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BOOK REVIEWS

Hunter Davies – The Beatles Lyrics: The Stories Behind The Music (Little, Brown & Co.)

Book Reviews | February 26th, 2015

Since none of the Beatles could read music at first, their music publisher transcribed the lyrics from studio tapes. As the author of *The Beatles: The Authorized Biography* (1968), Hunter Davies asked for their tossed-out, handwritten lyric sheets. He later received permission to scan pages from private collections and museums, then created this anthology. It's no news that classic songs are born on motel stationery, on a son's birthday card, or in a chauffeur's address book. Still, fans worldwide who know whole albums by heart will enjoy seeing these tentative scribbles, mostly in the handwriting of Lennon or McCartney, with titles changed and verses crossed out.

Davies's droll, cheeky style is a perfect fit with the band's early image. Contrasting the personalities of Lennon and McCartney (ground already well-trod), he states, "Paul had his own traumas...so why did that not make him a misery guts?" Suggesting ties between the lyrics and their lives, he makes no assumptions and he's never puffed up about having their personal confidences.

Hunter Davies is an accomplished novelist and journalist on topics ranging from parenthood to sports to music, yet he leans on a stale concept: the notion that it is a "mystery" that teens with little musical training and so-so education wrote hit songs. The press was similarly mystified about Irving Berlin decades earlier and the public couldn't care less. Timing, talent and hard work—and a huge PR machine: that's a time-tested recipe for artistic success.

– Annie Dinerman

THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC, INCLUDING THE HANDWRITTEN DRAFTS OF MORE THAN 100 CLASSIC BEATLES SONGS



EDITED BY HUNTER DAVIES

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