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Paul McCartney: The Life



Synopsis

The definitive Paul McCartney biography, written with his approval by bestselling biographer Philip Norman. Since the age of twenty-one, Paul McCartney has lived one of the ultimate rock-n-roll lives played out on the most public of stages. Now, Paul's story is told by rock music's foremost biographer, with McCartney's consent and access to family members and close friends who have never spoken on the record before. PAUL McCARTNEY reveals the complex character behind the façade and sheds new light on his childhood--blighted by his mother's death but redeemed by the father who introduced him to music. This is the first definitive account of Paul's often troubled partnership with John Lennon, his personal trauma after the Beatles' breakup, and his subsequent struggle to get back to the top with Wings--which nearly got him murdered in Africa and brought him nine days in a Tokyo jail. Readers will learn about his marriage to Linda, including their much-criticized musical collaboration, and a moving account of her death. Packed with new information and critical insights, PAUL MCCARTNEY will be the definitive biography of a musical legend.

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Customer Reviews

Philip Norman's new biography of Paul McCartney, *The Life* comes with McCartney's approval from McCartney. Basically he gave approval for Norman to interview many people in his life while he himself would not interfere or cooperate. So far, so good! Firstly, I must say that, for me, there are some good qualities to the biography. I like the focused structure of the short

chapters... The photos are nice and captioned accurately... The cover is also nice, but we all know that old saying... God, I must dig deeper. There are a few interesting adventures in Paul's life which are now elaborated on with the aid of fresh interviews, such as the struggle to get the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts off the ground in the 1990s; Paul's place at the centre of the Summer of Love in '67; Maggie McGivern's many insights into life as Paul's secret girl... Interesting stuff. What is equally interesting is the author's 180 degree turn from previously bashing Paul since the 1970s. Now he apparently gets what the 'cute Beatles' was and is all about. Let's see...I don't at all mind an author or critic not liking or appreciating everything that a musical legend has produced, as long as the writing is informed and does not come across as being hypocritical or insincere. One of many reasons why I continually recommend Howard Sounes' Fab biography of McCartney is that the author doesn't suck up to its subject, nor mask any dissatisfaction with some of Paul's weaker moments on and off record. But, you can tell that the writer is a full-on fan and a most curious one at that. It is also a well written and researched book. Let's begin on page one of Paul McCartney: The Life, where Philip Norman recalls that in his youth, "My daily fantasy was to swap life with a Beatle. Paul was the most obviously good looking. John, for all his magnetism could never be called that, while George had good bone structure but unsightly teeth and Ringo was... Ringo. Was poor Philip the most grotesque looking kid in school? Was he told that he was ugly by the sweetheart of his dreams? We don't know. Sure, kids can be silly and shallow, but most of us develop beyond such trivia and fantasies as we grow. We get over it. What we do know is that Norman is just one year younger than McCartney, so he was harbouring these feelings when he was nineteen or twenty, not nine or ten. One comment from Norman which I found particularly interesting, early on in the book, was this, which I gather refers to his totally imbalanced and ludicrous point of view in his 'Shout' bio of the Beatles, published in 1981 - "If I'm honest, all those years I'd spent wishing to be him had left me feeling in some obscure way that I needed to get my own back. To me, that seems a rather peculiar and narcissistic trait which has seemingly done no service to Norman as an author, nor as a man. On the other hand, Paul, his subject, could put the writer's previous failings and insults aside to give a distant approval to him writing this 816 page biography. I like factual books on the Beatles, so I, not surprisingly, love the Special Extended Edition of Mark Lewisohn's Tune in. Philip Norman recently declared on a Beatles radio show (Something About the Beatles) that he had discovered Lewisohn, who had been a mere office clerk before he had been taken on board as a researcher for Norman's Shout biography of the Beatles. Norman, in his own words, had created a monster in Lewisohn, who went on to write books overloaded with factual information at the expense of telling a story. Is that a fact?

