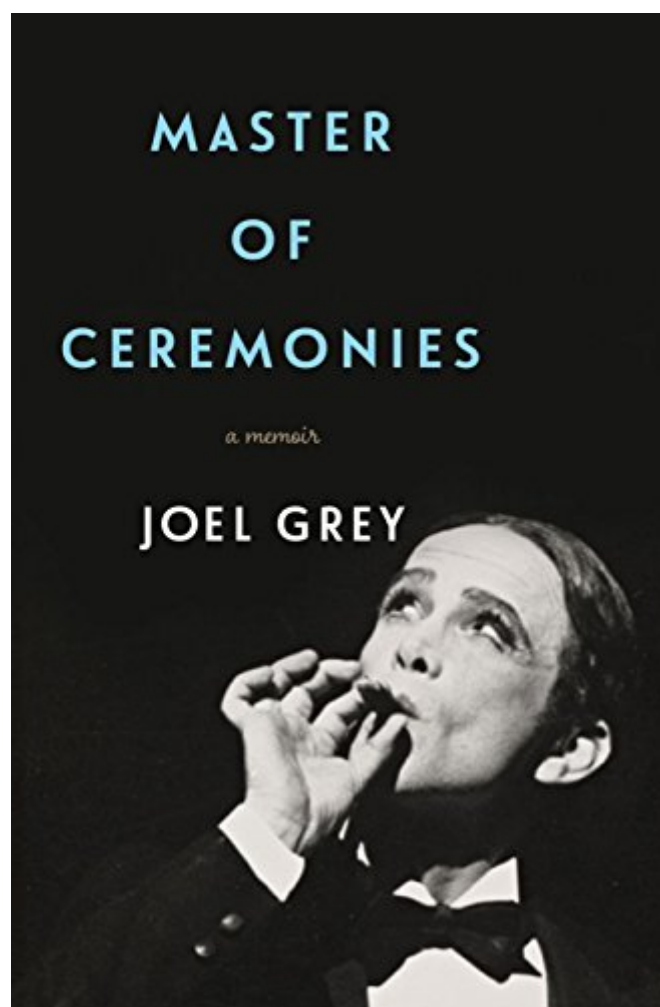


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Master Of Ceremonies: A Memoir



Synopsis

Joel Grey, the Tony and Academy Award-winning Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret* finally tells his remarkable life story. Born Joel David Katz to a wild and wooly Jewish American family in Cleveland, Ohio in 1932, Joel began his life in the theater at the age of 9, starting in children's theater and then moving to the main stage. He was hooked, and his seven decades long career charts the evolution of American entertainment - from Vaudeville performances with his father, Mickey Katz to the seedy gangster filled nightclubs of the forties, the bright lights of Broadway and dizzying glamour of Hollywood, to juggernaut musicals like *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, and *Wicked*. *Master of Ceremonies* is a memoir of a life lived in and out of the limelight, but it is also the story of the man behind the stage makeup. Coming of age in a time when being yourself tended to be not only difficult but also dangerous, Joel has to act both on and off the stage. He spends his high school years sleeping with the girls-next-door while carrying on a scandalous affair with an older man. Romances with to-die-for Vegas Showgirls are balanced with late night liaisons with like-minded guys, until finally Joel falls in love and marries a talented and beautiful woman, starts a family, and has a pretty much picture perfect life. But 24 years later when the marriage dissolves, Joel has to once again find his place in a world that has radically changed. Drawing back the curtain on a career filled with show-stopping numbers, larger-than-life stars and even singing in the shower with Bjork, *Master of Ceremonies* is also a portrait of an artist coming to terms with his evolving identity. When an actor plays a character, he has to find out what makes them who they are; their needs, dreams, and fears. It's a difficult thing to do, but sometimes the hardest role in an actor's life is that of himself. Deftly capturing the joy of performing as well as the pain and secrets of an era we have only just started to leave behind, Joel's story is one of love, loss, hard-won honesty, redemption, and success.

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Customer Reviews

In *Master of Ceremonies*, we learn that Joel Grey was a short Jewish kid with a moody and dominating mother who dressed her prized possession in flamboyant outfits. Unsurprisingly, his peers bullied him. Grey came of age at a time when few men dared admit that they were gay. After he divulged the truth about his sexual orientation to his mother, she retorted: "Don't ever touch me again. You disgust me." He never forgot her chilling words. Fortunately, Grey's sweet-natured father, Mickey Katz, a gifted clarinetist and saxophone player, remained loyal and supportive. Joel sang, danced, told jokes, and did impersonations in Mickey's Yiddish-American revue, *Borscht Capades*. However, Joel was already thinking about the future. He wanted to make his mark in the theater, and in spite of his preference for men, hoped to marry and start a family someday. Grey took pride in putting his unique stamp on the roles he played. Most memorable, of course, is the iconic master of ceremonies in *Cabaret*. It is fascinating to learn that the Emcee was, at first, a peripheral character. Grey fleshed him out, portraying him as a mercenary, lascivious, and menacing presence whose outrageous behavior pushed the boundaries of propriety, even in an already degenerate Weimar Republic. Grey takes credit for placing greater emphasis on the Emcee, who turned out to be not only the glue but also the essence of the show. For his efforts, Joel Grey earned a Tony and an Oscar. With the able assistance of co-author Rebecca Paley, Grey recalls both amusing and painful episodes from his volatile childhood in Cleveland and Los Angeles. In spite of his torment at having to conceal a major part of his identity, Grey looks back with pleasure at his more than seven decades in show business.

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