



On Bowie

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From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love Is a Mix Tape*, a thoughtful and loving meditation on the life of the late David Bowie that explores his creative legacy and the enduring and mutual connection he enjoyed with his fans

Innovative. Pioneering. Brave. Until his death in January 2016, David Bowie created art that not only pushed boundaries, but helped fans understand themselves and view the world from fantastic new perspectives.

When the shocking news of his death on January 10, 2016 broke, the outpouring of grief and adulation was immediate and ongoing. Fans around the world and across generations paid homage to this brilliant, innovate, ever evolving artist who both shaped and embodied our times.

In this concise and penetrating book, featuring color photographs, highly regarded *Rolling Stone* critic, bestselling author, and lifelong Bowie fan Rob Sheffield shares his own feelings about the passing of this icon and explains why Bowie's death has elicited such an unprecedented emotional outpouring from so many lives.

On Bowie Details

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Tosh says

Totally readable and perfectly OK, but I just didn't feel that strongly about this book here and there. Which is odd, because I love David Bowie, and I will probably read every book out there on this great artist. First of all, I totally disagree with the author, Rob Sheffield, about "The Man Who Fell To Earth." He doesn't like that film very much, nor other Roeg films. Even Performance! And two, he doesn't care for the "Outside" album. So, I'm already put off while reading this book length fan letter. On the other hand, Sheffield is very sincere with his Bowie love. I think it's interesting, because I presume he's somewhere in his early 40s, while I'm in my 60s. I was a teenager when the early Bowie albums came out, and he was a young boy when "Lodger" came out - and I think totally age wise, geared to the "Let's Dance" era of Bowie. Yet, we both agree about "Tonight" that it's a stinker of an album. So there is a meeting ground here, and in a sense, anyone who loves Bowie is a friend of mine. But, this is still a so-so book. He wrote it quickly, and he writes well, but it lacks a certain weight of critique or insight into the world of Bowie. It's very surface, and rarely does he dig into the Bowie world. I think the book will disappoint hardcore Bowie lunatics, but some fans may find it good.

Scott Rhee says

I'm writing this review on January 1, 2017, the dawn of a new year. I'm writing this with both middle fingers raised to 2016, one of the shittiest and most fucking awful years on record.

Personally, 2016 was the year I lost my father-in-law to liver cancer. I had to watch a wonderfully kind, loving, funny, intelligent man with a crazy work ethic (he was a truck mechanic and he was working two weeks prior to dying quietly in hospice) and the wisdom of a demigod wither away and crush the spirits of my wife and mother-in-law, dying a week before Christmas. I will never have the pleasure of building a deck or putting up a tub surround or changing my oil again with him. We will never again have the pleasure of talking for hours about our favorite science fiction novels or bad 1950s grade-B horror films that we loved or our shared admiration of Kurt Vonnegut, Katy Perry videos, and Japanese cuisine. I will miss him terribly.

This past year was also the year that a fascist orange moron with yellow hair won the presidential election. I will never call Trump my president. He is an embarrassment, a national joke, a nightmare, and a piece of shit. He is the Asshole to end all Assholes, and I honestly fantasize that something awful will happen to him, Mike Pence, and Trump's entire Cabinet sometime before the 20th. Something juicy, like a pack of rabid wolves or a meteor shower right in the middle of Trump's getaway, Mar-a-Lago. It can take his whole worthless family, too, for all I care. I don't---and won't---apologize for this.

This past year was the year that Aleppo was bombed; millions of children were killed; the Russians hacked the United States; the Zika virus hit; kids in Flint, MI got lead poisoning from tap water; oil pipelines threatened to wipe out ancient Sioux burial grounds in ND; and global climate change got real, but nobody---including our President or anyone else in Washington, D.C.---gave a shit because they were too worried about transgenders raping our children.

This past year was the year that Black Lives Mattered but, ultimately, didn't.

This past year was the year that so many beloved celebrities passed away---Alan Rickman, Carrie Fisher, George Michael, to name a few---long before their time.

This past year was the year Bowie died.

So, fuck you, 2016. I hope you are rotting in hell for all eternity. I hope you are gagging on Satan's cock. I hope Antonin Scalia is dropping trou and dumping Cleveland steamers all over your face, you stupid, stupid, stupid excuse for a year.

Okay, that's enough... Thanks for letting me vent.

Anyway, Rob Sheffield's little 197-page book "On Bowie" is a beautifully-written love letter to Bowie and his legacy of awesome music. Sheffield, a music critic and contributing editor of Rolling Stone, focuses on the evolution of Bowie's music, starting with his forgettable Brit-pop roots to his sci-fi hippy resurrection with "Space Odyssey" and the heavy metal period of "The Man Who Sold the World" to his revolutionary experimental phase and brilliant collaboration with Brian Eno on "Low" to his brief but successful foray into mainstream with "Let's Dance" to his relatively dead period with the forgettable "Tin Machine" to his Iman-inspired resurrection with "Earthling" to his surprise last album "Blackstar".

