



Aretha From These Roots

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Her soulful, soaring voice has earned her mythic status. Now, in her own moving words, the woman behind the myth is revealed. The result is a captivating self-portrait of one of this century's most fascinating artists, an Aretha Franklin as real as the songs she sings.

For the first time anywhere, Aretha tells her story--the glorious triumphs as well as the heartbreaking pain. With refreshing candor, Aretha tells it like it is, the way she sees it, the way she lived it.

A child prodigy of the golden age of gospel, the daughter of a world-famous preacher, Aretha was the anointed successor to Mahalia Jackson and Clara Ward. But her father had a broader vision and helped Aretha enter the field of pop and jazz. By age eighteen, she was under contract to Columbia Records. Six years later, after only a few minor hits, she switched to Atlantic, where she shook the musical world to its roots. Her song "Respect" became the anthem of an epoch, a touchstone for African Americans, for women, for all people struggling to be free. Aretha became the Queen of Soul, the genre's finest interpreter since Ray Charles.

In **Aretha: From These Roots**, the singer gets up-close and personal. In rich detail, she paints a vivid picture of a Detroit long gone: the storefront churches, the basement parties, the explosive R&B shows. She documents her life as a single teenage mother, working to balance home life with career, coping with two challenging marriages and, later, romantic relationships that were the source of both tremendous joy and unforeseen heartache.

Along the way, we meet the characters who lit up her life: her charismatic father, the Reverend C. L. Franklin, "the man with the million-dollar voice"; Sam Cooke, the man of her dreams; her singing sisters, Erma and Carolyn, and her manager-brother, Cecil; her famous colleagues--Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, the Temptations, Luther Vandross, and Luciano Pavarotti--as well as some famous rivals.

Aretha emerges as a triumphant woman of rare wit, willing to share with us her passion for great music, great food, and great love affairs. Her book does more than illuminate some of the most exciting songs ever sung; it lets you into the heart and mind of the mesmerizing woman who sang them.

Aretha From These Roots Details

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Anthony says

The life and times of Aretha Louise Franklin as shared and told in her own words. This remarkable story tells of a child prodigy who soared to unbelievable heights in the music world. The daughter of a world famous preacher shares her most intimate moments in the public eye, and behind the scenes of her family life, and very personal moments. A great read that will push the reader to revisit her discography, and come to a better understanding of what makes her title as the Queen of Soul diva worthy, and well deserved.

Peter O'Connor says

It is Aretha Franklin so it is always going to be worth a look and the early accounts of her upbringing are interesting. It does often appear though that ghost writer David Ritz was purely there to take notes, ask questions and take dictation as it often lacks a lot of the punch and insight that a book on or by Aretha Franklin should. If nothing else though, it at least seems a fair representation of her take on her own career. Overall though, the whole thing is just a bit too on rails to be worthwhile.

Kayla says

Seems to be a lot of Aretha tooting her own horn and putting down others, while trying to come off as a victim. She's an amazing talent, but her true negative self comes through even though she tried to play it off as she's the one who's been wronged. By the end of the book I was just annoyed, and ready for it to be over.

Angie says

Lots of interesting history of the gospel & soul movements. As with many autobiographies, there was more of the self promoting then I cared for. Overall a good bedside read!

Gayle Tennant says

I absolutely love Aretha Franklin so this autobiography I've re-read after her death has made me appreciate her even more. She was very gracious towards those that weren't so gracious towards her through out her career. Her life hasn't been easy. But that talent. - wow! I've been listening to her music again and loving it all over again. Thank You for sharing your life Aretha and your talent.

Daryl says

I LOVE Aretha Franklin. When you think of soul music, if you don't think of her, you'd have to be crazy. I was hoping that this book would give us insight into a career that has spanned the last four decades but I was

totally disappointed. The entire book is spotty at best. It is poorly written with too much hidden from the readers and has to be one of the worst autobiographies I've ever read. You would think a life as interesting as the "Queen of Soul" would be enough to fill two volumes but if this is it, I think we better stick to her singing. Forget this lemon, console yourself with one of her cds---you're guaranteed to like that!

