



# Staring at Sound: The True Story of Oklahoma's Fabulous Flaming Lips

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An engrossing and intimate portrait of the Oklahoma-based psychedelic pop band the Flaming Lips, cult heroes to millions of indie-rock fans.

In July 2002, the Flaming Lips released an ambitious album called *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*, which merged elements of orchestral pop, electronic dance music, and old-fashioned psychedelic rock with lyrical themes that were simultaneously poignant and philosophical and supremely silly. The album sold a million copies worldwide, introduced the Flaming Lips to a mass audience, and made them one of the best-known cult bands in rock history.

*Staring at Sound* is the tale of the Flaming Lips's fascinating career (which, in reality, began in 1983) and the many colorful personalities in their orbit, especially Wayne Coyne, their charismatic and visionary founder. Based on hundreds of hours of interviews with the band, it follows the Flaming Lips through the thriving indie-rock underground of the 1980s and the alternative-rock movement of the early '90s, during which they found fans in such rock legends as Paul McCartney, the Rolling Stones, Robert Plant, and Devo, and respected peers in such acts as the White Stripes, Radiohead, and Beck. It concludes with exclusive coverage of the creation of the group's latest album, *At War with the Mystics*.

## Staring at Sound: The True Story of Oklahoma's Fabulous Flaming Lips Details

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## From Reader Review Staring at Sound: The True Story of Oklahoma's Fabulous Flaming Lips for online ebook

### Nihil says

If i idolize anyone, it's probably Wayne Coyne, or The Flaming Lips as an entity. This book is an easy, quick, interesting read. Derogatis's writing flows well- i would often realize it was late, and that i probably needed to sleep... i'd flip ahead to see how many pages were left in the chapter... 12? 15? They flew by. The later chapters seemed a bit sparse compared to the earlier ones, but all in all, i really like this book.

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### Ryan says

this is a great rock n roll book, and a well-reported and researched look at the Flaming Lips. anyone from Oklahoma will get extra jollies from the stories about places and people you know. and there's lots of Okie culture stuff that DeRogatis gets surprisingly right.

This is a glowing portrayal of the Lips, one of the great bands of the last 25 years, but it could have used some more balance. DeRogatis doesn't quite veer into hagiography, but it's an authorized biography after all, and he clearly loves the band.

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### Mike says

I love the flaming lips and this book definitely adds a lot of the background to their legend. derogatis knows his shit about bands and he has an intimate history with the lips, so the book is honest. which means sometimes brutal (sorry, wayne's ego). good read for any fan though, for sho'.

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### Steven says

the flaming lips have been a source of great debate among most of the people i know who are very into listening to, talking about, dissecting, and ruminating about music. for those of you who have been with the band since the early days ( i first started listening to them in 1992 and they seemed ancient then) the evolution of the band is undeniable. some still prefer the early love/noise sound, the ronald jones era and despise the later orchestral, less darkness, incarnation that is all over the world today.

i can remember a time when it was impossible to even find a clear picture of what these guys looked like. most photos of them were a blurry, psychedelic enigma. Finding an interview was even less of a likely prospect. now wayne coyne (is he a household name yet?)is the tonite show correspondent for sxsw...there's a documentary movie about them and a tell-all book.

they have been a band i have been fortunate to have grown old with so to speak...but, the charm and mystery is long gone and it does change the way i hear the music now....still, i read the book...there were some interesting moments and jim deragotis is certainly an accomplished music journalist...certainly more suited to write a book on them than anyone else. but, maybe it was just too much information.

## Ed Wagemann says

Jim deRogatis does adequate research, but he's not much of a writer. Still the band is interesting enough to make this an interesting read. Its funny that since reading this I have noticed two recent TV commercials that seem to have Wayne Coyne impersonators in them. One is the previews for Meryl Steep's new movie Ricki and the Flash. He's not really a Coyne impersonator. He seems to be the guitar player in Streep's band and he has shaggy hair, a beard and wears a suit.

The Coyne other impersonator is for a commercial which I can't remember what the product is - I think it is for an organization that wants adults to volunteer time with kids who don't have both parents. Anyway there is a Coyne-looking guy who sings and has a sidekick who sings with him.