Read Tune In (the extended edition) and you will discover the greatest story ever told, beautifully written, while enjoying a factual and meticulously researched account of history. The pupil became the master, by all evidence. If you seek an accurate account and understanding of the Beatles' Irish roots, go to Tune In and steer clear of Norman's laughable, ignorant and safely brief account. Here is an example of how a ten year old might write and better present an essay on McCartney's Celtic roots. On page 25, Norman informs us that - "the Scots and Irish) overlap in numerous ways, from their shared Gaelic language to their fondness for whiskey and the passion and sentimentality of their native music, which both make with the aid of bagpipes... One of the most controversial songs Paul ever wrote was 'Give Ireland Back to the Irish' " yet in truth his forebears were deprived of their homeland willingly enough. "Willingly enough"? I get the impression that Philip is too cool for school. He also appears to be either unaware or dismissive of a horrific famine which forced millions to flee to ports such as Liverpool and New York in utter desperation. Instead he mentions Ireland's horrific poverty... Thanks for the all too brief history lesson there, Philip. By the way, the Irish equivalent of bagpipes are uilleann pipes. For the simplest of history lessons regarding Ireland under British occupation, I would recommend listening to John's song, Luck of the Irish (the version without the Yoko parts, of course). Let's stick with bagpipes for a moment. At the time when Mull of Kintyre was fast becoming Britain's best selling single in 1977 (knocking She Loves You off the top spot), Norman penned and published a wee verse in the Sunday Times which went so - "Oh, deified Scouse with unmusical spouse For the cliches and cloy you unload, To the anodyne tune may they bury you soon In the middle-most midst of the road. " Did Paul and Linda happen to read that at the time? Probably. Now, in Norman's book, he has nothing but admiration for Paul for releasing a Scottish waltz with bagpipes during the height of the Punk scene in the charts. Now Norman gets it. I'm all for people finally seeing the light and realising that there was perhaps a lot of merit and balls and gifted talent to an artist, but I sense no sincerity in Norman's awakening what so ever. By the way, the song is not "based on only two chords. " The 1970s, in particular, are littered with inaccuracies and old myths in the book. Norman has obviously not bothered to read or believe May Pang's account of her time with John, who was not at the Dakota when the ex-Beatles were due to sign the dissolution papers in the Plaza Hotel in '74 and Ringo wasn't even in New York at the time. There are examples in each and every chapter of lazy researching but what does the entire book more damage than that is the recurring evidence that Norman is not a curious author. While Mark Lewisohn's presence in the pages of Tune In is minimal and warm when noticed, Norman's prose and smarmy voice is annoying and often baffling throughout the McCartney biography. Norman

doesn't appear to like the song, Band on the Run, for instance. Fair enough, but - The 'Sailor Sam' had evidently been left on the beach since Yellow Submarine. What? Do better, please. When seemingly everything in a life is described on the page as being ironic or odd, one wonders what a grasp of life experience the writer has had, aside from wanting to be the cutest Beatle when he was twenty years old. Oh the irony, that not everything about Paul's incredible life has been so ironic or odd. These are just some personal peeves about the book, but what is even more frustrating is the sloppiness of the writing, editing and research. Solo albums are given incorrect years of release; She is printed as being he; there are at least a dozen typos... Am I being too picky for a book which is being billed as THE book on McCartney? Norman claims to have had eleven expert researchers fact check this book meticulously. It is an impressive list of names, but they were either drunk or just didn't give a damn for nothing more than a pay cheque and a name check if they can't spot the most obvious of errors. Were any of them at all familiar with the John song, 'Now and Then'? It's an unfinished beauty from the late '70s which was given to Paul, George and Ringo to finish off for the Anthology in the '90s. Unfortunately they never got to complete it. George apparently didn't like the song. In Norman's book this song is titled 'Here and There'. Now and Then is Here and There. How careless and lazy can an author, eleven paid Beatles experts and a publisher get? I mention such stupid and insulting mistakes to give an impression of the care and research which was not at all invested in this book. It doesn't end there. Norman later describes McCartney's concerts in the U.S. in 2002, when Heather Mills was firmly in the picture - Every night on the tour, Paul dedicated the song 'Heather' to her with its declaration of undying love, 'I could spend eternity inside your loving flame'. There is even a clue as to the correct title of the song in the lyric which is quoted by the author! The melodic joy in song, 'Heather' from Driving Rain has never, sadly, been performed live. 'Your Loving Flame' had been performed every night on that tour. This is nothing less than yet another example of utter carelessness by a sloppy author in a hurry to make amends with Paul fans while presenting us with a bouquet of plastic flowers wrapped in yellowed newsprint. Also, does the divorce from Heather really deserve eighty or so pages? Surely there are more interesting avenues down the rabbit holes to explore than how much money he has or has not accumulated from his own talents over the years. So, the author doesn't manage to get the titles of songs right. He also misquotes lyrics from songs, but does he get the music? Let's take a look at the McCartney album from 1970 as an example - There was a puzzling emphasis on guitar-led instrumentals whose underlying message seemed to be 'Anything George can do, I can do better.' What is so puzzling about Paul playing guitar on a solo album? Had he not already proved himself to be a

