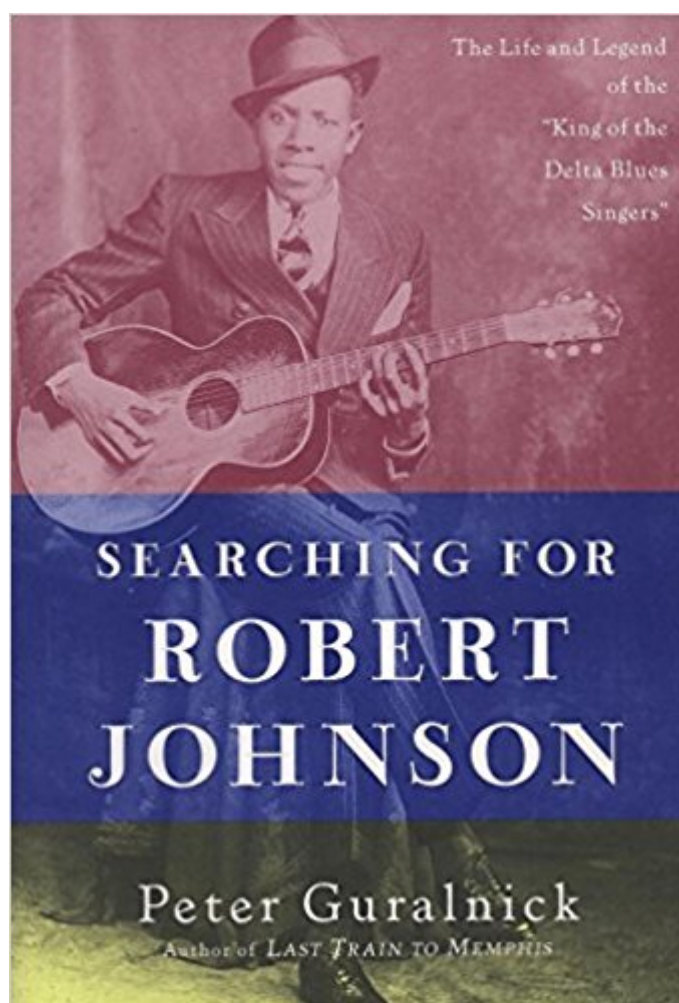


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Searching For Robert Johnson: The Life And Legend Of The "King Of The Delta Blues Singers"



Synopsis

Robert Johnson, while probably the most influential of all blues guitarists, is also one of the most obscure. Recognized as an influence on musicians like Eric Clapton and the Rolling Stones, Johnson was poisoned by a jealous husband in 1938--at the age of twenty-seven. This untimely death, his supposed bargain with the devil that enabled him to play guitar, and the ferocity and tormented originality of his work have given rise to a legend that has inspired a Hollywood movie and numerous stories. Peter Guralnick's extended essay about the life of the man and the myth, and of the place and time that produced both, illuminates much of the obscurity around Johnson without forfeiting any of the mystery.

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Customer Reviews

Blues fans have long held up Robert Johnson's small but potent body of work as a slender pillar on which much modern blues and rock rest, and the songs themselves remain astonishing paradigms of the blues' most primordial style, the country blues of the Mississippi Delta. Yet, for decades after his murder in 1938, details of Johnson's life and clues into the genesis of his music consisted of little more than the evocative themes and settings of the songs themselves. This brief but absorbing meditation on Johnson's life and art, originally published in 1989 in anticipation of the first release of his complete recordings, benefits from the detective work of earlier blues scholars, most notably Mack McCormick, who began piercing the veil surrounding Johnson's life in the '60s. By the '80s, reminiscences from the bluesman's contemporaries, more solid evidence of his shadowy lineage,

and even the belated discovery of photographs added more dimension to McCormick's "phantom" Johnson. Yet, possibly by his own design, Robert Johnson remained more outline than flesh, still explained more lucidly in the fevered nightmares and earthy imagery of his songs than by the scattered details of his life. Guralnick succeeds in conveying the power of Johnson's music and delineating both its origins and, ultimately, singular genius. His debts to delta blues avatars Charley Patton and Tommy Johnson are solidified, yet, more crucially, Guralnick roots Johnson's artistic growth in the specific context of this rural corner of Mississippi, at this particular moment between the world wars. He also frankly addresses the potency of Johnson's myth and an early death that only glorifies the brief, bright arc of his work. No less crucial is Guralnick's ability to convey the dark beauty of the music itself, giving *Searching for Robert Johnson* a broader sweep as an essential blues primer. --Sam Sutherland

Peter Guralnick is the author of the hugely successful book on Elvis Presley, *Last Train to Memphis*. He lives in West Newbury, Massachusetts.

I read this book because of other books I had read about great bluesmen from yesteryear (Howlin Wolf, Muddy Waters, The Chitlin Circuit). While this book had some good info, it was not near as good or as detailed as many others I have read. The author referred to another author's book which was still in the works that I thought the best way to describe this volume was as an advertisement for another. Robert Johnson was an interesting character but I think there must be a better book on him somewhere.

At 96 pages you'll be able to read it in one sitting. Chock full of good information but falls short of being a comprehensive profile; It's a pity more isn't known about this colossal sphinx of a bluesman. Crisply written and nicely rendered paperback edition, includes a few interesting b&w photos of locations and related people to add to the atmosphere.

An interesting, if slight, book, which lays out what is known (except possibly by Mack McCormick) about Robert Johnson, and how the author came by this knowledge. For better or worse, what is known is not all that much, but perhaps (as the book suggests to me) the myth of Robert Johnson is more interesting than the reality. This book is good, but the records themselves are indispensable.

Excellent!

Great book for serious blues scholars, though the author looks at Johnson through idolatrous eyes.

It has been a while since I have read this book. From what I remember, I was disappointed in the book in some ways but loved it in others. It wasn't the read I expected it to be. I was hoping for more info on Robert Johnson but there wasn't. I did however like how the book was written and I liked the info that the book did have. I suppose there isn't very much info on Robert Johnson anyway, but I have heard more on TV shows and magazine articles than what was written in this book. Absolutely worth the read though for Robert Johnson fans.

Not well written, nor very informative. Definitely a 2 stars as far as interesting.

This was a gift purchased for someone else. They thoroughly enjoyed and the book was in excellent condition. Thanks so much.

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