

FLYIN' OFF THE SHELVES

The Best Pop Culture Books of 2015

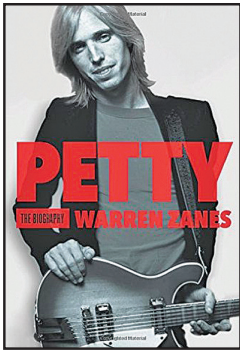
BY LEE VALENTINE SMITH

Still have a few of those gift cards left over from the holidays? So why not trade that impersonal token of obligation into a treasure you'll savor all year. Books are truly your best entertainment value. INsite looks back at the very best of 2015's pop culture books.

BEST ROCK AND ROLL BIOGRAPHY

Petty: The Biography, Warren Zanes (Henry Holt and Co.)

Behind the utilitarian title is a wonderfully detailed story of Tom Petty, the man and the musician. Written by friend and fan Warren Zanes, a cool musician himself (Del Feugos) and a very talented storyteller. A treasure for the Petty fan, the book is an enthralling read, packed with the best and worst aspects of being an incredibly successful entertainer in any field.



Runner up, John Fogerty: My Life, My Music, John Fogerty (Little, Brown and Company)

BEST PERSONAL MEMOIR

A Carlin Home Companion, Kelly Carlin (St. Martin's Press)

Even if you weren't a fan of influential comedian George Carlin, this emotional memoir by his daughter is a must-have. It's her story, presented honestly. Her candid and intelligent insights on being raised in an iconoclastic family is an often hilarious and heart-breaking adventure. Her natural knack for storytelling and remarkable strength in dealing with the lives (and deaths) of her parents is the core of the story. Anyone who has lost a parent can appreciate the sincerity and scope of her intense adventures.

BEST CLASSIC ROCK LESSON

Jeff Lynne: Electric Light Orchestra – Before and After, John van der Kiste (Fonthill Media)

A meticulously detailed account of the history of ELO, mostly centering on frontman Jeff Lynne, but including necessary details on the band, its recordings and inner workings. Mostly for hardcore fans of the group and, of course, Beatle completists, but it could easily create a few new converts in the process.

BEST ROCK'N'ROLL GRIT

Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock 'N' Roll, Peter Guralnick (Little, Brown and Company)

Historian Guralnick has exhaustively covered the soulful grit of southern-born music for years, but never so pure and focused as in this mighty account of the life and times of Sam Phillips. Eccentric beyond belief, music pioneer's life is the stuff of legend - and grand fodder for a long tale of marketing success and backwoods craftiness.

BEST SONGWRITER'S TALE

Psychedelic Bubble Gum: Boyce & Hart, The Monkees, and Turning Mayhem into Miracles, Bobby Hart (Select Books)

Hart, one of the most successful songwriters of the '60s, tells his intensely personal tale of dogged dedication and incredible triumphs from his beginnings as a shy, fledgling

musician to ultra-successful music industry veteran. He wrote and played on many of the best-selling songs of the '60s and '70s, and continues to produce excellent pop music.

BEST MOVIE STAR TELL-ALL

But Enough About Me: A Memoir, Burt Reynolds (G.P. Putnam's Sons)

Playing his cards close to his chest, Reynolds writes less about himself and more about a number of important people he's encountered during his colorful career. He includes some personal friends and family, and how each one shaped his own life. Especially touching is a special chapter devoted to his "Smokey and the Bandit" co-star Sally Field, gently detailing their considerable on- and off-screen escapades.

BEST PEEK BEHIND THE SCENES

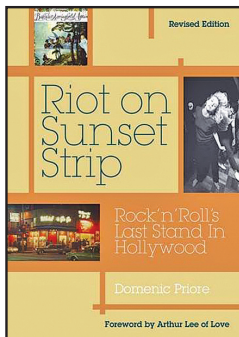
You've Heard These Hands, Don Randi (Hal Leonard)

As the title promises, you have indeed heard the handy keyboard work of session pro Don Randi. The musician offers stories of the many artists he's personalities he has the honor of playing and recording with. And of course he name-drops Elvis, The Beach Boys, Phil Spector, Nancy Sinatra, Phil Spector and many of the unsung Wall of Sound and Wrecking Crew characters.

