



## Reading Group Guide for **Mamaphonic**

Balancing Motherhood and Other Creative Acts

Edited by Bee Lavender and Maia Rossini

Soft Skull Press

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6 x 9 284pp \$14.95 B&W illustrations

Guides available for download at:

[www.softskull.com/files/MamaphonicReadingGroupGuide.pdf](http://www.softskull.com/files/MamaphonicReadingGroupGuide.pdf)

"[One of] the reigning mother superiors of the crowd [is]  
Bee Lavender . . ." —*Time Magazine*

### About the Book

Tapping into the universal drive to etch out immortality (in this case through art and children) *Mamaphonic* will appeal not only to mothers, but to anyone who has ever wanted to leave a mark on the world. *Mamaphonic* includes confessions and conversations about the true, exhilarating, entertaining, and difficult aspects of remaining creative while raising kids. It's a smart, sexy, alternately funny and heartbreaking look at balancing art and motherhood, told in the artists' own words. In a world where young mothers are discouraged, this is an incredible, empowering, and much needed source of inspiration.

### Questions for Discussion

1. The editors of this book write, "we flatly refuse to agree with the idea that becoming a mother is the end because it's not. It is the beginning." What do you think they meant by that? How do the children in your life inspire your work and creative process? Alternately, if you do not have children, how have you observed the children in your friends' or family's lives changing their work?
2. One of the recurring themes of this collection is the interruption of the creative process. The mothers/artists in this book were constantly interrupted by their children, and had to learn new ways to work after their children were born. What methods and tools do you use to cope with interruption (both by children and by other elements) in your working life?
3. In her essay "Noodles and Sauce" Ingrid Wendt writes about the "false dictates" and expectations that poets (and other artists) have learned to internalize. For instance, she does not believe that you have to write every day to be a "real poet." What do you think of this statement? What do you think a person must do or be to earn the right to call them self a "real" artist?
4. What do you think the illustrations and photographs brought to this book?
5. Much is written about the fact, that up until very recently in history, most successful women artists did not have children, and often did not marry. Do you

think that this situation has changed dramatically today? If so, what societal forces have allowed for this change? What more could be done to encourage and help women with families to create?

6. Which essay in the book did you enjoy the most? Why? Which essay seemed the hardest for you to relate to and why?

7. In several of these essays, such as “The East Village Inky,” “The Rudest Muse” and “Talking Back to My Elders,” humor is used as a way to express the authors’ frustrations, both with being a mother and how society expects a mother to be. Why do you think these writers chose to use a comic voice? Do you think their use of humor was an effective way to deliver their stories?

8. How do you think this book applies to your own mother? Would you share this book with her?

## Critical Praise

“In perhaps no other career choice is the tension between the self-sacrifice of motherhood and the need for self-actualization felt more strongly than in artistic and literary pursuits. This theme—along with that of the practical obstacles and unexpected inspirations of creating while tending to one child or more—is repeatedly but not repetitiously examined in this collection of essays, practical guides, poetry, and illustrations edited by writer-mamas Lavender and Rossini. The pieces are as varied as the nature of the art created by their authors, including dancers, artists, photographers, writers, singers, and zine creators. Still, a sense of honesty, passion and, yes, intense motherly love is apparent throughout. Highly recommended.”—*Library Journal*

“You don’t have to be in the arts to suddenly realize that you are a mother and no longer what you were before. I think all of us have at one point or another thought, what the hell has happened to me? How did I get to this place? Some women comfortably take on this role, embracing it, and throwing aside all they were before and becoming one hundred percent mommy. Other women just need to know that they are not forgotten as they embrace this new role in their lives. Some realize that you can be one hundred percent mommy, but still be one hundred percent themselves as well. Motherhood can enhance lives, as well as change them. That is what the struggle in this book is all about.”—*The Imperfect Parent*

“My favorite thing about *Mamaphonic* [is] the adoration these women feel for their families, their joy (even on bad days) at the synthesis of motherhood and art.”—*Brain, Child: The Magazine for Thinking Mothers*

“*Mamaphonic* presents more than two dozen essays on what might be called the delicate balancing act of motherhood and artistic work—except that, as these contributors prove, the act is not so much delicate as it is messy, arduous, and absolutely essential.”—*Bitch Magazine*

“Reading *Mamaphonic* is like being on a retreat with an enormously diverse and wise sisterhood of those who really understand—punk rockers and dancers and researchers, cartoonists and cookie decorators, all pretty much in agreement: How do we do it? We don’t know. To do it is difficult, but not to do it would be impossible.”—*Chronogram*