



“Parallel Play”

ABOUT THE BOOK

In a personal chronicle that is by turns hilarious and heartbreaking, Tim Page revisits his early days through the prism of newfound clarity in “Parallel Play.” Here is the tale of a boy who could blithely recite the names and dates of all the United States’ presidents and their wives in order (backward upon request), yet lacked the coordination to participate in the simplest childhood games. It is the story of a child who memorized vast portions of the World Book Encyclopedia simply by skimming through its volumes, but was unable to pass elementary school math and science. And it is the triumphant account of a disadvantaged boy who grew into a high-functioning, highly successful adult – perhaps not despite his Asperger’s but because of it, as Page believes. For in the end, it was his all-consuming love of music that emerged as something around which to construct a life and a prodigious career.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Page is a professor of music and journalism at the University of Southern California. He won the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1997 for his writings about music for *The Washington Post*. He is now a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each book guide follows the weekly Connect: 21CM Book Club discussions led by Sylvia Yang on [Facebook](#) @21CMBookClub. Feel free to follow along with other book club members in real time or work at your own pace.

Welcome to the 15th meeting of Connect: 21CM’s Book Club. Join us as we read “Parallel Play” by Tim Page, who remembers the eccentric behavior of his childhood that eluded even his own understanding. A poignant account of a lifelong search for answers, “Parallel Play” provides a unique perspective on Asperger’s syndrome and the well of creativity that can spring forth as a result of the condition.

BEFORE YOU READ...

In graceful prose, Tim Page describes living with undiagnosed Asperger’s syndrome. He also recounts how music gave his life meaning. As you read, think about how music has influenced your own perspective on personal strengths and weaknesses.

AS YOU READ...

We offer a few questions for each chapter so you can dive deeper into your reading.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN:

SEPTEMBER 6-12: PAGES 1-43

“Mike was one of my first heroes, and his example granted me permission, at an early and impressionable age, to think and write independently about music. Never for a moment thereafter did I want to be a fireman, a policeman, a movie star, or even the resident – none of the usual fancy futures of young American boys. No, I wanted to read and think and listen to music, and Mike made it clear that such a life was possible.” (p. 17)

Page describes Alan M. Kriegsman (Mike), recipient of the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for his work at *The Washington Post*, as one of his first role models. We all need role models to motivate and inspire us. Share how a role model helped shape your vision of an ideal life in the comments.

SEPTEMBER 13-19: PAGES 44-110

“Every room [of the UConn library] held treasures, but my favorite spot was the listening station at the Music Library, where, one blessed afternoon, I put on bulbous headphones that made me look like Mickey Mouse and heard the prelude to *Das Rheingold* for the first time ... Wagner’s depiction of the River Rhine started to play and a flowering drone filled my head; time was suspended, and I was transported.” (p. 75)

In his text, Page expertly captures his experience of listening to Richard Wagner’s “Das Rheingold” for the first time. In the comments, share a memory of when music resonated with you in an unforgettable way – a moment when you were “transported.”

SEPTEMBER 20-26: PAGES 111-154

“Suddenly I had peers who understood (and sometimes shared) my obsessions, with whom I could discuss the pieces I was learning on the piano, the compositions I was trying to write, obscure recordings, the proper way to dot a sixteenth note, and the dream of what Glenn Gould called the purpose of art – ‘a gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity.’” (p. 132)

Page describes his teenage experience attending what is now Tanglewood Music Center as a moment of belonging. Reflect in the comments on how music has helped you feel you belong.

SEPTEMBER 27-OCTOBER 3: PAGES 155-197

“One evening in 1979, a few weeks out of college and thoroughly confused about the future, I walked downstairs into a Greenwich Village store and purchased Pierre Boulez’s new recording of the complete music of Anton Webern. I took it home, listened to it, loved it, and then spent three days distilling my excitement into words. When I finished, I sent the article, unsolicited, to the *SoHo Weekly News* ... [My] story was accepted, published, and even paid for, after a month or two and some prodding on my part. And suddenly I was a music critic.” (p. 175)

21CM embraces the idea of expressing your unique self as a musician. Page found that he could express himself best as a music critic. How do you feel your music helps convey who you are?

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR?

We hope you enjoyed September’s book club selection and the dialogue with colleagues on 21CM.org. Do you have a question for the author? Send us your questions via email at bookclub@21cm.org or message your questions on Facebook to [@21CMBookClub](#).