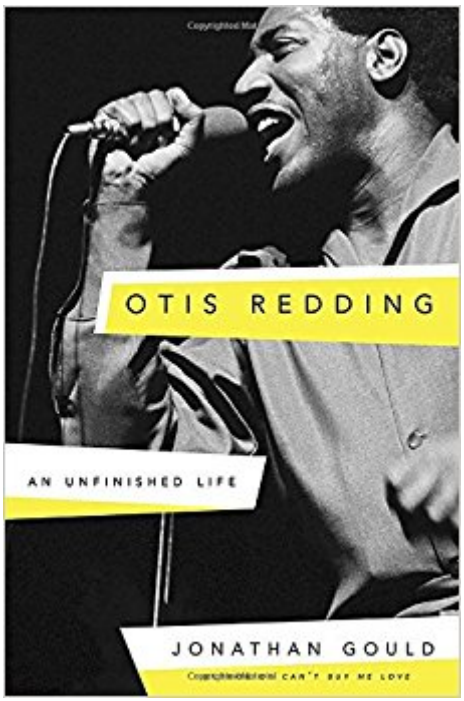
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Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life



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Synopsis

The long-awaited, definitive biography of The King of Soul, timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Redding's iconic performance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival. Otis Redding remains an immortal presence in the canon of American music on the strength of such classic hits as Ã¢â ¬Å“(SittinÃ¢â ¬â„¢ on) The Dock of the Bay,Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬Å“IÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve Been Loving You Too Long,Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬Å“Try a Little Tenderness,Ã¢â ¬Â• and Ã¢â ¬Å“Respect,Ã¢â ¬Â• a song he wrote and recorded before Aretha Franklin made it her own. As the architect of the distinctly southern, gospel-inflected style of rhythm & blues associated with Stax Records in Memphis, Redding made music that has long served as the gold standard of 1960s soul. Yet an aura of myth and mystery has always surrounded his life, which was tragically cut short at the height of his career by a plane crash in December 1967. Ã Â In Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life, Jonathan Gould finally does justice to ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s incomparable musical artistry, drawing on exhaustive research, the cooperation of the Redding family, and previously unavailable sources of information to present the first comprehensive portrait of the singerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s background, his upbringing, and his professional career. In chronicling the story of ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s life and music, Gould also presents a social history of the time and place from which they emerged.Ã Â His book never lets us forget that the boundaries between black and white in popular music were becoming porous during the years when racial tensions were reaching a height throughout the United States. His indelible portrait of Redding and the mass acceptance of soul music in the 1960s is both a revealing look at a brilliant artist and a provocative exploration of the tangled history of race and music in America that resonates strongly with the present day.

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Customer Reviews

One of Men’s Journal’s "Best Books of May 2017"Ã¢â ¬Å“[An] impressive biographyÃ¢â ¬Â|. Access to ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s surviving family members helps Gould flesh out his upbringing and offstage personalityÃ¢â ¬Â|. Music historians like Peter Guralnick, Rob Bowman and Robert Gordon have all done essential work on the history of Stax, but Gould takes a contrary and provocative position on the labelÃ¢â ¬â„¢s relationship to its greatest starÃ¢â ¬Â|. [He] makes a convincing case that, while ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s recordings are never less than compelling thanks to his remarkable voice, [Stax co-founder Jim StewartÃ¢â ¬â„¢s] shortcomingsÃ¢â ¬Â|held Redding back as a songwriter and repeatedly stymied his popular momentum.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Alan Light,Ã Â New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢â ¬Å“PerceptiveÃ¢â ¬Â|.An incisive and deeply humanistic portrait.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Eddie Dean, Wall Street JournalÃ¢â ¬Å“The beloved Ã¢â ¬Ëœ60s soul titanÃ¢â ¬Â|comes alive in GouldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s insightful, well-researched biography.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •People"A rich picture of [ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s] worldÃ¢â ¬Â|.Illuminating."Ã¢â ¬â •Will Hermes,Ã Â Rolling StoneÃ¢â ¬Å“MagisterialÃ¢â ¬Â| With meticulous scholarship, lively prose, and a tale that uses a singular musician as a springboard into interrogating AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s political and popular cultures, Gould has created a vital book that helps contextualize one of the most important figures in pop music.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Maura Johnston, Boston GlobeÃ¢â ¬Å“GouldÃ¢â ¬Â|sets sky-high aspirations for his book, attempting not to merely chronicle ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s meteoric life, but to use him as the backdrop for a larger story about race in America, the history of soul music, and the rise of MemphisÃ¢â ¬â„¢ small but powerful Stax Records. He does that gracefully.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •Thor Christensen, Dallas NewsÃ¢â ¬Å“An excellent and definitive biographyÃ¢â ¬Â| A master storyteller, Gould tackles ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s life by planting his flag firmly at the crossroads of individual genius and social and cultural contextÃ¢â ¬Â| [His] fabulous portraitÃ¢â ¬Â|provides Redding with the Ã¢â ¬Å“RespectÃ¢â ¬Â• he richly deserves. Highly recommended.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Library Journal (starred review)"A music biography with the depth to do its subject justice. Otis Redding (1941-1967) ranks high in the pantheon of 1960s musical luminaries, so it’s fitting that [Otis Redding] ranks equally high among such work focusing on popular musical artists.... Better late than never, the soul master receives his considerable due in this superbly researched and written biography."Ã¢â ¬â •Kirkus ReviewsÃ Â (starred review)Ã¢â ¬Å“Jonathan GouldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s

