

# Johnny Cash: Ten Years After

New music releases, a documentary and a book by music critic Robert Hilburn examine *The Man in Black*

## BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

ducted into both the Country Music Hall of Fame and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, winner of a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Kennedy Center Honor, Johnny Cash on September 12, 2003 left the physical planet at the age of 71. His status in the last decade has only grown as a musical, spiritual, literary and retail influence. Cash and I have the same February 26 birthday.

The 2005 biopic on his life *Walk The Line* grossed more than \$300 million and his posthumous albums have totaled over \$130 million.

In 2006 his final studio album, *American V: A Hundred Highways* went to number 1 on both the Pop and Country charts.

In 1975 I conducted an interview with Cash in Anaheim, California for *Melody Maker* and Johnny commented about choosing songs to record and perform in his live concert repertoire.

"In concert I sing 'Sunday Morning Coming Down,' the Kris Kristofferson tune, that's so much of me that sometimes I feel like I wrote it. There are some songs that I must write for self-expression. If a song comes along I must acknowledge it. I've recently recorded a song 'Strawberry Shortcake.' It's about a guy who went into the Plaza hotel in New York and stole a cake. It's a novelty song. But there are some songs that I had to write like 'I Walk The Line'."

The Columbia/Legacy label has released a slew of stellar Cash CD reissues and box sets this century. Many Greatest Hits and Best Of packages are constantly available.

In 2012 the company pressed up Johnny Cash-The Complete Columbia Collection. Containing 61 distinct album packages

(single and double CDs, totaling 63 discs overall) housed in a box with a lift-off cover. The deluxe product also follows up the critical and commercial success of *The Johnny Cash Bootleg Series*, which has presented four historic releases to date. Released in April, the most recent title in the series is *The Soul Of Truth: Bootleg Vol., IV*, which includes 51 gospel-themed recordings.

In addition, a couple years ago, *Johnny Cash - The Great Lost Performance* was stocked by Island/UME Records. It's the first-ever CD release of a classic 1990 live show, remixed from the original multi-track tapes, with several songs Johnny rarely performed live. Cash and his revue were captured on stage at the Paramount Theatre in Asbury Park, New Jersey on July 27, 1990. The album contains the only concert version of "Life's Railway To Heaven," (the studio version was released posthumously).

Also worth investigating is The Johnny Cash Project, a global collective art project now displayed at: [thejohnnycashproject.com](http://thejohnnycashproject.com).

Participants from all over the world were incorporated into this endeavor initially developed around a music video for "Ain't No Grave" that were strung together and integrated in sequence over the song. New people are encouraged to contribute so this living portrait evolves and is never the same video. The Johnny Cash Project is a collaboration between the Cash Estate, record producer Rick Rubin, Radical Media and digital media artist Aaron Koblin, who leads the Data Arts Team at Google.

### JOHNNY AND SAUL

In October 2013 the documentary, *My Father and the Man in Black*, a film by Jonathan Holiff was distributed on DVD by Passion River Studio after a critically acclaimed film festival and theatrical run.

"Heart and feeling is soaked through it like the sweat in Cash's guitar strap," Alan Scherstuhl offered in *The Village Voice*. "A fresh angle on the Cash mythology - a long way from *Walk The Line*," described Steve Rose of *The Guardian*. The New York Times hailed the flick as "complex and haunting," *Variety* lauded it as a "uniquely intertwined dual portrait," while *The Wall Street Journal* reported, "You thought you knew Johnny Cash. Think again!"

The movie DVD includes 20 minutes of extra scenes and is subtitled in French and Spanish is available at many major retailers and at [Johnny-And-Saul.com](http://Johnny-And-Saul.com)

Holiff was a talent agent at William Morris for a couple of years, later operating a celebrity endorsement agency for fifteen years.

Long before there was Johnny and June, there was Johnny and Saul, from 1960 to 1973.

*My Father and the Man in Black* is a movie that features one of the 20th century music's known icons while also telling the inside story of Johnny Cash, his talented but troubled manager, Canadian impresario, Saul Holiff, and a son Jonathan, named after Johnny Cash, seeking his father in the shadow of a legend.

