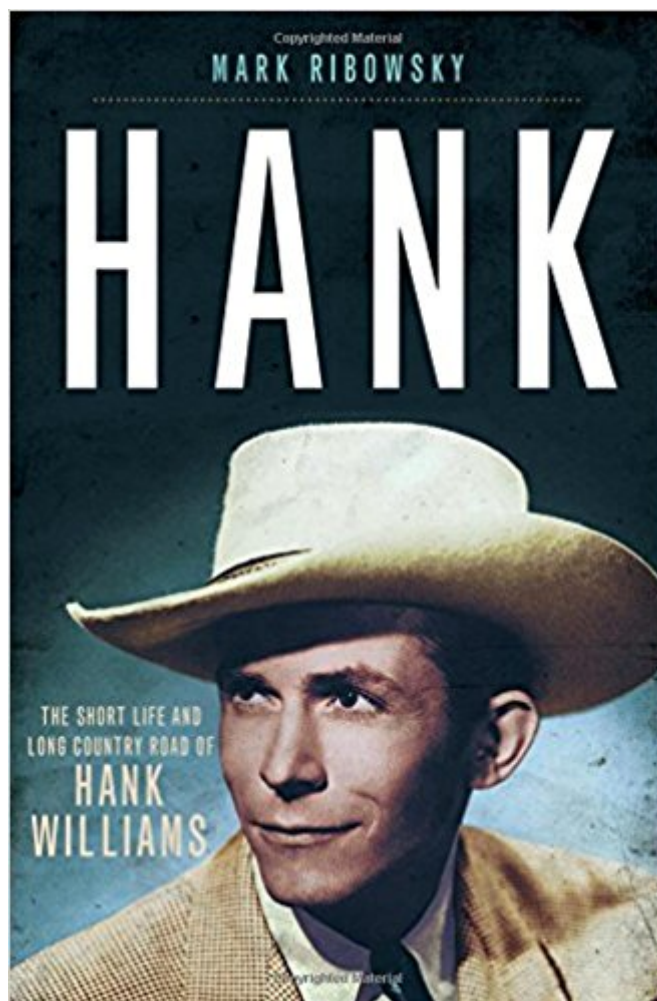


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Hank: The Short Life And Long Country Road Of Hank Williams



Synopsis

A heartbreaking and unforgettable portrait of country music's founding father. After he died in the backseat of a Cadillac at the age of twenty-nine, Hank Williams—a frail, flawed man who had become country music's most compelling and popular star—instantly morphed into its first tragic martyr. Having hit the heights in the postwar era with simple songs of heartache and star-crossed love, he would, with that outlaw swagger, become in death a template for the rock generation to follow. But unlike those other musical giants who never made thirty, no legacy endures quite like that of the "Hillbilly King." Now presenting the first fully realized biography of Hiram King Williams in a generation, Mark Ribowsky vividly returns us to the world of country's origins, in this case 1920s Alabama, where Williams was born into the most trying of circumstances, which included a dictatorial mother, a henpecked father, and an agonizing spinal condition. Forced by his overbearing matriarch to do odd jobs—selling peanuts, shining shoes—young Hank soon found respite in street-corner blues man Rufus "Tee Tot" Payne, who showed him how to make a guitar sing. It wasn't long before young Hank found his way onto those nascent American radio airwaves, where his melodic voice and timely tunes slowly garnered a following. On that dusty path to early stardom, Hank was indefatigably supported by his overbearing mother, who would shepherd his band, the Drifting Cowboys, to shows along backroads of the Jim Crow South. Yet it was a different woman who would supply Hank with the fuel he needed to explode out of the local spotlight: his sometimes wife, Audrey Mae Sheppard. As Ribowsky brilliantly evokes, their fiery relationship was as abusive as it was passionate—would inform nearly every song he ever wrote, and provide a template for country music for generations to follow. In chronicling Hank's rise to stardom, Ribowsky also explores all those cautionary tales that have, until now, remained secreted beneath the grooves of his records. Drawing from new interviews, Ribowsky connects those seemingly eternal afternoons and nights spent choked in booze and desperation to the music that Williams would create. With remarkable nuance and insight, Ribowsky allows us to witness the man behind the tipped cowboy hat—the charismatic troubadour who hid the wounds of his domestic quarrels, relied on painkillers to get through the day, and was always teetering on the edge of tragedy, even when he saw the light. Tracing the singular rise of a music legend from the street corners of the Depression-era South to the now-immortal stage of the Grand Ole Opry, and finally to a haunting, lonely end on New Year's Day 1953, Hank uncovers the real man beneath the myths, reintroducing us to an American original whose legacy, like a good night at the honkytonk, promises to carry on and on. 16 pages of photographs

