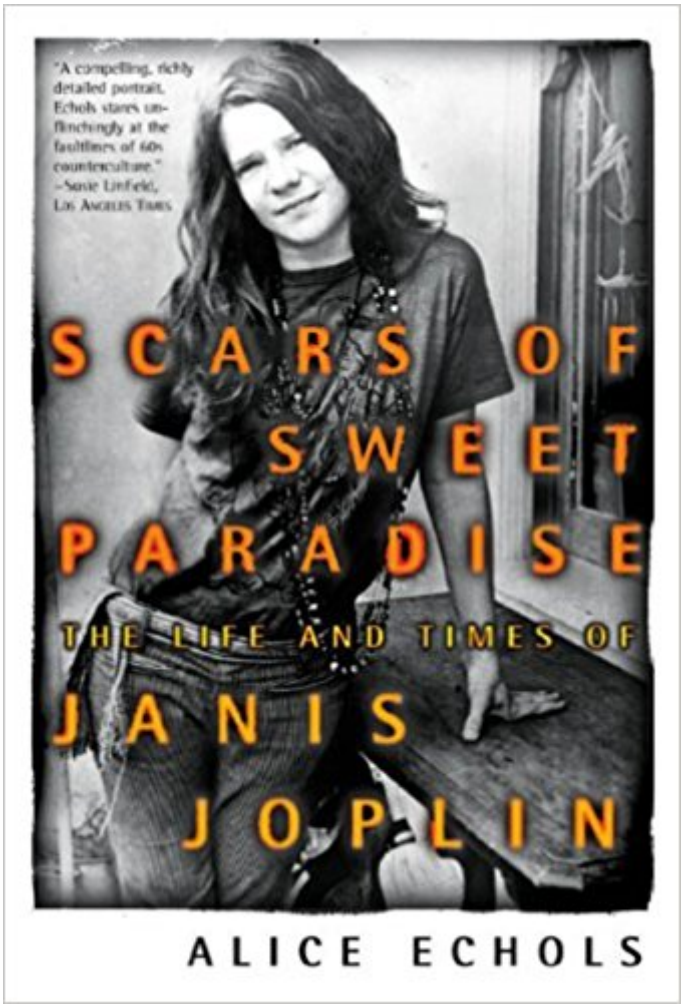
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Scars Of Sweet Paradise: The Life And Times Of Janis Joplin



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Synopsis

Janis Joplin was the skyrocket chick of the sixties, the woman who broke into the boys' club of rock and out of the stifling good-girl femininity of postwar America. With her incredible wall-of-sound vocals, Joplin was the voice of a generation, and when she OD'd on heroin in October 1970, a generation's dreams crashed and burned with her. Alice Echols pushes past the legary Joplin-the red-hot mama of her own invention-as well as the familiar portrait of the screwed-up star victimized by the era she symbolized, to examine the roots of Joplin's muscianship and explore a generation's experiment with high-risk living and the terrible price it exacted.A deeply affecting biography of one of America's most brilliant and tormented stars, Scars of Sweet Paradise is also a vivid and incisive cultural history of an era that changed the world for us all.

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Customer Reviews

To call Janis Joplin the Judy Garland of the Woodstock set is in some sense a fair characterization. The brassy, carnal, extravagant, and ultimately pitiable queen of psychedelic rock is indeed a cultural icon. And while Joplin reveled in her own ballsy, boozy legend, its needy, inebriated, real-life equivalent was a shadow that darkened her short life and, in the decades since her 1970 drug-induced death, has come to eclipse the party-girl persona. To her great credit, author Alice Echols reconciles the two faces of Joplin in this ambitious, thoroughly readable biography. She does so by tracing Joplin from her youth as a natural-born libertine in dreary Port Arthur, Texas, to her emergence as the sole female rock superstar of her era--a period when beneath-the-surface sexism

hampered Joplin’s progress even while women’s liberation was being widely touted. The author does not shy away from sordid sex-and-drugs episodes, and there’s plenty of raw material---the singer was promiscuous, bisexual, and, at various times, an alcoholic, a speed freak, and a junkie. Echols, however, elevates this biography above run-of-the-mill rock profiles by painting her subject against an elaborate and ever-changing cultural backdrop. Here is Joplin the aspiring folksinger, the white-picket-fence wannabe, the wayward daughter, the hit-and-miss recording artist, and, finally, the ill-starred spirit with nothing left to lose. --Steven Stolder --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In the introduction to this richly textured biography of the trailblazing blues-rock superstar who succumbed to a heroin overdose in 1970, Echols (Daring to Be Bad) informs us that she is not going to give us "a blow-by-blow account of Janis’s every fuck and fix." That is not to say that Echols sidesteps the sordidness of Joplin’s short life. There’s certainly enough drug use ("She even shot up watermelon juice one day") and sex (with both women and men) to keep the reader titillated. But by tracing Joplin’s place in the psychedelic movement?vibrantly reconstructed here through more than 150 interviews?Echols presents the singer not just as a rock casualty but as a contradictory icon of female power, "neither just the ballsy chick who helped throw open the doors of rock ’n’ roll nor the little girl lost who longed for the white picket fence." Joplin’s outrageousness?her sexual conquests, inhuman consumption of Southern Comfort and eventual heroin addiction?is presented as an expression of her insecurities. Stifled in her hometown of Port Arthur, Tex., by rigid gender roles and the cruel taunts of fellow teenagers who thought she was ugly and weird, she turned her teenage rebellion into a successful career as rock’s first down ’n’ dirty bad girl. Outside of Port Arthur, however, she found that even the hip Haight couldn’t handle a woman who was neither a folkie nor the girlfriend of some guy in the band. Rock critics may have loved her, but as Echols reveals, even they seemed more concerned with her raw sexuality than with her talent: following the Monterey Pop Festival, which launched Joplin’s career, the L.A. Free Press ran an article titled "Big Brother’s Boobs" while Richard Goldstein of the Village Voice wrote, "To hear Janis sing ’Ball and Chain’ just once is to have been laid, lovingly and well." 140 b&w photos. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