The reason I mention these impersonators is because it seems like the "Coyne archetype" is starting to make its mark on popular culture. I'm not sure how far this archetype will go, but its interesting to me. Personally, I like only a minority of songs I hear from the Flaming Lips, but I really admire the way they "try" really hard to entertain and to explore the boundaries. Plus the fact that they have been doing it for so long is admirable.

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## Serah-Marie McMahon says

I'd classify my self as a huge Flaming Lips fan, until I compare myself to the super fans they have, and then I'm just like medium-well. This book made me happy. I listened to each of the albums as DeRogatis worked though them and I heard new and interesting bits and pieces I'd never heard before. I kept reading chunks out loud to my husband until he told me to quit it because he now wanted to read it when I was done. There was a lot of new information and I was actually still entertained - unlike most band bios out there. I walked away incredibly inspired by Wayne and his constant, relentless drive and passion. Read it and fall in love with the Flaming Lips all over again.

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## Sean says

I've only read one other of DeRogatis's books - his history of psychedelic rock (published first as "Kaleidoscope Eyes", then revised as "Turn On Your Mind..."). I quite enjoyed that and while I didn't agree with all of his opinions, he's a solid enough writer to make the subject matter engaging at all times.

"Staring At Sound" doesn't let you down that much, either. He tackles the long history of The Flaming Lips without bogging down in too much detail. I personally found the earlier years more informative - as there aren't too many interviews from then - unless you scoured indie/punk 'zines in 1988 and 1989.

DeRogatis doesn't shy away from controversy either: Steven Drozd's drug addiction is covered, as is Wayne's control freak/jealousy episodes. Couple those with his penchant for starting beefs with other front-men (Richard Ashcroft, Beck, Win Butler, etc.)--and it does take a bit of the sheen off of "The Nicest Guy In Rock-And-Roll". For all that, though - I still appreciate Coyne's determination and being an 'ideas man'. He's never been afraid of trying something new for the sake of it - even if he misses the mark a bit (The "Boom-

Box Orchestra" shows). For those who like to think that The Lips get their inspiration by eating LSD tabs like M&Ms, you'll be disappointed to find out that (apart from Drozd, who's also clean now) they're pretty straight-edge.

I suppose for the die-hard, rabid fans, his descriptions of the content of the records can slow the book down a little - as you've already heard them zillions of times. I liked reading them, only to see how his views stacked up against mine. Pretty close, it turns out, though I like "Hit To Death In The Future Head" more than DeRogatis does.

I'd say that if you're a novice to The Flaming Lips - this is a very good way to get the inside dope (pardon the pun). I reckon even the hardcore fans will learn a thing or two about the band...unless you're an official F.O.W. (Friend Of Wayne). Then you might just nod and say "yep" while reading of their adventures.

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## Dusty says

My love for the Lips sprouted in 2007, when, at a coffee shop in southern Texas a friend of mine (was he a friend? I don't remember his name) hijacked my MacBook and implanted a digital copy of *The Soft Bulletin* into iTunes. Unlike the author of this book, music critic Jim Derogatis, who seems to have followed the band closely at least since the late 1980s, I came to know the band's various albums in the order I could find them (*Yoshimi* second; the *Ego Tripping* EP third; *Satellite Heart* fourth; etc.) rather than in their order of release. And I did all this the same way I came to know, say, Elvis Presley or Gladys Knight and the Pips. For me, the Flaming Lips have always been an established band. As a late fan (the worst kind, in many people's books), my job has not been to spread the word but rather to conduct an archeological dig: What came before?

Anyway, Derogatis's book does exactly what I wanted it to do. It brings into crystal-clear focus the band's origins and development and certainly transforms the list of credits inside every album's jacket into a three-dimensional story of conflicted ambitions and bruised feelings. It conveys how it must have felt to love the band before *Yoshimi*, when at every turn it looked like it would either break apart, be dumped by its label or have its forthcoming album forever shelved due to one or another legal battle, and to revel in the newness of glitter-saturated concerts and aural experiments conducted in an Austin parking garage. It provides background to songs I had loved and memorized but never really understood -- and it convinced me to give some of my less favorite tracks another chance. Some other reviewers have said they found the book over-crammed with information, but I disagree: I look forward to Volume 2, which the author tentatively (and jokingly) has promised for sometime around 2025.

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## Cvestweber says

I learned more than I really needed to know about my favorite band, but they are my favorite band.