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Customer Reviews

“In a year when a number of notable books . . . focused on the history and fate of the white working class in America, Mark Ribowsky’s *Hank* is a timely biography . . . Ribowsky has taken on a truly harrowing life. — John Williams, *New York Times Book Review* “A compassionate yet clear-eyed study of the iconic country star. . . . It [Ribowsky’s] credit that he gets as close to Williams as any writer could. . . . Hank Williams was a tortured poet who died before most Americans today were born, but he’ll outlive us all. — David Kirby, *Washington Post* “A new biography that exhumes the strange case of the poet and the peckerwood. . . . [Hank] offers a feast of juicy anecdotes and sharp analysis that should satisfy devotees and attract newcomers to the fold. It’s the most Hank you can get in a single helping and the most you’d probably want. Williams is always good company, especially around last call. — Eddie Dean, *Wall Street Journal* “A sturdy biography of the unsteady icon of outlaw country avant la lettre. . . . Ribowsky covers the details of Williams’ untidy personal life without undue sensationalism . . . [a] decidedly warts-and-all portrait of a man more revered than listened to these days. It’s not every 29-year-old who can pack enough into a life to warrant a 500-page biography and a good one at that. — Kirkus Reviews

Mark Ribowsky is the author of fifteen books, including *Ain’t Too Proud to Beg: The Troubled Lives and Enduring Soul of the Temptations*, the *New York Times* Notable Book *Don’t Look*

Back: Satchel Paige in the Shadows of Baseball, and, most recently, Dreams to Remember: Otis Redding, Stax Records, and the Transformation of Southern Soul. He lives in Florida.

Outstanding read for any music fan, especially those who care about American roots music and the artists who paved the way for future generations. This latest biography contains nothing particularly earth-shattering, but the book was thoroughly researched and the material was well-presented and eminently readable. "Hank" is definitely worth your time.

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Most detailed story of Hank Williams ever read. Nothing is glossed over. Loved it.

I ordered this for my husband, who is a huge Hank Williams fan. He hasn't finished it yet, but says it's a really good book & he's learning things about HW that he never knew about before.

I loved it! Hank Williams has always been my idol. He is still the King of Country Music.

New Stories and a better appreciation of Hank

Illuminating and well researched biography of a star that burned out all too early.

Avoid this if you are a fan! Introduction sets tone for NY author. Hank: goofy-looking guy; from Jim Crow South; couldn't read or write music; proudly unrefined; talked with a twang; songs culled from comic books; God, beer, women; weakness and recklessness; poor excuse for a rebel; seriously disturbed; dysfunctional; drunk a mean raving egomaniac; appeal made no sense; White trash; not much of a guitar player...with more of the same. Hank Jr.: anti-intellectual country which is happily crumbling; goes on at length about his rant on Obama; beer-bellied, bearded doppelganger; possessed same tendencies to screw up; reduced to aging warhorse in ten-gallon hat and goggles. This is just the Introduction! First two pages of Prologue NY author in small Alabama town describes verbatim conversation with "typical ignorant Hillbilly" which is wrenching. He goes on to attack Montgomery for it's racist past by recounting in detail events which liberals like himself are still juicing. I need go no further to recognize that is not a biography but rather another indictment of

everything Southern. "He did not come to praise Hank, but to bury Him!"

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