BEST CULTURE SHOCK

Riot On Sunset Strip: Rock 'n' Roll's Last Stand In Hollywood, Dominick Priore (Revised Edition) (Jawbone)

They say great music comes from times of upheaval, and perhaps no contained area better exemplifies this than mid-'60s Hollywood. Specifically the Sunset Boulevard scene was a dynamic swirl of music, art, fashion and social change. Here author Priore follows the folk-rockers, the psychedelic experiments and the sweeping change in attitudes and culture the scene birthed some half-century ago.



BEST R&B/SOUL SURVIVAL

Sumdumhonky, Lloyd Price (Cool Titles)

The Hall of Famer tells his own story of how he and his family have lived with - and survived - racial inequalities through the years. As #blacklivesmatter becomes a sweeping panorama of current events, Sumdumhonky travels the personal backroads of the issues. Price offers a true inside look at rural racial discriminations, beginning in '30s and '40s Louisiana, continuing through '70s Africa through the tumultuous 2000's.

BEST RACONTEUR'S RAMBLINGS

A Life... Well, Lived, Ray Wylie Hubbard (Bordello)

Self-released on his own Bordello imprint, the cunning singer-songwriter-larger-than-life-character's life story is sketched out in an often non-linear narrative that occasionally eschews traditional format, punctuation and capitalization. In it, Hubbard enters ee cummings' experimental territory with the raw wanderlust of Hemmingway. This life story reels like Bob Dylan's Tarantula, spinning a wonderfully heady stroll through the mind of a true individual.

NEW RELEASES

THE LATEST DVD, BLU RAY & VOD RELEASES

By Bret Love & John Moore

AMY

By the time mainstream America knew who Amy Winehouse was, she'd started down the path of addiction that led to her untimely overdose at age 27. This exceptional documentary charts her rise and fall through her own words as well as interviews with many of her friends and family, including enabler/ex-husband Blake Fielder-Civil. It's as stunning to see the raw artistry of her early years as it is infuriating to watch that talent wasted as she proves incapable of dealing with the harsh spotlight of fame. Don't be surprised if it takes home an Oscar.



THE END OF THE TOUR

Jason Segel and Jesse Eisenberg turn in a beautifully engaging film based on a profile written for Rolling Stone. The story follows a book tour road trip writer David Lipsky (Eisenberg) took with Infinite Jest author David Foster Wallace (Segel) at the peak of his fame. There are lots of late-night conversations covering everything from Wallace's weird fascination

with Alanis Morissette to relationships. It could've been a mind-numbingly boring affair, but it soars thanks to smart writing and stellar performances.

BURROUGHS: THE MOVIE

Though he was also a longtime drug addict, Beat Generation icon William S. Burroughs wound up living to the ripe old age of 83. This 1983 documentary offers unparalleled access to one of the most influential cultural touchstones of the 20th century. Director Howard Brookner worked with Burroughs 5 years, interviewing peers such as Allen Ginsberg and Brion Gysin and charting the author's life from the American Midwest to North Africa. Like Amy, it reveals the unconventional artist in a way that adds new meaning to his art.

THE COMPLETE LADY SNOWBLOOD

Based on a manga called Shurayukihime,

SCORPIONS: FOREVER AND A DAY

These German rockers may not be name-checked by many young metal groups looking to up their street cred. But the band has been rocking you like a hurricane for decades. Here, filmmakers document the band's 3-year farewell tour, which kicked off in 2010. Several former band members talk about their time in the Scorpions, along with interviews with music industry folks, peers (Don Dokken, Paul Stanley, etc.) and, impressively, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

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