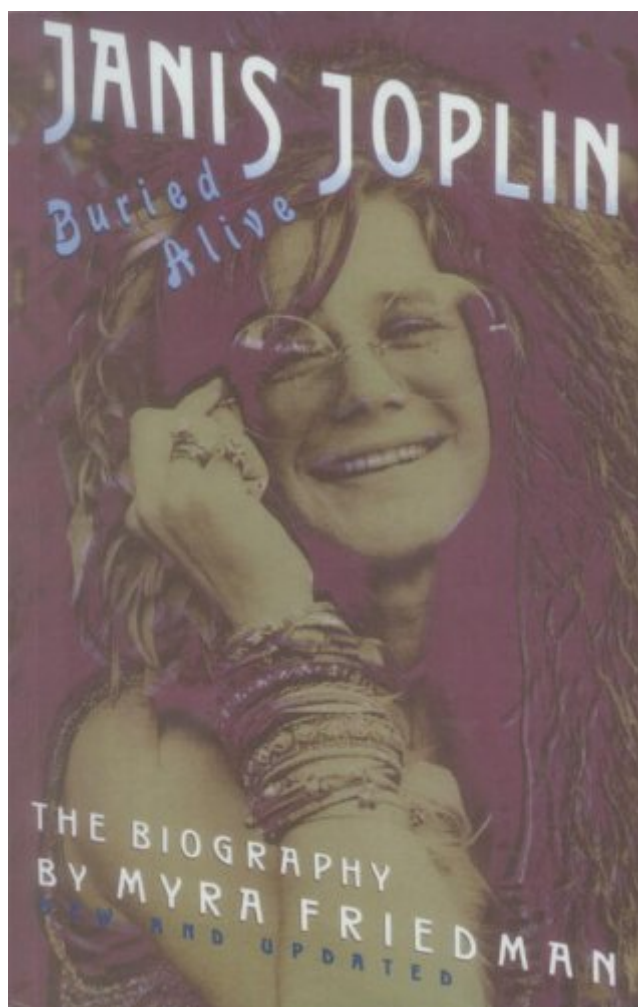


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Buried Alive: The Biography Of Janis Joplin



Synopsis

Electrifying, highly acclaimed, and intensely personal, this new and updated version of Myra Friedman's classic biography of Janis Joplin teems with dramatic insights into Joplin's genius and into the chaotic times that catapulted her to fame as the legendary queen of rock. It is a stunning panorama of the turbulent decade when Joplin's was the rallying voice of a generation that lost itself in her music and found itself in her words. From her small hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, from the intimate coffeehouses to the supercharged concert halls, from the glitter of worldwide fame to her tragic end in a Hollywood hotel, here is all the fire and anguish of an immortal, immensely talented, and troubled performer who devoured everything the rock scene had to offer in a fatal attempt to make peace with herself and her era. Yet, in an eloquent introduction recently written by the author, Joplin emerges from her "ugly duckling" childhood as a woman truly ahead of her time, an outrageous rebel, a defiant outcast and artist of incomparable authenticity who, almost in spite of herself, became to so many a symbol of triumph over adversity. This edition also contains an afterword detailing the whereabouts of a large and colorful cast of characters who were part of Joplin's life, as well as "We Remember Janis," a new chapter of poignant and affectionate anecdotes told by friends. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

This book was AWFUL. It starts out like a regular biography, but about a quarter of the way through, the author, Ms. Myra Friedman, begins to inject too much of her own personal opinions, and before you know it, the whole thing turns into a rant about the evils of the Sixties. This book can't really be called a biography because it is filled with too many opinions and diagnoses and not enough objective facts. I found the author's psychoanalytic approach to be overbearing, preachy, and frankly, passe. In portraying her subject, she mixes some smug sneers at rock culture with a shallow, psyche textbook description of Janis's supposed affection/rejection complex, free of any insight into the complicated consciousness of the '60s. The author writes that Joplin referred to her (Friedman) as a "Jewish mother." We can be assured the quote is accurate, given the tone throughout. Nothing escapes her contempt, especially poor Janis, who is really hung out to dry in the book's latter sections by the author's overly righteous harangues, all very mean-spirited. She was her publicity girl for a couple of years starting in 1968, but maybe she should have put in for a transfer to another department if she hated the rock scene so much. The author conveys an almost sadistic pleasure in pointing out her subject's weaknesses. In her version of events, Janis Joplin apparently had not one shred of redeemable qualities and was a weak, wretched human being on all counts. She writes that Janis was "no musician," an "amateur" during her entire time with Big Brother, not at all spontaneous with her phrasing, "contrived," emotionally "astigmatized," "infantile," "deplorably self centered," copied other people's fashion styles and had no original fashion style of her own, (!!?)

One would expect better from an author who served as Janis's publicist during her career. But when you get beneath the eloquent literary tone of this book, what emerges is Friedman's sheer ignorance and misinterpretation of Janis as a person, her life, and especially her music. Friedman openly admits her dislike of Big Brother and the Holding Company, comparing them to a minstrel show and describing the landmark album, "Cheap Thrills" as "abominable." Kozmic Blues fares no better; the author actually believes Janis was at her "most shrill" during a time in her career that is historically considered to be her peak year as a vocalist. Worse though, is Friedman's insidious condemnation of Janis the person, which is why I laughed out loud when I read her token passage claiming that she loved Janis. If this book is her idea of love, I'd hate to be her friend, especially if I were no longer around to defend myself. Excerpts like these shed light on Friedman's true feelings

about Janis: " [She was] talking in that fake, godawful voice." "She was deplorably self-centered..." "She was egocentric, paranoid, megalomaniac..." "It wasn't love as an adult knows it: no sharing, no interest, no commitment, no giving, none of those things at all." "[She] played the buffoon." "Janis' relationships were terribly narrow..." [She was] infantile.." "Janis's childness reflected a completely unrealistic view of the world..." etc, etc. And this is just the tip of a very negative iceberg. The author basically renders her subject unrecognizable, obscured in a mire of pseudo-psychoanalysis masquerading as the truth. No, this is not a realistic shattering of the hippie ideal and romantic 60s mythology. This is the writing of someone who just didn't get it.

I found this book to be the most intelligent ever written about the legendary Janis. I bought this book upon its publication, and, to me, it remains the definitive biography on the greatest woman rock star ever. While this book angered many (and apparently still does), I feel Friedman's perspective is very valid. This book is amazingly honest and insightful, considering it was written so shortly after Joplin's death, without the benefit of time, which changes the patina of a life. While it would have been easy for any author taking on such an intimidating subject so soon after their demise to be tempted to either canonize them or vilify them, Friedman does neither. She very eloquently tells of the Janis she knew for the maybe 2 year period that she was her public relations person, and her opinions are not always popular. We like our icons deified, and it's not always easy hearing about their faults, superficialities, and demons. What can make the difference between an honest telling of a life, and an unfair portrayal, is the balance in which it is written. Though Friedman is sometimes brutal in the honesty of her observations of Janis, and sometimes perceived as judgmental, I never doubted for a second that she loved Janis, and her grief at the wretched tragedy of her ending is apparent, to me, through-out, though never maudlin. She even admits that she was not a particular fan of Joplin's at the beginning of her involvement with her, having more of a classical background. Her chapters on Janis' early years, when she was an outcast, and all but banished from school for being different, un-pretty, and un-popular, are especially filled with empathy.

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