Bowie fans know the first time they fell in love with Bowie. They could tell you which album and which song it was that they had the revelation that Bowie was a musical god, in much the same way that born-again Christians know the exact moment that they were saved.

I have that moment, and I don't necessarily have a problem with sharing it, but I'm keeping it to myself because I want that for myself, that shared moment I had with Bowie, for all time.

Erick Mertz says

Simply stated, I could not put this book down.

Author Rob Sheffield is one of the most engaging music writers working today and his stylish look at the life and work of the late David Bowie is one of the finest creative tributes I've read in the months since he passed away. Sheffield offers an appropriately prismatic view on Bowie's life, weaving personal narrative in with reported facts, legends and a healthy dose of hyperbole about the artist's career. I picked it up at a glance and never set it down. This book isn't there to teach the small details. It's there to bring to life the broad creative swatch cut over decades of reinvention.

My only problem may be that the book is light on pictures. Actually, there are four similarly staged shots of Bowie from different eras. With such a paltry number, why bother including them at all?

Don't let that defer you though. If you want Bowie pictures, go to the internet. Search: BOWIE, DAVID. Otherwise, read this book.

www.well-lightedetcetera.com

Dr. Detroit says

You know you're in for a rough ride when Rob Sheffield proclaims "Station to Station," "Low," "Heroes," "Lodger," and "Scary Monsters" not only Bowie's best five-album run, but the best five-album run of ANYONE IN THE SEVENTIES OR SINCE (capitalization is mine). No you're not seeing things. Uh, Ground Control to Major Rob: not only do the albums "Hunky Dory" through "Diamond Dogs" trump anything Bowie ever came up with (where's Mick Ronson when you really need him?), but the Stones, Ramones, Alice Cooper, Bruce Springsteen, and Elvis Costello are calling for your head on a platter.

I never could muster up much enthusiasm - hell, any enthusiasm - for the Berlin trilogy or most anything that followed, a long painful trip to Nowheresville. Much like tattoos and body piercing, I never quite got the post-Ziggy section of Bowie's resume. Change for the sake of change is like taking King Kong off of his jungle island and dropping him into the middle of midtown Manhattan – nothing good can come of it.

magrathea. says

john, i'm only crying :(

Nat K says

3.5★s for me.

*"Ain't there one damn song that can make me...
Break down and cryyyy?"*
- David Bowie, "Young Americans"

Will the real David Bowie please stand up?

So many phases, so many personas, so many glittering personalities. But, ah, the music!

Rob Shettfield's book is an ode, or even a very long love letter if you like, to his idol David Bowie.

He takes us on a journey with him, we visit Bowie as he travels from city-to-city, shedding his skin along the way, creating new eccentric characters and amazing music. This isn't your atypical music bio, with stats about when/where/who recordings were made. It has more of the emotional touch, of what Bowie was going through, via each phase, the record that defined the year, and Bowie's place in it.

Rob Shettfield celebrates David Bowie's creativity while not shying away from talking about his chemical fuelled binges and self imposed exiles due to the demons that haunted him from various addictions.

But still, he remained utterly stylish & sophisticated, David defined each decade in his own way.

I remember being in (high) school just after the "Let's Dance" video had been screened over the weekend. Everyone was absolutely abuzz with how amazing Bowie looked, and how brilliant a song it was. Ditto for "Young Americans", which a very cool and hip English teacher asked us to treat as an essay. Discuss. I can

quote this song verbatim. So many memories are tied in with Bowie's music. I'm sure most people are the same. Rob Shettfield shares his moments with us.

"That's why listening to Bowie sent you back to your drab daylight world with fresh eyes, noticing all the glamour of ordinary people in ordinary places. Transition. Transmission."

Thanks for the music David, it will live on.

A very stylish read.

Tommy says

This is a terrific book from music writer Rob Sheffield. He approaches Bowie's career as a fan, not as a critic. For those of us who admired and loved Bowie's music, but might not have been aficionados of his every musical and cultural nuance, this book hits the sweet spot. It never dives into minutiae or feels heavy handed. It's like coffee with a Bowie fan who wants to share a fair assessment of his hits and misses, his humanity and his struggles.

The book, chaptered by albums and eras, takes us from his early days as David Jones to his passing in 2016 and the luminous "Lazarus" that capped off his career. I'd recommend it to anyone who is looking for an introduction to Bowie, or a high-level appreciation of his life and artistry. If you know the lyrics and session players for every album from "Low" to "Never Let Me Down", this might be a deep enough dive for you, but you'll appreciate Sheffield's honesty, respect, and awareness of Bowie and his impact on our culture.

Adam says

A book about David Bowie written by Rob Sheffield is so perfect I'm still not sure it's not a dream.

Monica says

Rob Sheffield writes about music exactly how I want to read about music: as a fan, as an educated fan, one with an encyclopedic knowledge of music as well as a clear understanding of how importance its both cultural and emotional resonances are. His Bowie book did not disappoint: while realizing the impossibility of trying to separate his own life from his understanding of Bowie's career, his explanations for it all go well beyond his own emotional response. Great stuff here.

