



Dig If You Will the Picture: Funk, Sex, God and Genius in the Music of Prince

Ben Greenman

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A unique and kaleidoscopic look into the life, legacy, and electricity of the pop legend Prince and his wideranging impact on our culture

Ben Greenman, New York Times bestselling author, contributing writer to the New Yorker, and owner of thousands of recordings of Prince and Prince-related songs, knows intimately that there has never been a rock star as vibrant, mercurial, willfully contrary, experimental, or prolific as Prince. Uniting a diverse audience while remaining singularly himself, Prince was a tireless artist, a musical virtuoso and chameleon, and a pop-culture prophet who shattered traditional ideas of race and gender, rewrote the rules of identity, and redefined the role of sex in pop music.

A polymath in his own right who collaborated with George Clinton and Questlove on their celebrated memoirs, Greenman has been listening to and writing about Prince since the mid-eighties. Here, with the passion of an obsessive fan and the skills of a critic, journalist, and novelist, he mines his encyclopedic knowledge of Prince's music to tell both his story and the story of the paradigm-shifting ideas that he communicated to his millions of fans around the world. Greenman's take on Prince is the autobiography of a generation and its ideas. Asking a series of questions--not only "Who was Prince?" but "Who wasn't he?" and "Who are we?"--Dig if You Will the Picture is a fitting tribute to an extraordinary talent.

Dig If You Will the Picture: Funk, Sex, God and Genius in the Music of Prince Details

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From Reader Review Dig If You Will the Picture: Funk, Sex, God and Genius in the Music of Prince for online ebook

ElphaReads says

Like many people, the day that Prince died was a day that absolutely devastated me. Not only was he our hometown hero here in Minneapolis, he was a musical genius whose music will live on to be remembered as extraordinary. To say the very least. And yes, this Minnesotan has her own 'Prince Story', one that I will tell through the ages (it involves me, my job at a museum, and getting totally flustered when Prince came up to me to ask me a question). When I heard about DIG IF YOU WILL THE PICTURE by Ben Greenman, I was pretty interested to pick it up.

DIG IF YOU WILL THE PICTURE is an examination of Prince, his persona, bits of his life, but mostly his music. His career started in the 80s and was continuously reimagining itself and changing, and his artistry has few peers or comparisons. This book examines his music and the meaning behind it, as well as the process that Prince took to compose it and the way that it influenced his life as well as the music world as a whole.

I don't know that much about music, to be honest. I've played flute, guitar, and sang in choirs, but I can't say that I'm very versed in it. But I know that I love Prince's music, and so while the structural examinations that Greenman did didn't mean that much to me, I loved reading about the songs. I also really liked how Greenman examined not only the social and personal themes that Prince put in his music, but also the acts that he promoted and took under his tutelage. There is definitely a lot to say about race, gender, and sexuality in his music, and seeing it all laid out and dissected was interesting to read. I was kind of hoping for more about his background and his life, but he was such a private person that I'm not totally surprised that Greenman didn't have much to go off of (I assume). To frame the focus on his music was probably for the best.

I think that people who are a bit more musically inclined will get more from this book, but the anecdotes and the stories behind the songs were entertaining to this Prince fan.

Bookforum Magazine says

"It was almost as if Prince were competing with the medium that was most like him—each of them teeming with near-infinite content, much of it naked and moaning, a stream that never stops running, at all hours of the day.

But any account that stresses Prince's solitary inventiveness misses the other crucial wellspring, as captured in the slogan of the long-standing free-jazz group the Art Ensemble of Chicago: "Great Black Music, Ancient to the Future."

His catch-me-if-you-can reclusiveness reads now more like a superstar living his black life, mainly in black circles, and sidestepping the blanching efforts of the mainstream glare. No question he was an eccentric within a tradition. There was a hall of mirrors, but it had specific reflection in it.

He also writes excellently about Prince's sojourns into film, and his section about Prince's mainly antagonistic relationship with would-be parodists stands out as an original contribution."

