



The Philadelphia Mummers: Building Community Through Play

Patricia Masters

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Every New Year's Day since 1901, the Philadelphia Mummers have presented a spectacular show of shows that raucously snakes and shimmies its way through city streets. "The Mummers Parade" features music, dance, comedy, and mime, along with dazzling costumes and floats. Although the lavish event is now televised to a wide audience, it is still rooted in the same neighborhoods where it began. This book explores the community created and annually reaffirmed by the Philadelphia Mummers. The author spent more than five years with the Mummers, observing their lives and rituals as she took part in their preparations and parades. Writing with the fascination of a sociologist and the excitement of a participant, Masters examines the Mummers from their beginnings. Through the prism of their century-long history, we can see how communities retain their identities and how they are affected by larger cultural trends. In the words of the Mummers themselves: 'Performing is a total, joyous release. You're having fun. Now, you're just going to let all the tension you've had in your job, in your family, from getting ready - you just let it go. There's a big smile ten miles wide on your face and you're out there to have a good time. That's what it's all about'. 'It's important to parade once a year, but it's also important to be able to be in your community, have a place that you know that you can go to, and socialize and be with friends and feel comfortable and enjoy yourself. You have a camaraderie there that just builds and builds. It's just like, you're a family, this is your group'.



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