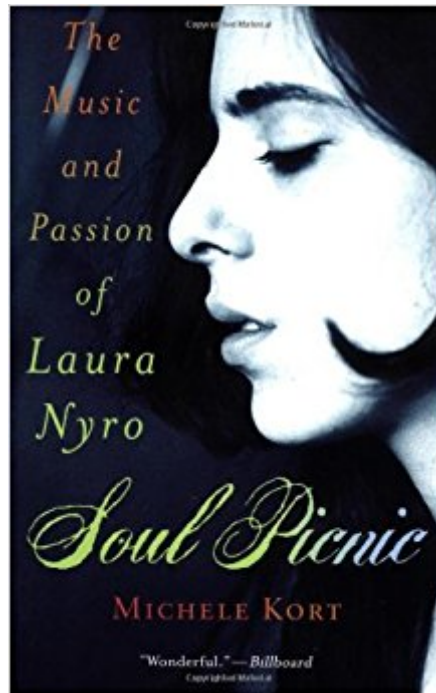




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# Soul Picnic: The Music And Passion Of Laura Nyro



## Synopsis

Laura Nyro was a beloved and pioneering singer-songwriter of the 1960s and 1970s, whose songs were covered with great success by the Fifth Dimension; Blood, Sweat & Tears; Three Dog Night; and Barbra Streisand. This first biography uncovers previously never revealed details, including a love affair with Jackson Browne, and her relationship with painter Maria Desiderio. Unappreciated in her time, Nyro's legacy is currently experiencing a revival. With her groundbreakingly honest and passionate lyrics, her unusual and innovative rhythms and melody, Nyro's influence is still felt by singers and songwriters today.

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## Customer Reviews

Young women growing up in the tumultuous 1960s found that the music of Bronx-born singer/songwriter Nyro was something they could cling to. Journalist Kort, who obviously felt the same way, here portrays the enigmatic performer in this first account of her life (1947-97), cut tragically short by ovarian cancer. Nyro was just a teen when she began what would become a long recording career, though renditions of her works by others (e.g., the Fifth Dimension, Barbra Streisand) would generally be more successful commercially than any of her own. Kort gathers every date, description, and dialog to draw a complete picture of her subject. For the legion of now middle-aged fans, there is perhaps too much minutiae regarding studio sessions, musical arrangements, chord variations, personnel changes, and industry infighting. Nyro's relationship with eventual power-broker David Geffen (her agent, representative, and friend) is more interesting, though the ending of that tale remains somewhat ambiguous. There is nothing here from Nyro

herself, except what is culled from numerous interviews and the shared memories of family, friends, and fellow musicians. Musicologists and students of the history of popular music will wallow in the preponderance of information, especially as it pertains to Nyro's unquestionable influence on the music industry and the growth of women as both performers and composers. Those of us who knew every lyric of every song (and still do) would prefer a more accessible portrait of our goddess. Still, this biography is recommended for academic and public libraries. (Photos not seen.) Bette-Lee Fox, "Library Journal" Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Some will feel saved by her music," Kort says, and that accurately indicates her stance on the influential '60s singer-songwriter whose "And When I Die," "Eli's Coming," "Wedding Bell Blues," and "Stoned Soul Picnic," became signature songs for Blood, Sweat and Tears, Three Dog Night, and the Fifth Dimension--acts that appealed to a different, more mainstream audience than Nyro herself did. While providing hits to sparkly rock featherweights (i.e., some of the era's consistent hit makers), Nyro endured management by chameleon supreme David Geffen, which was unsettling for her but makes for good reading. Always enigmatic, she was somewhat secretive near the end of her life, after she received "the worst possible diagnosis: stage 4 ovarian cancer," which she "definitely felt she was going to get," says her brother. Nyro was one of the songwriters whose output gives "Age of Aquarius" rock its lingering cachet, and it is unfortunate that too many middle-of-the-road musicians have made elevator music out of it. Kort's admiring biography begins to give Nyro and her impressive music their due. Mike Tribby Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have been a Laura Nyro fan since about 1970, maybe a little earlier. Loved her perspective on things, loved her use of words, loved her timing and rhythm, music. I can't say she was a genius but certainly one of those rare beings sent to us to lighten our lives. I only learned a few months ago that she had died years ago, all this time I thought she was happily living out her life somewhere. The book gives you insights into what her life was like, what it must have felt like to follow the muse. I am glad toward the later part of her life that she found love and fulfillment in her personal and private life. We do miss her still. I think she was far far far more influential to far far far more people than indicated, possibly more people are simply unaware of how profoundly her songs added to the stew of life.