Martin says

This autobiography started out promising. I learned about Aretha's early life, her father's sermons, and the incredible musicianship that was a part of her daily life. She writes warmly of James Cleveland and the influence he had on her, not just teaching and inspiring her, but also encouraging her to find her own style on the piano. Aretha loves music and she loves food. She can write about seeing Dinah Washington (to whom she later cut a tribute album) at her family's Detroit home, and then she will tell us about her great discovery of Russian Dressing. She will write about the honor of singing for Queen Elizabeth II, but imply that the real highlight of London was tea time, including "scones with the best Devonshire cream and strawberry jam." I had heard that this book is not quite satisfactory because Aretha remains a very private person and shies away from discussing her personal life too deeply. This is somewhat true, although I was satisfied with what she decided to share. I had heard that she focuses on her music, but I feel that the liner notes of her CD reissues contain more info. In the middle of the book I felt like I was merely coasting along and no longer had any investment in the story. Then in the last fifth things turn ugly. Time to settle some old scores. She does this throughout the book with some journalist or a singer or somebody. But when she takes on her two sisters and a few lovers, I can't see what kind of point she is trying to make. Aretha takes great umbrage at Erma's comment that Aretha is introverted and comes most alive when singing. Aretha apparently thinks introversion is a huge insult, discusses the parties and dinners she has hosted and other accomplishments, and then brings up the fact that Erma gave up on her career and took a day job. Dang! She also goes after her cousin and deceased baby sis Carolyn for things they said (respectively) about pay or grieving for their father. It makes Aretha seem petty, narcissistic and hypersensitive. Throughout the book she pays herself high compliments and elides any chance for self-criticism. I kind of wish I hadn't read this book because I lost a lot of the mystique and didn't get enough insight in return.

Ternelljade says

I couldn't put this book down either. I love how Ms. Franklin has a sense of fun about herself too [The Snickers commercial!]. :) I want to get her cookbook as well. I learned a lot about her that I never knew before and like Etta James, she tells her story with candor. I like that she uses discretion as far as telling other people's business too. [You don't see a lot of that type of integrity anymore...] I also value that she is a singer/musician that just loves music period and it shows in her versatility (gospel, soul, opera...Wow!).

Khabeer Rashad says

This was more of a history of her beginnings and Musical career. I wish she really dug in and went deep. But this was still a good book. Her naivete about things cracked me up.

Troy says

It was interesting, I guess, but not my favorite autobiography. I had purchased it at Goodwill, so it's not like I'm out much money. I probably wouldn't recommend it, though, as it is one of the least objective autobiographies I've ever read - a toss-up between this and John Fogerty's. If anyone said anything bad about her, she made a point to say why that person was so much worse at whatever that complaint was than she is. It came off pretty whiny and petty about some less-than-important issues.

All that said, I still think she is a fine singer and musician. Listen to her music; don't read this book.

Greg says

Poorly written and mostly unentertaining. The text lacks excitement, humor, inspiration, and basically everything else that is typically necessary for an effective memoir. Aretha gives us a very shallow, birds-eye view of her life and musical genius. Hopefully an authorized and informed critical biography will be written someday. In the meantime, pass this one by.

franciszka says

i was really excited about hearing the first-person account/story behind the person who made this music that i couldn't get enough of.

it was disappointing.

lots of tossing names around [sam cooke for instance] and how good those times were, but not much of the story of a deeper self.

aretha, i just want to know you.

Julie Barrett says

I am being generous giving 2 stars. It earns an extra star for increasing my knowledge of soul and gospel music, of which I knew little. On the whole, however, this traditional memoir is a train wreck. It didn't help that in his introduction her ghostwriter appeared to be terrified of Aretha. I can't imagine he asked her any hard pressing questions or even asked her to explain herself more clearly or in greater detail. He basically just transcribed her words.

And what words they are! Aretha is, to put it bluntly, full of herself. I wonder, can you be called conceited and egotistical if you actually have the deeds to back up your claims of greatness? For sure, Aretha is a wildly successful and talented singer. I'm not a huge fan of hers but do know her music. It's hard not to. I was listening to her greatest hits album in my car and even my kids recognized several songs without ever having consciously listened to her. Her body of work and her voice are impressive and I had to keep reminding myself of that fact as I read her puff piece, I mean memoir.

This is a classic "I did this and then I did that" memoir with very little introspection or thought included. As a reader, I always wonder about memoirs like this. Is the person just incredibly vapid and dull and actually does not have much of an inner life? (See Grace Coddington's memoir for a fine example of this) Or is the

person just a very private person who feels uncomfortable sharing their inner thoughts? (see Kristen Hersh's memoir for an example of this style). I am leaning towards a combination of the two. At some points, mainly to do with her romantic life, Aretha does explicitly state she is not going to talk in detail about this man because what happened is private and between the two of them. Ok, that is well & good, but then why are you writing a memoir? It's pretty lame to hold back like that. No, readers don't need explicit details but if a person is writing the story of their life, then write the story of your life! Stop with the conscious self editing.

