

[PDF] Escaping The Delta: Robert Johnson And The Invention Of The Blues

Elijah Wald - pdf download free book

Books Details:

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Author: Elijah Wald

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Description:

From Publishers Weekly In this combination history of blues music and biography of Robert Johnson, Wald, a blues musician himself (and author of *Narcorrido*), explores Johnson's rise from a little known guitarist who died in 1938 to one of the most influential artists in rock and roll. From the blues' meager beginning in the early 1900s to its '30s heyday and its 1960s revival, Wald gives a revisionist history of the music, which he feels, in many instances, has been mislabeled and misjudged. Though his writing sometimes reads like a textbook, and he occasionally gets bogged down in arcane musical references, Wald's academic precision aids him in his quest to re-analyze America's perception of the blues as well as in trying to decipher the music's murky true origins and history. Using a lengthy comparison of how white Americans and black Americans define the blues,

Wald demonstrates how Johnson fit into the gray area between the two. Wald combines a short bio of Johnson with detailed analysis of his songs and the mysterious tales that are associated with him, giving a thorough account of Johnson's life, music and legend. The chapter on how white guitarists like Eric Clapton and Keith Richards interpreted who Johnson was and what he played really shows why he is not one of the many forgotten early 20th-century bluesmen. Wald's theories will no doubt cause passionate discussions among true blues aficionados, but the technical and obscure nature of much of his writing will make the book more of a useful reference resource.

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From As far as aficionados are concerned, Johnson (1911?-38) is the central figure in blues history, whose recordings contributed "Cross Road Blues," "Rambling on My Mind," "Come on in My Kitchen," "Sweet Home Chicago," "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," "Stones in My Passway," "Hellhound on My Trail," and "Love in Vain" to the core blues repertoire. He was the man promoter John Hammond wanted to represent the blues in the epoch-making Carnegie Hall concert "From Spirituals to Swing" but too late, for a jealous husband had killed him (it was said). Subsequently dubbed "mysterious," he certainly had eluded publicity in his lifetime (that Hammond knew of him seems miraculous). Blues fan, scholar, and player Wald contends that Johnson's obscurity wasn't his fault. He wanted stardom and followed a well-blazed trail toward it, copying and borrowing from big hit-makers of the time, not all of them blues singers or black, by any means. He made little impression on the blues audience of his time, which was identical with the black pop-music audience, who considered blues, along with Armstrong and Ellington's jazz, Crosby's crooning, and Gene Autry's cowboy singing, everyday pop music. Wald doesn't treat Johnson directly until the middle of the book, when he invaluablely parses each of his recordings to disclose both borrowings and originalities. The first section describes the musical and social scenes Johnson inhabited, and the last charts how white enthusiasts seized on Johnson as the archetypal bluesman. Throughout, Wald writes better than anyone else ever has about the blues. If you read only one book about blues--maybe ever--read this one. *Ray Olson*

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