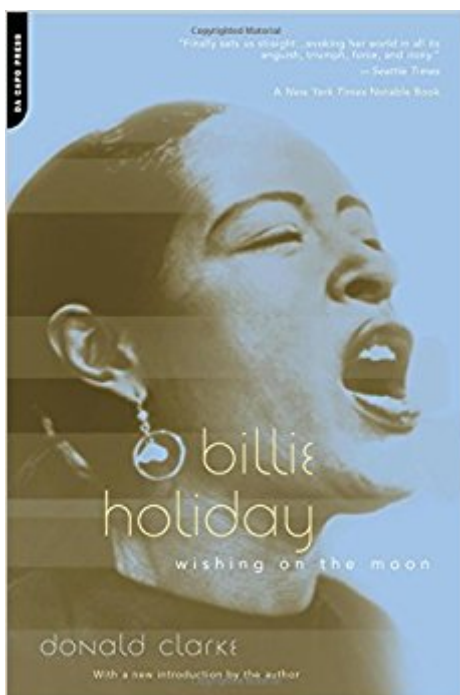


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# Billie Holiday: Wishing On The Moon



## Synopsis

Certainly no singer has been more mythologized and more misunderstood than Billie Holiday, who helped to create much of the mystique herself with her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*. "Now, finally, we have a definitive biography," said Booklist of Donald Clarke's *Billie Holiday*, "by a deeply compassionate, respectful, and open-minded biographer [whose] portrait embraces every facet of Holiday's paradoxical nature, from her fierceness to her vulnerability, her childlikeness to her innate elegance and amazing strength." Clarke was given unrivaled access to a treasure trove of interviews from the 1970s; interviews with those who knew Lady Day from her childhood in the streets and good-time houses of Baltimore through the early days of success in New York and into the years of fame, right up to her tragic decline and death at the age of forty-four. Clarke uses these interviews to separate fact from fiction and, in the words of the *Seattle Times*, "finally sets us straight. . . evoking her world in all its anguish, triumph, force and irony." *Newsday* called this "a thoroughly riveting account of Holiday and her milieu." The *New York Times* raved that it "may be the most thoroughly valuable of the many books on Holiday," and Helen Oakley Dance in *JazzTimes* said, "We should probably have to wait a long time for another life of Billie Holiday to supersede Donald Clarke's achievement."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Born Elinore Harris in Philadelphia, jazz and blues singer Billie Holiday (1915-59) was abandoned by her itinerant musician father, then by her stepfather, and got little sense of self-esteem from her

exploitive mother. Holiday became a prostitute, and later, while achieving cult status in Harlem, a heroin addict. In Clarke's remarkably insightful biography, a joy to read, the singer emerges as a vulnerable woman who had unrewarding affairs with unsuitable men out of her fear of deeper love. Nevertheless, writes Clarke, editor of *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, she was a charismatic interpretive artist touched with grace, who fought entrenched racism in the music industry. This marvelously evocative portrait places her performances firmly in the African American subculture from which they sprang. Clarke includes testimonies from Holiday's close associates, whom the late Linda Kuehl interviewed in 1970-72 for a never-completed biography. Crammed with jazz history and lore and sketches of legendary musicians, this biography will have great appeal for Holiday fans and jazz followers. Photos. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Clarke (editor, *Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, Viking, 1989) bases this substantial biography on transcripts of interviews made in the early 1970s with dozens of people close to Billie Holiday. One of his recurring themes is the often contradictory statements made by Holiday and William Duffy in *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956); Clarke sets the record straight with page after page of verbatim testimony from Billie's cohorts, keeping his own interpretive biographical commentary to a minimum. His intelligent organization of the material is supplemented with evidence of solid background reading, and lively, articulate discussions of the recordings reveal Clarke's great love of the Lady's music. The singer, her songs, and her society are warmly illuminated in this well-done, major work. Recommended for public and academic libraries. Bonnie Jo Dopp, formerly with Dist. of Columbia P.L. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Billie Holiday had a gift for singing, but not for living. In this book, we learn of her rise through a natural gift, her career peak during the late 30s-late 40s, her descent into drug addiction. Holiday had a wretched childhood that ended abruptly when she was forced into a life of prostitution which abruptly ended at 14 with her arrest. Life was so uncertain that life at a Catholic girls reform school in Baltimore was recalled by Billie sentimentally. As is the case with so many artists, it is impossible to grow up without a childhood. Her life was a series of mistakes and misadventures that ended with her dying handcuffed to her hospital bed, dying of alcoholism complicated by drug addiction before she was 50. Holiday's life on the stage was for the most part where she achieved transcendence. Despite being a bit of a handful, she worked with Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Count Basie, some

of the best names in the business at the height of the jazz era. Her romantic life was dreadful, tinged with masochistic entanglements and heavily fused by substance abuse, with heroin proving to be her downfall. Billie's horrible wonderful life is ably chronicled in this book, which has to be one of the best biographies ever written. Donald Clark weaves a series of interviews into a fascinating mosaic of an incomparable artist with an intemperate life.

I don't think words can truly express how much I loved this book. This is her story, the good, the bad and even the ugly. Like all great artists, she was a complex character, full of contradictions, yet extremely gifted and one of the best vocalists we will ever have known. This isn't an easy read in some parts, but biographies are meant to be honest no matter how tragic they are. If you want to know more about her life and the climate of the jazz music industry during that time period in American history, this is a great read. Highly recommended.

I bought this bio for a friend and he absolutely loved it...inept information about the fabulous legendary Billie Holiday....a must have for any Holiday fan!

This is a superb "real" look at the life and times of Billie Holiday. This book is definitely a montage structure without a sense of continuity at times - but it does not matter. The material is strong and research stronger. Few books offer such a candid look at Lady Day. This is a must read if you care about her music or her legacy.

love it. not just a bio of Billie, but a dialogue including many musicians of the era that surrounded her. sort of a historical reference to the time and culture. great author. he really loves and understands music.

Fantastic! Lady Day's music has opened me up and her biography was intense. Thank you. How many more words do I have to add?

Fantastic book; quick delivery too.

Unlike other books this seems to have many more facts than fiction attached to it (if you take the author's word on that) and I see no reason not to. How great was she after still having a life like hers? It's amazing that she made it to age 44. I wish they would do another movie of her life. "Lady

Sings The Blues", although acted very well by Diana Ross, was a fictional account of her life and should not be recognized as a biography of any kind (except that she had a drug problem). The only problem I had with this book was that at times it lacked continuity and was hard to follow. Still recommended though.

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