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## dirt says

You might be on the right track if people think what you're doing is weird.

These past few weeks I went on a Flaming Lips bender. I used to be a huge fan in high school and college, but love for them waned after the borderline adult contemporary release of *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*. Then three weeks ago I was reading Wayne Coyne's essay in *This I Believe II* and it jump started something in my mind and heart. I listened to the latest Lips album *At War with the Mystics* and it practically brought tears to my eyes. Since then I've relistened to their entire catalog, watched *Fearless Freaks*, and read this book.

Jim DeRogatis does an excellent job of reviewing the history of the Flaming Lips album by album, blow by blow, and triumph by triumph. Through years of interviews with the band, family members, coworkers, and fans, Jimmy D captures the past 25 years in a stunning biographical portrait of all the Flaming Lips have been through and accomplished. The tone of this book has a tiny bit of reverence/non-objectivity to it, but overall I enjoyed the voice he uses to narrate (which is more than I can say for his real life/radio voice, which peels the paint off the inside of my brain!!!).

One interesting trend that Jimmy D observes is that the Flaming Lips put out a giant-leap-forward album followed by a mediocre album. This pattern definitely holds true starting from the beginning with their first self-titled release which was followed by a less than stellar *Hear It Is* up to the ground breaking, outstanding, and influential *Soft Bulletin* after which saw the mediocre release of *Yoshimi* (ugh!!!). *Clouds Taste Metallic* is the one hiccup that doesn't follow format because it is a spectacular album which show cases some totally awe-inspiring tunes even if they don't necessarily make sense.

A parallel that I noticed between this book and *Raising Hell: The Reign of Ruin and Redemption of Run-D.M.C.* and *Jam Master Jay* is that record labels and the politics within them can often undermine the creativity and growth of musicians (not exactly a shocking revelation). Run-D.M.C. was bogged down by Russell Simmons and disagreements between Profile and Def Jam. The Flaming Lips were held back by label neglect and then Warner Brothers management turnover (what confounds me is why people get jobs at record labels if they don't love music???). The difference is Run-D.M.C. stopped putting out music and became stagnant where as the Flaming Lips continued to craft songs and grow creatively despite not always having support from the executives.

The message I found throughout this book, the movie, and their songs is to continue to do what you are doing if it is what you love. Don't let the Russell Simmons' in the world run your life because they are only motivated by money and not love.

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## Bookdragon Sean says

Is this a book review or just an excuse to rave about my favourite band?

Well, I think you're going to have to tell me. I did read this book, and I did enjoy most of it. But for me the history of the band isn't what's important. What matters is the music. And their music seems to get better as they go on. I could listen to it all day.

Here are three tracks from three different albums that I highly recommend listening to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKbJp...>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8kmo...>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8IP3...>

To some they may just sound plain weird, but some of you may feel it. I find it best to listen to them when outside. Not sure why.

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### **Liz Berry says**

I really enjoyed reading this as it answered a lot of questions that I had about pivotal moments in the band's history as well as the personal lives of the members: when did Wayne get together with Michelle, who are the other special ladies in the other guys' lives, etc.

The only thing I didn't like was the musical dissection of the albums -- obviously I know what they sound like or I wouldn't be interested enough in them to read a whole BOOK about them.

Overall, it was very easy to read and get into...

Now: where's the sequel???

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### **Jim McGrath says**

This was a pleasant surprise. People who don't like the Flaming Lips probably have no interest in this book. but if you're curious about the band's history, this book paints a pretty complete picture. And it's not just the soap opera "behind the scenes" drama: there's a lot of interesting stuff in here about the band in the studio.

Although if you like soap opera rock stuff, the bashing of Beck will probably whet your appetite.

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### **Marissa Barbieri says**

I bought this just before moving and it somehow got lost in the shuffle for awhile there. I ADORE the Lips, and have heard good things from other fanatics about this book - now I just have to wait for the urge to read about some "facts" again.

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### **Robyn says**

While I loved reading the story of the Flaming Lips, I absolutely hated the writer. Generally when I read a biography I like the author to keep himself out of the story unless the story is supposed to include him which wasn't the case here. There was way too much editorializing for my taste and I felt that he included certain details that weren't key components in the story just because he dug up some dirt.

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