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Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family And Their Legacy In American Mus

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Synopsis

The first major biography of the Carter Family, the musical pioneers who almost single-handedly created the sounds and traditions that grew into modern folk, country, and bluegrass music. Meticulously researched and lovingly written, it is a look at a world and a culture that, rather than passing, has continued to exist in the music that is the legacy of the Carters—“songs that have shaped and influenced generations of artists who have followed them. Brilliant in insight and execution, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone?* is also an in-depth study of A.P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter, and their bittersweet story of love and fulfillment, sadness and loss. The result is more than just a biography of a family; it is also a journey into another time, almost another world, and theirs is a story that resonates today and lives on in the timeless music they created.

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Customer Reviews

There is not a dull page in this 397 page account of The Carter Family. The writers manage to strike a happy medium between a scholarly treatise and a popular biography, something I find very appealing. In addition to being a biography of the Carters, the book also is a history of country music in the first half of the Twentieth Century roughly and a statement on rural Southern sociology of the

time as well. The book is full of information that I suspect is told for the first time as well as trivia many of us knew but had forgotten: For example, there was a time when soft drinks were called "dopes" in East Tennessee. I had forgotten that and that my aunt wore Blue Waltz perfume. (There is a funny account of Maybelle's breaking a bottle of this dreadful perfume she was using as a slide for her guitar in a recording session.) I laughed out loud to learn that Helen Carter, who could learn to play any instrument almost immediately, was having trouble with her first accordian. It took Pee Wee King's telling her she was playing the instrument upside down to get her on the right track. The Original Carter Family was the first group to let the women lead as opposed to being backup singers. The less than admirable Ralph Peer of the recording industry coined the term "hillbilly" for the kind of music Carters and other country Southerners played in the early part of the 20th Century. There is a good account of A. P.'s collecting mountain songs all over the South. That contribution alone would make him a giant in folk/country music. Finally we learn a great deal about both generations of this great family, from A. P., Sarah and Maybelle to "Mama" Maybelle and her daughters. I was pleased to learn, for example, that Maybelle was as good and kind a person as she always seemed to be.

Zwonitzer's look at the First Family of Country Music, the Carter Family, is long overdue, but very much welcome. Finally the information and stories that fans have been waiting decades for come to life on the book's pages. And what stories they are...I wish I could have been in Bristol when A.P., his wife Sara, and cousin Maybelle Carter made their first recording for Ralph Peer. It had to be one of those timeless moments in music history when someone realized that everything that had come before was about to change. Zwonitzer captures that moment and many others for the reader. The story of how the Carter Family was formed, thrived, soared, and then torn apart is a story that beats the heck out of any soap opera. It's a wonderful story, an inspiring story, and ultimately a heartbreak story. The style of writing is familiar and comfortable, like an old uncle sitting on the front porch, telling you what it was like when the Carter Family was still around. The best part of the book is the close examination of each of the three principal players in the Carter Family saga: The quiet, never-sitting-still A.P., leaving home for days on end, seeking out new songs for the group while further alienating his already distant wife Sara, the one person he could never forget. Maybelle, who loved performing almost as much as she loved her family. Her style of guitar playing is still studied and imitated by guitarists all over the world. And Sara - perhaps the most tragic figure of all...but I won't tell you the full story. (Otherwise you might not buy the book!) 'Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone' tells these stories so well that when it strays away from the three principal players, I

grew less interested. It seemed much attention and far too many pages were devoted to too many minor characters.

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