much-heralded biographyÃ¢â ¬Â¦ builds beautifully, more like a great soul ballad than the dance hall hit so many music biographies aim at becoming. One feels the time thatÃ¢â ¬â„¢s gone into the bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s organization, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s exegesis, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s every insightful and often quite-funny sentences.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Paul Smart,Ã Â Hudson Valley One"Gould vividly brings to life the man Stax Records boss Jim Stewart called 'a walking inspiration'....Ã Â From his supreme triumphs to his one last heart-breaking phone-call to Zelma, devotees and soul scholars alike could not wish for a more thorough and sensitive portrait."Ã¢â ¬â •Kris Needs, Mojo Ã¢â ¬Å“Some of the best parts of GouldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book are his incisive descriptions of ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s live performances and recording sessions.... But even more than his vivid re-creations of ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s composing and recording work, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s GouldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s insightful portrayal of the Segregated SouthÃ¢â ¬â„¢s racial climate that makes Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life so compelling.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Steve Nathans-Kelly, PasteÃ¢â ¬Å“Nuanced and well-researchedÃ¢â ¬Â¦ [Otis Redding] belongs in the hands of anyone who cares about soul music in the sixties.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Booklist"Jonathan GouldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s exquisitely written biography of one of the greatest singers of all time is spell-binding. His deep research superbly contextualizes Otis ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s way-too-short life and career, while his incisive critique of ReddingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s work makes his music come alive on the pageÃ¢â ¬â •leaving us yearning to have experienced the remarkable performer onstage."Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •Holly George-Warren, author of A Man Called Destruction: The Life and Music of Alex Chilton, from Box Tops to Big Star to Backdoor Man Ã¢â ¬Å“In his biography of Otis Redding, Jonathan Gould summons up the teeming cast of hustlers, visionaries, and eccentrics who fed Otis' supernatural talent. It's a thrill to see Redding brought back to life in all his raw, flashing glory!Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •David Dalton, founding editor, Rolling Stone, and author of Who Is That Man?

JONATHAN GOULD is a former professional musician and the author of CANÃ¢â ¬â„¢T BUY ME LOVE: The Beatles, Britain & America.Ã Â Ã Â He divides his time between a home in Brooklyn and a house near Hudson, NY.

Only August and already I'm convinced Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life will be my pick for music bio of the year. True, Otis is my all-time favorite singer. Also true this book delivers an honest, richly detailed and straightforward account of his life and the world around him.The rise and glory of Otis is woven with the music biz and national race relations of the time. Can't separate these components. Facets of a superb diamond, each aspect is a genuine marvel.It's likely I've read every

Otis bio to date. No need to ever read another after this.Please do yourself a favor and get this book. Your appreciation will significantly increase for Otis, the magic of Stax/Volt, and the loving interaction of black and white performers who cared only for the music during a deeply segregated period of our nation.