Book Riot Community says

There was no way I wasn't going to read this book! The death of David Bowie shocked and saddened the world, but his legacy will live on long after we're gone. Sheffield, one of the most respected music critics of our time, examines Bowie's catalog of work in a series of essays written in Sheffield's characteristic cultural astuteness. He explains why Bowie was so important to the world and his influences on music and culture,

and why it's okay to be sad that he's gone. Because we sure are sad.

Backlist bump: Talking to Girls About Duran Duran: One Young Man's Quest for True Love and a Cooler Haircut by Rob Sheffield

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<http://bookriot.com/listen/shows/allt...>

Cassie-la says

ORIGINALLY POSTED: <https://bibliomantics.com/2016/08/01/...>

I'm going to be honest, this book destroyed me. I'm talking almost crying in public levels here. Part love letter to David Bowie, part biography, part music criticism, Sheffield's book taught me even more about Ziggy Stardust, the Thin White Duke and all the iterations of David Jones in a mere 200 pages. Get ready to binge on Bowie tunes after reading! You know, more than usual.

Jennie says

I am a HUGE Bowie fan so this is in no way an objective book review.

I found out the morning of my birthday of 2016 that my biggest role model, life hero, inspiration and influence died. A piece of me did too.

"Something happened on the day he died"...

This book is written not just by someone who compiled facts and did a great deal of research, but by someone who loves his music. Peppered with song lyrics and some subtle/not-so-subtle references, we are privy to some widely known and die hard fan facts.

Many describe this book as a love letter and in many ways I would agree. Loving Bowie is like loving a favourite song or masterpiece. You love it in it's beauty and notice things you might not have in the beginning.

No two Bowie fans are alike; just put two together and talk about their go-to album or Bowie-style. He lived many lives and touched not just fans but music genres, challenging sexual roles and fashion boundaries.

Rob shares with us his in-depth view and experience of being a Bowie fan and I am thankful for it.

I strongly identify with Bowie as Jareth in Labyrinth. Seeing him on screen solidified my desire to be in film (which came true) hope and dream my way into my art. I believe this cult classic gave Bowie the rebirth he needed creating a new breed of loyal fans ready to take his music trip.

Painter, actor, writer, singer, musician, this man was/is an original.

A must read for Bowie fans. Kudos to Rob for his clever lyric insertion and talent for describing a man who for words can mostly fail us.

A highlight of my 2016 reading journey.

Quentin Montemayor says

Rob Sheffield is a master of awakening nostalgia in the reader without being schmaltzy. His taste in music is so approachable and unpretentious, as is his writing. I wish he would write this book a million times over about every artist that I love. Points because it's Bowie, but mostly Rob gets all the points himself with his refreshing and beautiful style. Cannot wait for the Beatles book!

Debra Komar says

A love letter from a fan to fans. I devoured this the moment it arrived. It was written in the immediate aftermath of The Dame's death. It was still raw for Sheffield when he wrote it and reading it brought me back to that time in January when I couldn't stop crying. He nails the sense of shock and how Bowie's music changed after his death. He also captures how the music and its meaning changed throughout Sheffield's life. I have adored Bowie from the moment I bought my first record (Station to Station, the day it went on sale). I have bought every album since and, while I have sometimes been disappointed (ironically with "Never Let Me Down"), I have never been bored and have never loved Bowie less. Bowie is, and remains, the soundtrack of my life.

I have read all the Bowie books and most are junk. This one finally gets it. If you are not already a fan, this book is not for you. The biography is tiny and there are no explanations as to why Bowie is great or meant so much. You either already know or need to find out for yourself.

C. says

I always think that maybe one of these Brooklyn days, I'm gonna run into Rob Sheffield. The question is, what would I say to the NY Times best seller or better yet, what would I ask him? He has become my Yoda to music and the historical emotion that rides shotgun to it. This obviously cathartic book, *On Bowie*, is exactly what my broken heart needed. We all love Bowie for different reasons. We love different eras, different faces, different genders roles.... I think I have always been obsessed with David Jones, the man behind the curtain and the artful danger Bowie always put him(self) in. What artist has pushed so many dimensions of self through art the way he has?

Sheffield reflects on Bowie's plastic soul era with, "For him, realness was whatever he wasn't enough of—that's why he kept trying on a variety of cultures, genders, ages, stepping into strangers' lives to ponder how music sounded to them." Bowie created through an infinitely symbolic method and wore the face of a real believer that he probably stole from someone else. Because after all, he is the DJ, he certainly is what he plays.

In a poignant statement in regards to Klaus Nomi's pining to team up with David Bowie again, Sheffield explains that, "As with so many David Bowie fans, what he learned from the master was how to turn

loneliness into a grand theatrical gesture- how to turn your loneliness into a work of art". Sheffield, delivers like the Starman himself, writing from a place of loneliness and capturing the emotion to reflect on the life of an artist we were lucky enough to share the same orbit with.

And as far as what I might say to Rob Sheffield, I think I might just say, Lodger is my favorite too.