Not too much can be done to prevent the unconscious self editing. Aretha is not a very self aware person at all. AT ALL. She should really go into therapy. She explains her weight struggles as being a result of loving food. Uh, no. Just like a person isn't an alcoholic because they really love the taste of booze. You are self-medicating. What are you self-medicating? You are using food/drugs/gambling etc to fill what void in your psyche? She mentions without going into detail (of course) about her parents divorce when she was 6, her mother's death when she was 10, her father's many many many girlfriends who came & went creating instability in Aretha's childhood, her pregnancies at 14(!) and 16(!) by different guys who totally dumped her once she was pregnant....the list goes on & on. It seemed to me that Aretha's preoccupation with food was a way for her to comfort herself and to soothe herself since no one else was. At least, that is my armchair diagnosis.

The bulk of the memoir concerns Aretha's career more than her personal life. Sadly, she does a really poor job conveying what was going on when making her albums and touring. I found it telling that she mentioned falling asleep(!) during a business meeting with her record label. In a way, she was asleep throughout a lot of her career. Her discussions of events is more like reading an album's notes rather than a story about what was going on. Lots of listing of names of people who worked on the album. It was a bit mind numbing reading a long list of non-famous names without any information about them. Occasionally she would have a throwaway sentence or two about something interesting that happened while on tour or while recording an album but then does not flesh out the story. It was times like these that I wished her ghostwriter had had a stiffer spine and gotten Aretha to discuss the event more. Like the story of a potential gang rape by The Isley Brothers. WHAT. Seriously, it was like 2 sentences. Aretha & her sister, her back up singer, were recording an album in Manhattan early in her career and were invited to a party in New Jersey by The Isley Brothers. They arrive to an empty isolated house, just several men waiting, and realize THEY are meant to be the "party". The girls insist on being taken home. The men refuse. So Aretha and her sister walk several miles in the dark in order to find a cab to get home. The end. Ok....WHAT. Seriously, you could have written several pages about that incident. Or the story about Miles Davis manhandling her. Details, Aretha, details. Oh, or the story of her shopping in Cannes in the late 70's wearing only a string bikini and high heels while paparazzi followed her? That would have been a fun one to devote a few pages to.

The details the reader does get are totally pointless. Want to know what soap operas Aretha likes? Here they are! What about the food options at nearly every venue she ever performed at? Here they are! Details about Detroit neighbors in the 1940s & 1950's? Here they are! A page spent detailing her love of roller skating? It's all in this book. A nuanced discussion of her career, her professional relationships, her family relationship or her love life - not in this book.

I learned more from googling her name than I learnt from reading this memoir. (Fun fact - her dad impregnated a 12 year old while married to his first wife! Yeah, not in the book)

Maria says

Omg A Really Aweome Book. awesome awesome book I truly enjoyed reading the autobiography Aretha Franklin. a must-read for any of Her Fans. I learned alot more about this amazing singer. She endured alot of

Heartache and loss but still came out on top. I Highly Reccomend this awesome book.?

Kevin says

While the Queen of Soul's autobiography is no crowning achievement, it offers a breezy tour through the singer's life and trailblazing recording career. Raised in a musical household in Detroit (next door to Smokey Robinson, with frequent visits from Mahalia Jackson, Sam Cooke, Dinah Washington and Rev. James Cleveland), Franklin made her solo singing debut at the age of 10 in her father's church. At 16, she gave birth to her second son, dropped out of high school and recorded her first album. Several romances and two more sons followed, as did 17 Grammys (the most for a female performer) and more than 20 number-one hits. The strength of this memoir, whose coauthor has collaborated on books by Marvin Gaye, Etta James, Smokey Robinson and Atlantic Records owner Jerry Wexler, lies in Franklin's candid discussion of her craft, song selection and various peers. She's not shy about settling old scores with those she believes have dismissed her in print--including Gladys Knight, Mavis Staples and Cissy Houston. But she remains emotionally remote when talking about herself, reserving her real passion for her music. Few will finish this book, however, without an urge to add another Franklin disc to their collection.