A lifelong fan of Nyro, I had only seen her perform once--in a small venue on Miami Beach in the '90s, a few years before her death from cancer. The slim woman with long dark hair who dressed in black and emanated spunky New York soul had grown much larger in size, but her talent and ability to express real and deep emotion had not diminished one iota. The feeling in the room was that of being on sacred ground. My love of Laura Nyro's music and curiosity about her life and persona were recently triggered by a PBS special on the prolific music, stage and film producer, David Geffin, her first manager with whom she parted ways. I decided it was time to learn more about her and was very happy to have found Michele Kort's very well-written and well-researched book. Laura was a complex woman of contrasts: strong-willed, stubborn, and perfectionistic, yet quiet, humble, sensitive, vulnerable, generous, well-loved, and giving...and great fun! ("Soft" and "loved" were the adjectives most applied to her in the book.) Immensely talented, her music only topped the charts when covered by others like the Fifth Dimension, Streisand, Three Dog Night and Blood, Sweat and Tears. She did, however, have quite a large following during and after her lifetime of those who loved and appreciated her for her truth and uniqueness. Known for her impassioned, articulate and penetrating style, she was a self-trained musician who grew up in the Bronx amidst a loving family that included a generous musician father and a strong, supportive mother. Her musical signature favored a very original approach towards chords, a flair for smart poetic lyrics and metaphors, and an ability to combine elements of jazz, soul and blues with bouncery rock rhythms. She also broke new ground for female songwriters who were simultaneously performing artists, which colleagues such as Joni Mitchell, Carole King and Melissa Manchester greatly valued. She paved her way through the music profession "her way" and, because of their enjoyment of and respect for her great talent, her personal likeability, and the love of her devoted fans, her colleagues allowed her to do it. She had friendships, relationships and associations with many who were influential in the rock world, and a great deal of information is gleaned in this book about that era of rock ('70s through '90s) and its personalities. The author undertook much detailed research and executed many interviews with close relatives, friends, teachers, and business associates in order to manifest a real flesh and blood human being (no easy task since Ms. Kort never had the opportunity to meet her). This is an excellent piece of work and a wonderful read for anyone who has ever appreciated and cared about Laura Nyro and her music and/or was curious about her life, loves and progeny (she left "one child to carry on").

This book is one I have had on my wish list forever and I received it with much joy. Having been a fan of hers for the past few years (yep, I'm a newbie Laura fan), this gives me great insight into the

beauty and spirit of Laura and her music. While it does not go into some of the stories you may have read about her elsewhere, there are some great stories of her life here and I am so grateful to hold this in my hands.

In my opinion, Laura Nyro continues to be one of the most underrated songsmiths in the history of American Music. While some record stores still file her under "Folk Music", Nyro's primary musical inspirations were pop, jazz and the vocal R & B and doo-wop stylings of the 50's. She also had an affinity for show music and her circle of friends included Broadway Icons Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. Her poetry was unique, as well. No woman before her had explored so many controversial and personal issues in their lyrics as Nyro did. Since little has been written about this Great American Artist, Kort's book is a welcome read and fills in a lot of the spaces that fans have been wondering about regarding this very private person. The book is a little light on depth, however, and it reveals itself as more of a record of rememberings by people that were part of her personal and music business worlds, either fleetingly or for long periods of time. Kort treats her subject with great respect and reverence, however, and her affection for Nyro as an artist and as a person is reflected throughout this book. Although this book will, mainly, be of interest to Nyro's longtime supporters, hopefully people who are curious about who this woman was, and the art that she created, will go out and buy her music. If you have never heard her before, nothing can prepare you for CD's like New York Tendaberry or Christmas and the Beads of Sweat. She was a shining star, a visionary, and a pure artist who paid dearly for her musical vision. We will never see the likes of her again. Love you, Laura, RIP.

My mother is the ultimate Laura Nyro fan and was extremely happy with this book!

I learned so much about my gifted Laura. Wish they would do a Broadway show about her so they she could get some of the credit she is due. Pure genius!!!!!!

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