorabilia and noticed a silk-screened playbill of the musical *Carousel*, May, 1964, which listed me as a stagehand. The lead actress was Diane Hall. Something connected and I remembered that Diane Keaton's name was once Hall, (hence, Annie Hall). I confirmed with her that she was in that production. Neither of us remembers meeting the other, yet we must have worked in proximity. More evidence that I was a wallflower. Decades later, we ended up "making love" on the floor of a movie set on *Father of the Bride*.

On the Kennedy Assassination

One Friday in 1963, I had finished a class and was about to drive to Knott's Berry Farm for the afternoon shows when I saw a clump of agitated students across the campus. I asked someone what was going on. "They're saying that the president's been shot."

I drove across town to Knott's and punched radio buttons. I could hear the scheduled programs clicking off and being replaced by live broadcasts. Assassination seemed so ancient and inconceivable, I was sure that someone would soon correct the erroneous report. President Kennedy died that day and I didn't know that news could be taken so personally by a nation. Sitting backstage, watching the Birdcage's black-and-white TV drone out the increasingly grave report, we were all mute. We assumed the performance that night would be canceled, but as show time neared, word came down that we were going on. We couldn't fathom why; we believed no one would show up, much less enjoy us. I still can't explain the psychology, why the very full house that night was able to roar with laughter. The obvious must be correct: our silly show was providing some kind of balm that soothed the ache.

In 2003 I hosted the Oscars on the particular weekend that the United States invaded Iraq. The news was grim and just hours before the show I flipped on the TV and saw a report, subsequently proven false, that our captive soldiers were being beheaded. I quickly turned the TV off, sick. I knew, from my experience forty years earlier with the Kennedy assassination, what my job was, and I harbored a secret knowledge that the audience would laugh. I also felt that soldiers who might be watching would be tuning in to see the Oscars and all its hoopla, not a cheerless comedian doing what he doesn't do best. I decided to acknowledge the circumstances early in the show and then get on with the jokes. The academy had announced that the show would "cut back on the glitz." I walked out for the opening monologue, took a look around the stage at the dazzling, swirling staircases, mirrored curtains and polished floor, and simply said, "I'm glad they cut back on the glitz." It got a laugh of relief and the show could go on.

More from Steve Martin



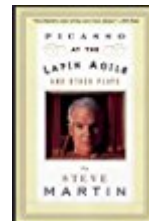
The Alphabet from A to Y with Bonus Letter Z!



Shopgirl



The Pleasure of My Company



Picasso at the Lapin Agile and Other Plays



Pure Drivel

Praise for *Born Standing Up*

"[A] lean, incisive new book about the trajectory of [Martin's] life in comedy...*Born Standing Up* does a sharp-witted job of breaking down the step-by-step process that brought Steve Martin from Disneyland, where he spent his version of a Dickensian childhood as a schoolboy employee, to both the pinnacle of stardom and the brink of disaster...tightly focused...*Born Standing Up* is a surprising book: smart, serious, heartfelt and confessional without being maudlin." --**Janet Maslin, *The New York Times***

"Absolutely magnificent. One of the best books about comedy and being a comedian ever written." --**Jerry Seinfeld, *GQ***

"The writing is evocative, unflinching and cool. When Martin takes a scalpel to his life, what you feel is the precision of the surgeon more than the primal scream of the unanaesthetized patient...*Born Standing Up* is

neither fanfare nor confession. It gives off a vibe of rigorous honesty. With lots of laughs." --**Richard Corliss**, *Time Magazine*

"A spare, unexpectedly resonant remembrance of things past...Martin's one true subject is the evolution of his comedy--the transcendent moments...A smart, gentlemanly, modest book...winning." --**Jeff Giles**, *Entertainment Weekly*, *EW Pick: A*

"A charming memoir tracking what the great comic characterizes as his 'war years.' Martin offers an eloquent and exacting account... [and] approaches his subjects with generosity, warmth and integrity." --**Kirkus Reviews**

"Sure to delight fans and create new ones." --**Laura Mathews**, *Good Housekeeping*

"What fun to discover the humble beginnings of some of his iconic personas...inspiring." --**Rachel Rosenblit**, *Elle*

"The archetypal story of the underdog's rise and a particularly American story...beautifully written, honest, engaging, and quietly brave." --**Frederic Tuten**, *Bomb Magazine*

"Son, you have an ob-leek sense of humor." --**Elvis Presley**

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Martin recounts his tense childhood, his desire to become a magician and his segue into standup comedy in his surprisingly serious and eloquently written memoir. Martin's memories are perceptive and emotionally honest even though he confesses early on that while writing this book, he felt some events in his life seemed to happen to someone else and I often felt like a curious onlooker. Martin's writing is spare, concise and evocative, and he's a smooth and limber reader, an assured and relaxed, seasoned raconteur. Martin runs through some of his classic comedy routines to give listeners an idea of how they developed into his anti-comedy sets (humor without punch lines). Enjoyment while performing was rare, he reveals. Enjoyment would have been an indulgent loss of focus that comedy cannot afford. After 18 years of studying, refining and finally succeeding, Martin ends the book when he gives up the solitary standup life in favor of a collaborative life making films. Martin also provides the banjo music that plays between chapters. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

It's hard to believe that it's been a quarter century since Steve Martin packed the props and walked away from a stunningly successful turn in stand-up. His career as a popular actor, a critically lauded writer (*Shopgirl*), and a dramatist has since flourished, of course. But readers hoping for vintage Martin can get a quick fix with *Born Standing Up*. While the memoir may not be as salacious as fans expect or as riotously funny as an arrow through the head, Martin writes with the wisdom of experience (don't miss a remarkable meeting with Elvis Presley after a 1971 show) as he recounts his development into one of the most popular and original comedians of his generation.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jeffrey Spencer:

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Catherine Acevedo:

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