



John Lennon: the Man, the Myth, the Music – The Definitive Life

By Tom Riley

Publisher: Hyperion

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USA TODAY REVIEW

Enigmatic Beatle John Lennon shines on in exhaustive new bio

By **Jocelyn McClurg**, USA TODAY
September 20, 2011

Few subjects cry out as much — or as often — for so-called definitive biographies than contradiction-heavy cultural deities like John Lennon.

Music historian and critic Tim Riley is the latest in a long line of biographers to dig in, devoting more than 700 pages to his highly articulate read on the life and career of the most contentious and controversial member of The Beatles in *Lennon: The Man, the Myth, the Music — The Definitive Life*. Arriving in lockstep with the 40th anniversary of the release of Lennon's second solo album, *Imagine*, and what would have been Lennon's 71st birthday on Oct. 9, Riley offers up a scholarly work that's loaded with musical detail but light on new information. (Riley's previous books include *Tell Me Why: A Beatles Commentary* and *Hard Rain: A Dylan Commentary*.)

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Unlike Philip Norman's edgier, personality-driven *John Lennon: The Life*, published in 2008, Riley's *Lennon* finds its deepest resonance and meaningful reflections in a methodical analysis of song and verse.

"Strawberry Fields Forever plumbed the loneliness of the world's most famous man," Riley writes, calling it "the hangover that would sound utterly clichéd were it not so unguarded, so inimitably

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John Lennon: part Beatle, part loner in his own band."

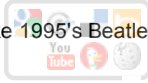
The biography is neatly and logically divided into three distinct periods — "Pre-Beatles, 1940-1959," "Beatlehood, 1960-1969" and "Beyond Beatles, 1970-1980." Riley makes his most convincing points upfront, homing in on one perceived misconception in particular.

"There's no more misleading Lennon myth than the one spun from his 1970 Working Class Hero, which every self-respecting Liverpudlian renounces as a sham," says Riley, repeatedly underscoring Lennon's "solidly middle-class" upbringing.

It was, apparently, Lennon's affinity for scouse, "a thickly accented brogue immediately recognizable as a working-class tongue, rich with suggestive street slang, its own obscenities and many colorful non sequiturs" that fed the confusion and illusion.

Riley sings many of the same tunes in the same key as other biographers, hitting all the big notes, including Lennon's abandonment issues as a child; his misogyny; his push for peace; his penchant for violence; and his battles with drugs and alcohol, the U.S. government and, most profoundly in a musical sense, with his singing/songwriting partner Paul McCartney.

As a whole, this Lennon plays much like 1995's Beatles Anthology, the massive, multipart audio, video and print collection.



There's far more about the path from here, there and everywhere than we want to know, but, spellbound, we follow nevertheless.

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By **Lakis** (Nicosia, 06, Cyprus) — 5 of 5 stars — September 17, 2011

John Lennon has always been one of my favorite musicians. I've been listening to his songs since I remember myself listening to music and I've always thought him to be a man who during his life, apart from his art, did nothing more than keep searching to find a destination, where he really wanted to [...more](#)

By **Marjorie** (Jamaica Plain, MA) — 4 of 5 stars — August 28, 2011

Tim Riley has read absolutely everything that there is to read about John Lennon – and talked to as many sources as he could – and has done so very thoughtfully. The result is a very balanced biography that manages to be fair to all the players involved – John himself, Paul McCartney, Yoko Ono, Cynt [...more](#)

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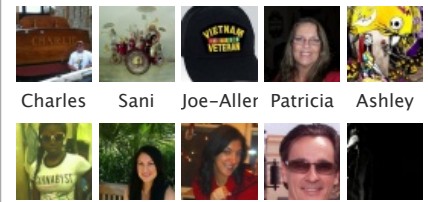
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