mighty fine guitarist on so many Beatles records? Does the same go for the emphasis of drums on the album? Was he attempting to outshine Ringo behind a kit, or simply enjoying playing? 'Maybe I'm Amazed' is described as - a soaring ballad whose unspoken eroticism matched the best of Cole Porter. What? It certainly is unspoken. There is little exploration of Paul's music in the book, by the way. Some episodes are stale in their inaccuracy by now, such as the time George left the group during the Let it Be sessions in January '69. We are all familiar with the footage of Paul and George having a heated, almost head on collision in front of the cameras, so we might well assume that George left the group because of Paul's seemingly dominant attitude. But, for an author to accept that story, it displays laziness and a complete lack of research, when there is a much more revealing story to tell. Even when the Beatles were not being filmed during those sessions, much of their conversation and rehearsals were recorded, and later brilliantly documented, day by day, take by take, in the book, *Get Back* "The Beatles' Let it Be Disaster", by Doug Sulpy and Ray Schweighardt. Paul and George are as much to blame as lazy writers are for the misconception that George left because of a falling out with Paul. They both said so in the Anthology, but I would imagine that they would rather have forgotten the details of the time. The details, recorded on tape, reveal that they had that particular conflict on January 6th 1969. Within an hour of that occurring they were merry on booze and singing Dylan songs. They both compromised and realised that they had hurt each other. They then united and had a go at John, their leader, who was suddenly not producing many new songs or communicating much at all. It was actually worse the following day. George's apathy toward the group in general was alarming and it is surprising that they even made it to January 10th, when he finally walked out because of an argument with John. George did feel bossed about by Paul, because their General had taken a hit. No pun on heroin use intended there, but Yoko was also speaking for John, while distracting him from his duties in the band, and that was too much, understandably, for George to accept. For me, that would be a more interesting and fresh read than the same old lazy story. That is a major issue with Norman's book. He doesn't bother to explore many rabbit holes. He just prances on by them, noting where they are and missing opportunities. It may be of comfort to George fans to know that Norman does not plan to follow this trash with a bio of him next. George is (according to Norman) far too grim and humourless a character to write about in depth. Check out the bitter and bitchy obituary that he penned for George. We can't blame Philip Norman alone for the factual error regarding George leaving the Beatles, which most likely won't be corrected in stone until Mark Lewisohn gets to (God willing) eventually complete his third of a trilogy of unique books. Perhaps Norman should have bothered to study office clerk Lewisohn's book, *The Complete*

Recording Sessions, to discover if the session for You Know My Name (Look Up the Number) was in fact the last time that John and Paul ever had fun together in a studio. There is a much less trivial moment in Norman's biography where he half laments the realisation that, after John's murder, Paul would have to live with the simplistic and false perception that John had been the experimental and deep one, while Paul would forever more be viewed to have been the safe and shallow one.

~The guy who just booked the studio~*, as Yoko would later put it. That ridiculous perception was due, in large part, to Philip Norman's Shout book from 1981, which, as I see it, sent Paul off on a decade or two of trying to justify himself and his artistic achievements in interview after interview, to the point that he felt the need to redress the perceived balance of creativity within the Beatles in the book, Many Years From Now. Norman's latest account of Paul and his life does not read as being a sincere assessment of a most incredible life and career. I get the impression that the author is biting his tongue while numbly repenting for previous sins of ignorance. I remember well, watching Sky News in 1992 as Paul's 50th Birthday was being celebrated. Norman was on a panel of talking heads, remarking that Paul's Liverpool Oratorio classical work was rubbish and that, perhaps, to save face and all that, it would be an appropriate time for Paul to retire, with what little grace he still had left. This says a lot about the author's judgement and knowledge of his book's subject. As recently as 2003, Norman had this to say in an open letter to Paul, published in the Daily Mail - ~Recently, you refused a music industry lifetime achievement award because you said it implied your career was over and you had nothing left to give to music. But hanging onto youth is only part of the reason why, despite all your colossal achievements, you continued to push yourself to such an extent, touring for months on end and pumping out records as well as writing classical symphonies, exhibiting your (not very good) paintings and publishing your (at best mediocre) poetry. It seems you cannot rest until you've persuaded us that our typecasting of The Beatles all those years ago was so completely wrong; that you weren't just the 'nice' one while John Lennon was the arty and edgy one; that you can do anything John ever did, and still more.~* As I pointed out, the typecasting of John and Paul is in large part Norman's own fault. Another point to make in relation to Norman's opinions in the quote above, it that in his new biography, he praises and compares one of Paul's poems about the loss of Linda to the lyric of 'Yesterday', although he bites his tongue and passes no opinion on his paintings when they were finally exhibited. So, it has taken the author 35 years to conveniently come round to the fact that Lennon was not ~ of the Beatles. I found it to be in extremely bad taste that he would pull such nasty punches on Paul just after John's murder. They were cheap shots from a s*** writer out to make a quick buck and to mislead readers. He has made a career out of bashing Paul for decades while also turning Lennon