–Carl Wilson on Ben Greenman's Dig If You Will the Picture: Funk, Sex, God and Genius in the Music of Prince in the April/May 2017 issue of Bookforum

To read the rest of this review, please go to Bookforum:
http://bookforum.com/inprint/024_01/1...

Julie says

Dig if you Will, The Picture: Funk, Sex, God and Genius in the Music of Prince by Ben Greenman is a 2017 Henry Holt & Company publication.

‘Science-fiction authors have played around with the idea of extreme longevity and what effect it might have on the human psyche, speculating that if humans lived to be a thousand years old, they’d be so preoccupied with protecting that lifespan, that they would never even cross the street. Prince took the opposite tack, and then some.’

Before you begin reading this book, be sure to take note of these words in the title: ‘The Music of Prince’.

This is NOT a biography, but more of a fan driven homage to Prince and his music with many interesting and thought -provoking insights. However, it rarely delves too deeply into the personal life of Prince.

Having said that, it would be impossible to ignore some personal aspects, and to leave them out entirely would have been a big mistake, but, when the time came to address those issues, the author gave the least amount of information possible, and did not linger on them for long. In fact, it was almost as if it made him squirm and he wanted to gloss it over and move on as quickly as possible.

So, if you are looking for a definitive biography that digs deeply into the life of this iconic musician, as well as his musical talents, this is not the book you are looking for.

However, if you are a rabid fan- loved Prince’s music, style, fashion, and mystique and would like to take a closer look at his musical influence and public life, this book will give you plenty to reminisce about.

For me, this book was a like skipping down memory lane. I was reminded of so many Prince moments I’d forgotten all about overtime, and discovered others I was totally unaware of.

To be honest, I liked Prince, enjoyed his music and aura, but at best, I was only a casual fan. Still who could forget the VMA when he wore those yellow ‘assless’ pants?

Have you ever watched that awkward interview he did with Dick Clark on American Bandstand? I had not. In fact, I never even knew Prince had made an appearance on the show. You have to look that up on YouTube.

From a nostalgic standpoint, these reminders of Prince’s early career moments are fun pop culture snapshots that show how his styles and music changed and developed over the course of time.

But, this is not just a book packed with trivial ‘fan book’ facts. The author goes into deeper discussions about the themes represented in the music, as well as career highs and lows, who he was influenced by, his need for control and his battles for individuality, while maintaining a mass appeal to such an incredibly broad

audience.

**“One bear said,
‘Did you hear about Rustam?’
He has become famous
And travels from city to city
In a golden cage;**

**He preforms to hundreds of people
Who laugh and applaud
His carnival
Stunts.”**

**The other bear thought for
A few seconds
Then started
Weeping”**

Hafiz

This book explores song meanings, sexuality, spirituality, and race, but also highlights life on the road, performances, and Prince’s fight with recording studios and for the rights to his songs, the snafu over copyrights in the age of the internet and the integrity of his art, the importance of his privacy and how he did things, for better or worse, in the way he thought was best, and would grant him the creative license he needed.

Knowing what we know now, this book could have had a sad, melancholy tone, but it doesn’t. It steers far from the very dark and still secretive life of Prince and stays focused, as much as possible, on his music and career.

The only downside, is that in this author’s eyes, Prince could do no wrong, and so everything he did or said was given a positive spin with some excuses stretching the limits just a wee bit, and it appears that the author is still trying to wrap his head around the darker areas of his idol’s life, still clinging to that persona he has etched in his memory.

However, to this day, my favorite memory of Prince- is the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame ceremony when he joined Tom Petty on a star- studded stage and literally blew everyone away with his guitar solo in “*My Guitar Gently Weeps*” I am amazed. The guy was absolutely incredible.