Following his dad's 2005 suicide, filmmaker Holiff discovers hundreds of letters and audio diaries, including recorded telephone calls with Johnny Cash during his pill-fueled 1960s, triumphs at Folsom and San Quentin, marriage to June Carter, and his conversion in the early 1970s to born-again Christian.

Director, writer and producer Holiff, over seven and a half years, has assembled these items for a revealing behind-the-scenes view of the complex relationship between

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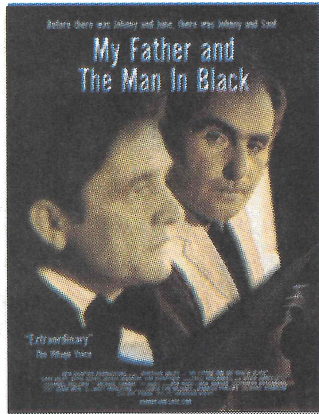
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Cash and his long-suffering manager, both struggling with personal demons. The utilization of never-before-seen footage, artifacts, believable re-enactments and voice-over narration serve as a catharsis for its maker.

Now out is a definitive biography of the Man in Black, Johnny Cash: The Life. Published by Little, Brown and Company, written by author Robert Hilburn, the former music editor of *The Los Angeles Times*.

Hilburn tells the complete story of Johnny Cash for the first time. Of the many great rock and country arrivals in the 1950s, Cash was one of the few who approached his music as more than hits for the jukebox. He wanted to inspire and up lift people. As Hilburn illustrates, Cash was the crucial link between Woody Guthrie's music of social idealism in the 1930s and 1940s and Bob Dylan's music of revolution in the 1960s and beyond.

Singing of love, loss, hardship and faith, Cash was one of the first artists to recognize



that he could use his music and fame to impact social attitudes, and offer hope to those downtrodden by society.

Hilburn shares a trove of never before seen material, straight from the singer's inner circle of family and friends.

One testimonial on the back cover of Hilburn's book is supplied by Keith Richard, who wrote, "I listened to that stark unrelenting country as a kid. He was a hero of mine. I met him, finally, in a john at the Waldorf Astoria. He was taking a pee and I broke out into 'Loading Coal.' We both zipped up and sung the final chorus together. One of my most cherished moments. You don't get much closer than that. Hilburn has written a brilliant story of an even more brilliant song writer, warts and all."

**ROBERT HILBURN INTERVIEW**

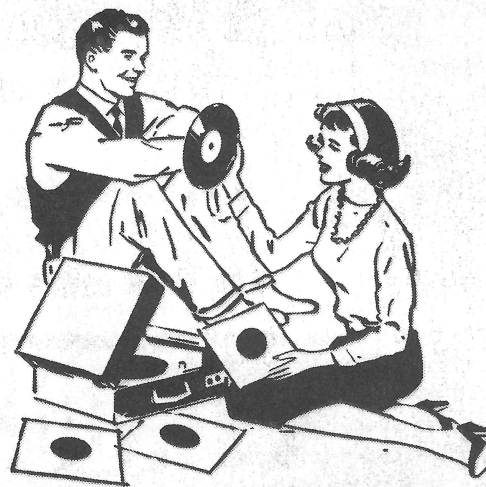
*Q: When did you first have the concept of doing a Johnny Cash book? Obviously I know you covered Cash's career as a pop music critic for The Los Angeles Times for 40 years.*

*Why did Johnny Cash always speak to you? You began your journalism career first as a country music reviewer.*

*A: That's true. I wanted to write about pop music in the late 1960s and contacted the Los Angeles Times and they gave me some free-lance assignments. One of them was going to Folsom Prison in 1968 to cover what turned out to be John's landmark concert. I felt an immediate rapport with him, partially because we both came from small towns in the South (in my case it was the Natchitoches – Campti area of central Louisiana) and we talked a lot about what it was like transitioning to a larger world. After I was hired by The Times, I continued to do stories on John from time to time—including an interview at June's childhood home in Virginia – just months before her death. I didn't think about a book until after John's death when I saw the movie and read some books about him and realized how much more there was to say.*

*Q: Besides decades of trust and reporting of Johnny Cash, from being at the Folsom Prison live recording in 1968, and later in attendance at some of his last ever shows, why do you think the inner circle of Cash and*

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