fans against Paul and Paul's fans. He still doesn't get it, no matter how hard he may try to convince the reader that he does. He may claim to be a fan but he displays himself to be more of a narcissistic and insincere child with deeper lingering issues than who might be the prettiest Beatle to become. He has become a jaded old man who seemingly doesn't care (along with his team of eleven fact checkers) for the difference between a fact and a fib-fest of sloppy errors, which gives just an iota of the regard which he has for his profession and his subject. There is a most telling end to the book... Spoiler alert, as if you didn't see this coming. Norman gets to meet Paul backstage before a concert in Liverpool last May. Paul instantly remembers him and shakes his hand, before getting a vibe and wishing him well before moving on to greet others. Norman then watches the concert and... well... After three hours on my feet, I decide I've had enough and head for the exit. But inside the Echo Arena no one else is going anywhere. "You're not leaving are you?" Says the elderly security man who unbars a door for me. "He's still got another six songs to do." There are two main characters in this book. One is Paul McCartney and the other is Philip Norman. One you might like. One you may loath. Nice cover though!

If your only reason for not buying this book is because you've read Shout! and hence got exposed to Norman's bias against McCartney, then do buy it because Norman's perceptions on McCartney's gone through some massive changes. This is a great, comprehensive bio if you're mainly interested in Paul's life. If you're interested in The Beatles as a whole, go with Lewisohn's Tune In.

It appears that Mr. Norman hasn't updated his research since writing SHOUT! all those years ago. This book reflects none of the new information uncovered by Mark Lewisohn. Norman doggedly recounts the accepted but now discredited mythology of George Martin signing The Beatles to Parlophone. He repeats the accusation that the publishers Ardmore and Beechwood did nothing to promote "Love Me Do", when in fact Kim Bennett expended a great deal of effort in getting the record played on BBC and Radio Luxembourg while George Martin, who didn't like or believe in the record, did nothing to promote it. Norman describes Geoff Emerick as having been involved in all Beatle EMI recordings from their first session in June 1962 until Emerick left during the White Album sessions. Emerick did indeed work as a tape operator in a few of the earliest recordings and a smattering of sessions afterwards, but he was by no means involved in every session or album. It wasn't until Norman Smith decided not to engineer The Beatles' recordings and George Martin tapped Emerick to take his place during spring of 1966 that Emerick was regularly involved in each session. A shocking inaccuracy occurs as Norman recounts George Harrison's quitting the band

during the Get Back sessions. Those tapes have been available online for years, and the walkout occurred on January 10, 1969 following a disagreement between John and George while they were at lunch. The group returns from lunch and George is heard to say, "I'll be leaving the band now." John asks when, and George replies, "Now" and walks out. Rather than researching or listening to this recording of the session, Norman relies on the released Let It Be film, stating that George walked out after a disagreement with Paul over Paul's telling George what to play. This disagreement occurred a couple of days earlier, so Norman has the wrong argument, on the wrong day, for the wrong reasons, apparently unaware that the factual information is readily available, and has been for decades. This is shoddy, lazy research. These are a bare handful of the many inaccuracies in the book. They are shockingly numerous. Norman's editorial opinions show even less insight. Noting George Harrison's ragged 1974 tour and disappointing Dark Horse album, Norman states that it had become clear that what little talent Harrison had apparently rubbed off from John and Paul. Apparently, Harrison's 1987 artistic and commercial success Cloud Nine, his work with Traveling Wilburys, and his posthumously released masterpiece Brainwashed, either don't count or Norman hasn't heard. While reading about times in McCartney's life about which I know little, I'm reluctant to put any stock in what is being written. Norman is correct that McCartney is deserving of a definitive biography. Sadly, Norman chose not to make the effort of producing one.

Philip Norman's PAUL MCCARTNEY, THE LIFE is the latest in the never-ending string of biographies on Sir James Paul McCartney, MBE. It's also probably the longest, topping out at 853 pages! Depending on how much you've read on Macca, Norman's book might be the definitive, absolute-bestest bio on McCartney or a rather tedious recounting of the life and times of this most talented songster. Norman dutifully takes the reader through the ups and downs of Liverpool's most famous musician/singer/songwriter. He's mined all the usual sources and added material from Macca and some others who haven't been tapped in the past or been willing to previously talk on record. The result is an exhaustive and exhausting record of a life well lived. Norman's book may indeed be the definitive biography of McCartney. Having read tons of books on the Beatles as a group and individually, I didn't find much new in the book. Norman did have some insightful comments regarding Paul but, overall, I found PAUL MCCARTNEY, THE LIFE a rather joyless 'long and winding road.' McCartney's life doesn't come alive, it's just rehashed. Nowhere is there a spark of the magic and joy and excitement that McCartney and his music and his life brought to the world. Your call, folks.

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