<https://youtu.be/efhIDbZ4SmY>

Even though I’m not necessarily the targeted audience for this type of book, I did find enjoy the exploration of the music and the unique perspectives given of Prince’s professional journey.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is a big fan, for the pop culture enthusiast, or for those who

might wish to take an in depth look at Prince's art and music without it being bogged down by too much personal drama.

3.5 stars

Jamie Lyon says

Short on facts, long on opinions. Just not what I was expecting.

Juan Canas says

A fan boy's overview of Prince's musical career.

I didn't come away from it feeling like I knew Prince any better but he's a talented writer so it was an easy read.

Sam Baber says

Even though Greenman's approach can appear scattered at times, this is an indispensable text for the long time Prince lover or the curious who want to explore the genius of his music. Strongly recommend having the songs discussed playing in real time while you read about them for a richer experience.

Erin says

This not a biography.

If you are looking for a biography about the life of Prince I would recommend Prince's ex-wife Mayte Garcia's book.

Dig If You Will The Picture is an analytical and intellectual look at Prince's impact on music, film, fashion, and culture. Ben Greenman is obviously a stan. He makes no attempt to hide his superfandom. If you are interested in taking a deep dive inside the music of Prince than I would recommend this, but if you want a more traditional look at the world of Prince there are other books for that.

Missy Michaels says

Not what I expected. I should have read the cover of the book better. I was drawn in by the cool picture and the cool title because I enjoy reading biographies. This is not that. My first clue was when I flipped to the center to look at the pages filled with photos documenting the life of the book subject and there weren't any.

If you want to read a book just basically about Prince's music then you will enjoy this. If you actually want to read a biography about Prince then you probably will not.

Anita Dawson says

I love reading the background genius of the Purple One. So many artists have benefited because of his genius. As the author indicated that the flowers that Prince planted in his garden are continuing to grow in the music that we listen to today.

Jessica Joye says

I would like to begin this review by saying this book took almost a week longer for me to finish than other books, and it's only 261 pages. I will not let how long it took to read it color my review though. That being said, this isn't a binge-readable book to me. It took forever to get through it simply because a great majority of it was boring. It sometimes read as an overtly drawn out high school essay. But I still give it a three star rating despite that, because I appreciate what Greenman did with this book. For starters, the people complaining that this book was all about Prince's music rather than his life, have missed the point. Prince was an immensely private person. Prince did not want people to know his everyday life behind the scenes. All Prince wanted to show of himself was his music, and what he did onstage. That is all he left us. Prince was a man plagued by feelings of narcissism, and self-hatred, cycling throughout his music career. I think Greenman did an amazing job showing that Prince was a complex man. He was incredibly controlling, at times abusive, and difficult. And that is what made Prince the music idol he was. I would also like to thank Greenman for writing this. Sometimes when icons die, people immediately try to cash in on the tragedy by craping out a book about the person. I feel Greenman understood Prince was, at times, unbearable, yet he was such a huge fan, he never stopped loving him. I feel he would of wrote this book even if Prince was still alive, and I have great respect for that.

Megan says

Well written account of Princes music, gives some insight of the man but is definitely not a biography

Alicen says

Just pre-ordered my copy!

Simon Sweetman says

Great writing, really great writing. And a wise - thoughtful - look back at the genius and mystery and magic of Prince.

Meg says

There was something about this book that I do not think any other Prince book I could ever read will ever touch, the personal aspect. I don't mean the person aspect in regards to actually knowing Prince. What I mean is the actual personal aspect as a fan. Greenman is truly a fan of Prince and it shows in every word on the page. From the personal stories he tells, to the history of the artist, Dig If You Will the Picture is a true love letter to Prince from Greenman. It is also a love letter from Greenman to other fans. I found myself smiling through most of this book because there was a bond between the author and the reader. So many times I felt myself thinking, yeah, you understood him too, didn't you? It's a nice feeling to have when you're the only 27 year old you know obsessed with Prince. Thank you Greenman for an amazing look at Prince, his music, his life, and yourself as a fan.

Longer review coming soon!
