



Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth

John Szwed

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“Revelatory . . . one of the most briskly revealing pieces of jazz biography that I’ve read.” —Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*

When Billie Holiday first stepped into a recording studio in November 1933, it marked the beginning of what is arguably the most remarkable and influential career in twentieth-century popular music. Her voice weathered countless shifts in popular taste, and today new reincarnations of her continue to arrive, most recently in the form of singers like Amy Winehouse and Adele.

Most of the writing on Holiday has focused on the tragic details of her life—her prostitution at the age of fourteen, her heroin addiction and alcoholism, her series of abusive relationships—or tried to correct the many fabrications of her autobiography. But *Billie Holiday* strips away the myths and puts her music front and center, staying close to her artistry, her performance style, and the self she created and put on record and onstage.

Drawing on a vast amount of new material that has surfaced in the last decade, critically acclaimed jazz writer and musician John Szwed presents not just a biography, but a meditation on Billie Holiday’s art and its relation to her life. Along the way, he illuminates her influences, her uncanny voice and rhythmic genius, her signature songs—including *Strange Fruit* and *God Bless the Child*—and her enduring legacy as the greatest jazz singer of all time.

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