An aptly titled biography, because his life was indeed unfinished. In fact, it could be said his professional singing career had just entered a new plateau. His best-selling song, Dock of the Bay was just completed before the tragic plane crash that took the life of Otis Redding. It was released posthumously to great fanfare selling a million copies and hitting number one on the charts. With this sweeping biography we get the details of Otis ReddingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s life and his rise to become the King of Soul; firmly situated in the social dynamics that were at play in America, and the south, specifically Georgia. The author does an adequate job of setting the social table and is fair in describing the paternalistic attitude that existed amongst whites in reference to Blacks in OtisÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s hometown of Macon.He extends this impartiality while writing about the music business, white managers and Black talent. The prose is steady, giving you a real sense of what it was like to make records, tour the country and compete with other artists of your time. In Otis ReddingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s case he had to contend with the star of James Brown, Little Richard briefly and Sam Cooke who died three years earlier than Otis. Otis had remarked after learning of Sam CookeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s untimely passing, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I want to fill the silent vacuum that was left when Sam Cooke died.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• As this biography details, Otis did indeed fill that vacuum. If youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve ever heard any Otis Redding record, you would know why his voice is the one most identified with ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœsoul.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ If you havenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t heard any song from Otis Redding, I would suggest buying this book and as the songs are being described listen to them and see if you can feel the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s intense descriptions of horns, keyboards and drums, and how they combine with voice to make a great or bad recording.It isn't necessary to be an Otis Redding fan to enjoy this biography, if you are a music fan, young or old and always wondered about the term 'soul music' this is certainly not a bad place to begin.

Otis Redding was kind of a "cult-of-one" soul music hero to me growing up in that I was personally acquainted with no other individual who had ever heard of him (excluding my local record shop proprietor), let alone owned multiple 45s by him as I did (LPs came later for me when I was able to gather a few dollars together at a given moment). It didn't help that Chicagoland radio didn't give his

discs a lot of action (virtually nothing on the Top 40 stations [just one week at #35 for "I've Been Loving You Too Long" on WLS in '65 - and no airplay that I ever heard] until "Dock of the Bay" posthumously) or that I never saw a performance by him until the film "Monterey Pop" in 1969 (while at college). He was probably the artist (three decades before the Internet) I was most hungry to learn about.Jonathan Gould's brilliant new biography of Otis Redding - meticulously researched and exceedingly well written - is destined to be the definitive one for all time, and it begins with an account of Otis's triumphant Monterey Pop appearance at the start of the 1967 "Summer of Love," where his set (with Booker T. & the MGs) was the only one in the realm of R&B/soul. From there Gould recounts both the history of Otis's family (he was the great-grandson of slaves emancipated as a result of the Civil War, and he was born in a sharecropper shack) and of race relations in the South (Macon, Georgia is where the family wound up and where Otis grew up and made his permanent home). Without understanding the full context of his heritage - right up to the 1960s and the civil rights struggle - one cannot truly appreciate the soul of this proud young Southern black man, even if neither he nor his music was overtly political. Gould's exploration of this whole area is absolutely fascinating and illuminating, and it serves to explicate the omnipresent underlying racial component behind the interpersonal relations involving Otis and the white people in his sphere. It all rings true.Likewise, Gould presents an informative historical overview of African American music; and from the point the narrative has Otis entering the field of professional recording, we get a veritable education in the music business as it existed in Otis's day (and a bit beyond, as the unfortunate fate of Stax Records of Memphis in the 1970s needed to be told).Gould's account of the fatal private small-plane crash on approach to Madison, Wisconsin on that cold and bleak day of December 10, 1967 - which left the arc of Otis Redding's remarkable life unfinished - is chilling and heartbreaking, and no doubt accurate in its detail.While I think that for the most part the author does right-on-the-money critiques of Otis Redding's recordings, I am not a fan of some of the potshots he takes at other artists, either in dismissive or insulting ways. Targets include fellow Stax songwriter-artists William Bell and Eddie Floyd, as well as Atlantic's Percy "When-a-Man-Loves-a-Woman" Sledge (all of whom I owned records by - especially by Percy; in my opinion, one's soul music credentials must be questioned if one is unable to appreciate this phenomenal soul vocalist); and on the distaff side he takes several swipes at Stax's top female artist, Carla Thomas, and her supposed lack of talent. (And by the way, I cannot fully accept the veracity of the vulgar, misogynistic quote about her attributed to Otis.) Most randomly, the author feels inexplicably compelled to call the soulful 1959 ballad "Since I Don't Have You" by the Skyliners (a #3 R&B hit) "smarmy." (Actually, he has its title as "I Don't Have You," which is the only outright

error I noted in this expertly edited book. I suspect he really wasn't very familiar with this record - in which case he should have refrained from offering a subjective [and irrelevant] characterization of it.)Nothing mentioned in the previous paragraph is enough for me to consider lowering my five-star rating, but it did have me scratching my head wondering why he had to go small unnecessarily and risk making his own very necessary book seem a tad less definitive.

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