

WTBBL Recommended Reads: Books About Music

It's always a great day to listen to – or read about – good music!

Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth by John F. Szwed, 2015. ([BR020856](#) and [DB081774](#))

Jazz scholar Szwed starts his examination of singer Billie Holiday by looking at the many contradictory stories told about her and by her, especially in her own 1956 autobiography ***Lady Sings the Blues*** ([DB083025](#)). He analyzes Holiday's influences, iconic songs, and her unique gifts as a singer.

Broken Horses: A Memoir by Brandi Carlile, 2021. ([DB102961](#))

Singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile takes readers through the events of her life that shaped her art – from growing up outside of Seattle, to her start at a local singing competition, to her first break opening for Dave Matthews Band, to many sleepless tours over 15 years and six studio albums, all while raising two children with her wife. This hard-won success led her to collaborations with personal heroes like Elton John, Dolly Parton, Mavis Staples, Pearl Jam, Tanya Tucker, and Joni Mitchell, and ultimately to the Grammy stage.

Daisy Jones & the Six by Taylor Jenkins Reid, 2019. ([DB094175](#) and [BR022912](#))

L.A. in the late sixties. Sneaking into clubs on the Sunset Strip, the sex and drugs are thrilling but it's the rock and roll Daisy loves most. By the time she's twenty her voice is getting noticed, and she has the kind of heedless beauty that makes people do crazy things. Another band getting noticed is The Six, led by Billy Dunne. Daisy and Billy cross paths when a producer realizes the key to supercharged success is to put the two together. What happens next will become the stuff of legend.

Decoding "Despacito": An Oral History of Latin Music by Leila Cobo, 2021. ([DB104078](#))

Billboard magazine's VP of Latin Music looks at the stories behind the biggest Latin hits of the past 50 years. From the salsa born in New York City, to reggaetón, to bilingual chart-toppers, this oral history includes anecdotes and insight from a who's who of Latin music artists, executives, observers, and players.

Dolly Parton, Songteller: My Life in Lyrics by Dolly Parton, 2020. ([DB102063](#))

Working with a music journalist, country music legend and singer-songwriter Dolly Parton brings readers an annotated collection of lyrics from 175 of her songs. She reveals the personal stories and memories that have inspired 60 years of songwriting.

Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to A Tribe Called Quest by Hanif Abdurraqib, 2019. ([DB098408](#))

Essayist and author of ***They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*** ([DB092565](#)) draws on his own personal experiences to reflect on the influence of seminal rap group A Tribe Called Quest. He traces their career, musical influences, and place in music and cultural history.

Jackson Street After Hours: The Roots of Jazz in Seattle by Paul De Barros, 1993. ([DBC00489](#))

Seattle had its share of ballrooms and clubs where big bands and small combos played. This history covers the jazz scene in Seattle from the 1920s through the 1960s and the people who played in it including Ray Charles, Quincy Jones, and Ernestine Anderson. Author interview included.

Reservation Blues by Sherman Alexie. ([DB041962](#) and [BRW01340](#))

Thomas Builds-the-Fire is an unlikely rock band leader: he is a little odd-looking and is kind and considerate; however, he has the guitar of the great Robert Johnson, and its music compels others to join the group Coyote Springs. The band's tale includes some wild stories about others in the Spokane tribe and is told with wry humor, mysticism, and warmth.

Rodgers & Hammerstein by Ethan Mordden, 1992.
([DB036269](#))

Traces the impact of the music of Richard Rodgers and the lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein II on American musical theater. Beginning with "Oklahoma!" in 1943, Mordden examines the duo's collaboration on ten musical comedies and a film score. He analyzes each show in terms of plot, casting, direction, promotion, and other Broadway developments, adding anecdotal bits by friends, families, and colleagues.

Songs of America: Patriotism, Protest, and the Music That Made a Nation by Jon Meacham and Tim McGraw, 2019. ([DB095573](#))

A historian teams up with country music star Tim McGraw to present a survey of patriotic and protest songs from all eras of American history. From "The Star-Spangled Banner" to "Born in the USA," they explore the history behind the music.

Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom by Peter Guralnick, 1986.
([DB073053](#))

Chronicles the rise and fall of soul music from the 1950s to early 1970s. Uses the author's interviews with singers and producers to describe racial integration in the record industry and the social milieu of the civil rights movement. Highlights musicians such as Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin.

The Beatles Anthology, 2000. ([DB050874](#) and [BR012804](#))

Chronicle of the innovative English rock group comprised of Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Ringo Starr, and John Lennon, from their childhoods in Liverpool until their split in 1970. Based largely on a 1994 television documentary series, the book features interviews with the four musicians and their close associates.

The Big Bands by George Thomas Simon, 1967. ([DB061651](#) and [BR006550](#))

Former editor-in-chief of Metronome magazine and the original drummer for the Glenn Miller orchestra tells insider accounts of bandleaders, vocalists, and instrumentalists of swing-era big bands. Profiles Count Basie, Les Brown, Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Artie Shaw, and others. Includes discography and a foreword by Frank Sinatra.

The Musical Human: A History of Life on Earth by Michael Spitzer, 2021. ([DB105041](#))

A musicologist looks at the relationship between music and the human species. In a global history of music on the widest possible canvas, he explores where music came from and how it evolved. Analyzes how music is central to the distinctly human experiences of cognition, feeling, and even biology.