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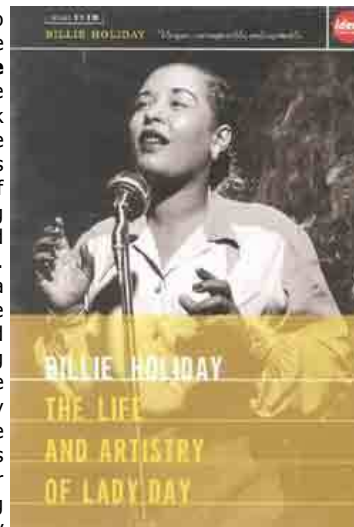
## Billie Holiday: The Life and Artistry of Lady Day

Score: **70%**  
 Rating: **Not Rated**  
 Publisher: **MVD Entertainment Group**  
 Region: **A**  
 Media: **DVD/1**  
 Running Time: **65 Mins.**  
 Genre: **Documentary/Historical/Musical**  
 Audio: **Stereo Sound**  
 Subtitles: **Closed Captioned**

### Features:

- Film: The Life of Billie Holiday
- Discography
- Books
- Strange Fruit (lyrics)
- Scenes of New Orleans (film)
- Billie's Compositions

I'm probably guilty of making too many references to Greek theater, but tragedy and comedy just make great analogies. In the case of this documentary, **Billie Holiday: The Life and Artistry of Lady Day**, there is an obvious force at work that fans of ancient Greek playwrights will recognize immediately. Comedy in the classic sense isn't the slapstick and go-for-laughs material we apply that label to currently, but a series of terrible events that test a protagonist before resolving in his favor. Tragedy was the flip side of the coin, a bad ride getting worse that the protagonist never escapes. Modern celebrities as a majority play out their lives in a fashion that the Greeks would have recognized as pure Comedy; Hollywood tell-alls have exposed troubled childhoods, substance abuse problems, conniving family members, or periodic financial ruin behind the facade of modern glitzy stars. There have certainly been celebrities ruined by these circumstances, but the larger trend seems to be that the public feeds on this misfortune, and that celebs actually profit from their trashy circumstances. Tabloid media and surrounding entertainment, online or through television reality shows, give celebrities a great platform for trotting out their messy lives and personalities. This has even led to the creation of the non-celebrity whose life is entertaining simply for being a hot mess, such as the *Real Housewives* of your choice...



**Billie Holiday: The Life and Artistry of Lady Day** showcases a star that lived too soon before celebrity media found its current enlightened state. The larger implications of racism and prejudice aren't handled here, which is a strange oversight considering how **Billie Holiday** polarized audiences with her anti-lynching polemic, "Strange Fruit." White artists like Frank Sinatra, even while they were known for some "bad behavior," carefully cultivated their star status through music and film appearances. **The Life and Artistry of Lady Day** shows Holiday at the height of her career cast as a maid in the 1947 movie *New Orleans*. The contrast could not be more stark, but it goes without much comment in the documentary. The problems with **Billie Holiday: The Life and Artistry of Lady Day** could easily have been solved by incorporating at least a few interviews with musical figures that inherited Holiday's legacy or played with her before her death. Other than clips from movies and films starring **Billie Holiday**, the content of this documentary is straight monologue. This creates a very flat viewing experience and also leaves some big question marks behind statements made without a corresponding historical records or testimonials.

If you've been a dedicated jazz fan, it's likely you've already seen much of the footage edited down for this documentary. The special features are mostly research items, readily available through Wikipedia or similar sources. Vocal jazz devotees and those interested in collecting **Billie Holiday** will appreciate this package, but we question the merit of including snippets from a socially stunted product like the *New Orleans* movie; the narrator even comments that **Lady Day** was upset by the choice to cast her as a maid. Other material that should have been expanded and clarified is the early period in Holiday's life; we instead get a quick overview with some questionable inference by the narrator (e.g. Billie's family situation leading to her sense of not being loved...). Knowing that **Billie Holiday** was raped when she was 10, arrested for prostitution when she was 14, and abused by various men (sexually or financially) for much of her early life is more than benchmarking. These are things that we really want to know about the artist. Unlike celebrities of today, Holiday never was able to parlay drugs and sex into any kind of career capital... Her stardom was a function of real talent, and that talent was capped severely by her personal and professional demons. **Billie Holiday: The Life and Artistry of**



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**Lady Day** is a decent introduction to the artist, but relatively unsatisfying for serious students of this woman, her work, and her place in jazz history. Good as a rental, or for the serious collector only.

-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications AKA Matt Paddock

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