You will enjoy this even if you love Janis or hate her. I love her music, and Echols paints her as a real human being, sometimes brutal, sometimes vulnerable, always fascinating. An excellent biographical work that humanizes the legend. Janis is not portrayed as a victim, an abused woman

or an abuser. Echols emphasizes the confusion of all of us who lived in those times. Some of us learned to tell -- or read -- about them. Unfortunately, Janis did not. Echols helps us to find a real person with a talent that is still, in this reader's opinion, unsurpassed.

If you want to know the basic facts about Janis Joplin's life and the cultural context in which she rose to fame and self-destructed, this book is perfectly adequate to fill you in. In some respects the book is quite exhaustive, especially in documenting Janis's relationships with various musicians and her series of bands. The author did a reasonably good job of showing how Janis fit in -- or didn't - with the cultural and political context of her day, and also gives some fun general background on the birth of the San Francisco rock scene. Most compelling was the author's description of Janis's tormented family life, and it was those sympathetic attempts to piece together her psyche that seem the most genuine. My complaint with the book is that the writing and editing are far from graceful. It reads more like an academic thesis, often dry, lacking in momentum, and wordy. I read a lot of biographies and I am sure it is very hard to write a good one, but it can be done. Writing about musicians is a special challenge because to really do it well requires deep knowledge and appreciation of the genre and a gift for metaphor. I found the musical criticsm aspect of the book particularly lackluster and it often sounded like the author was parroting others' musical opinions. The editing was a puzzle, too -- sometimes you would want more information on someone, sometimes there was just too much information. Not a page-turner, but I'm glad I read it.

Extremely well written, packed full of dates, names, deals, drugs, sex, and rock and roll. I loved Janis Joplin and her music, and all the music of 'my" time - I am so sad about the way she passed, but more so about her extreme low esteem. I suspect she could have been bi-polar as well. RIP Janis - Hopefully your life now is much happier :)

I had already read Buried Alive, which I thought was great! But I really like this book because it gives a much greater look at Janis's life at home, school, college, and her friends. It also covers the culture of those times both in and out of Beaumont, TX. Haven't finished reading it yet but it's a great read!

Interesting account both of Janis' life and also the times and music scene in which she lived. I liked it.

There are a whole bunch of biographies of Janis, including the well knownÃ Â Buried Alive, but this late comer published in 1999 appears to be the most even-handed, well-researched, and scholarly. In fact Alice Echols is a scholar of the 1960s (without any personal connection to Janis) so there is a lot of contextual information to put the period in perspective - I've probably learned more about the 1960s San Francisco scene in this book than anywhere else, it's worth reading for that reason alone.This is my first "rock-star biography", a genre I have avoided because of the groaning shelves of narcissistic "tell alls". I choose Janis to be my first (something she would have loved) after seeing a couple YouTube clips: one showing her singing "Ball and Chain" live, the other a TV interview at her Texas hometown high-school reunion. In these clips I saw a deep, complicated and obviously brilliant person, her charisma on stage was memorizing and off-stage equally so. For me she became more than a raspy-kinda-scary voice on the radio from another era, and I wanted to learn more about who she was, and why she had become so famous and died so young.Joplin's personality was a wild horse who kept on the move, never finding but always seeking a new home and greener pastures, running from her personal demons while embracing her desire for living life in the moment to the fullest. She drank heavily (Southern Comfort), f...ed thousands of guys and hundreds of women, got in fights with Hells-Angels, shot heroin and was a mainlining speed-freak. She was a vulnerable, loving and kind child from a well-off Middle Class suburban family. She was a walking enigma. Her origins are with the beatniks and folksie scene of the early 60s, she was never fully accepted in the San Francisco scene as a hippie, yet she is widely imagined as one of its founding mothers with her "Perl" costume of boa-feathers, clunky bracelets and lots of beads.In the end her death was no surprise even to herself, she put her body on the front-line of the cultural revolution pushing the boundaries forward on many fronts. It is unfortunate she was largely forgotten in the 70s and 80s but I think with historical reflection on the 60s her life will find more prominence - if nothing else than an archetype of a generation, but also for being ahead of her time as a woman rock star in a male dominated industry.Echols does a good job of balancing the exterior fame with the interior truths of Joplin, a psychological profile that will remind the reader of other people they know like her, it's believable because she seems so "normal" (in a somewhat abnormal way). I came away both with an intimate understanding of Janis and a much stronger sense of the 60s having seen it through the life of a single person who was a central catalyst.

On the back flap, the blurb about the author reveals that she is considered a prominant historian for the 1960's, and that really shows in this book. At times, it's enchanting to have all these details about the world that Janis lived in, but at other times it was just something to slog through. For

example - Janis actually returns home from California to recover from her speed addiction, and while she’s in Texas, the entire hippie movement takes off. Echols takes great pains to describe every single happening in San Francisco while Janis is in Port Arthur, and it just fell flat for me. I ended up flipping pages to see when the story would get back to Janis - something that I found myself doing several times while reading, wondering when I’d read less about Chet or Peggy, and more about the book’s subject.Regardless, it’s a very fair and honest portrayal of Janis Joplin, outlining her extraordinary talents and very sensitive soul. This is not light reading, but a very in-depth look at the "life AND times" of Janis Joplin.

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