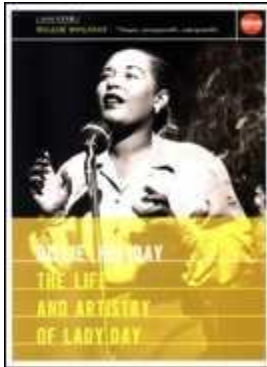



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## Billie Holiday: The Life And Artistry Of Lady Day

**MVD Visual** // 2003 // 28 Minutes // Not Rated  
Reviewed by Judge Victor Valdivia // May 28th, 2009

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Judge Victor Valdivia has got his own. God bless him.



### Scales of Justice

**Judgment:** 40

### Perp Profile

**Studio:** [MVD Visual](#)

**Video Formats:**

- Full Frame

**Audio Formats:**

- PCM 2.0 Stereo (English)

**Subtitles:**

- None

**Running Time:** 28 Minutes

**Release Year:** 2003

**MPAA Rating:** Not Rated

**Genres:**

- [Bad](#)
- [Concerts and Musicals](#)
- [Documentary](#)

### Distinguishing Marks

- Film Clips
- Discography
- Lyrics
- Bibliography
- Songlist

### Accomplices

- None

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### The Charge

Unique, incomparable, unforgettable.

### The Case

**Billie Holiday: The Life & Artistry of Lady Day** clocks in at 28 minutes. That's right, 28 minutes of film clips spliced together with narration and archival photos. Yes, the clips are remarkable and wonderful to see. Yes, the biographical content tells Holiday's life story concisely and sensitively. Honestly, though, 28 minutes? To say this is a superficial and rushed look at Holiday's extraordinary music and life doesn't even begin to cover it. This appears to be some sort of half-hour British TV special that was meant to serve as a very basic introduction to Holiday. On that level, it works. With such meager content, though, it's just not much more than that, even with some great songs.

Those songs, of course, are the main reason anyone would be interested in this DVD at all. There's some extraordinary footage of Holiday singing classics like "Strange Fruit," "God Bless the Child," "Lover Man," and others. However, these are brief clips that are so heavily edited in order to fit into the program's running time that they don't really give a full portrait of Holiday's outstanding talent. There are some tantalizing excerpts from some of Holiday's rare TV appearances, but because they're only snippets,



they're far more frustrating than enlightening. Similarly, the narration gives only a cursory overview of her life and how it related to her music, relating only the most important events without really explaining them or going into much detail. For instance, it describes that she had a troubled relationship with several of her collaborators and husbands. Why were those relationships troubled? What effect did her horrific childhood—her absent father, abusive mother, and her experience being raped and prostituted as a teen—have on her ability to make lasting connections? The show doesn't say, mainly because it can't; it's too short. With no interviews with anyone, such as people who knew Holiday or critics who can explain her artistic career, this DVD is simply too skimpy to serve as much more than a brief sampler of clips for fans.

The extras, such as they are, don't help much. The only truly significant ones are excerpts from the film **New Orleans** (1947), in which Holiday played a singing maid opposite Louis Armstrong. There are four songs presented here: "Do You Know What It Means To Miss New Orleans?" (two versions), "Farewell to Storyville," and "The Blues Are Brewin'." Unfortunately, these again are not complete performances—they're either interrupted by dialogue or the rest of the cast joins in, drowning out Holiday. The rest of the extras are all text-based but not at all useful. The discography and bibliography are both woefully incomplete, the lyrics are only for one song—"Strange Fruit"—and the songlist only includes the handful of songs Holiday actually co-wrote herself. The archival footage clearly hasn't been remastered or cleaned up in any way, and since there's no new footage at all, viewers will have to get used to looking at scuffed-up old clips.

For a DVD devoted to such an important artist, **Billie Holiday: The Life & Artistry of Lady Day** is simply too meager to be worth much. Holiday was and remains one of the most important singers in music, not just in jazz, but this DVD isn't going to do much to benefit anyone unless you're really desperate to hear the **New Orleans** material. Both newcomers and longtime fans do better to track down the **Billie Holiday—Ultimate Collection** DVD, which has complete performances, and hope that someday someone will put together a far more thorough and comprehensive documentary on Holiday's life and career.



#### The Verdict

Guilty of doing a disservice to a worthy subject by just slapping together some paltry content.

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