

High Notes: A Rock Memoir

Richard Loren

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With an understanding of the nature of rock and roll, Loren shows tumultuous musicians as humans, not idols with moral failings.

Many bands started out on the “long, strange trip” toward rock-and-roll stardom in the 1960s, but few could keep the bus on the road for long. For a handful of groundbreaking musicians, Richard Loren was the guy with the map. In *High Notes: A Rock Memoir*, the agent-turned-manager respectfully shares what it was like to be part of the behind-the-scenes machine that helped artists like Grace Slick, Jim Morrison, and Jerry Garcia make their indelible marks on music.

Loren’s frank memoir directly relates his memories of working with larger-than-life personalities, beginning with Liberace in 1966. The flamboyant performer made an impression on the twenty-three-year-old Loren, who paid as much attention to the pianist’s stagecraft as his music. Early on, Loren understood the connection between an artist and an audience, and he brought this perspective to his work with bands as dissimilar as the Doors and the Grateful Dead.

It’s the nuts and bolts of that work—from bailing Jim Morrison out of jail to arranging for the Grateful Dead to play at the Great Pyramid of Giza—that Loren focuses on in his memoir. There are reflective moments, as when Loren experiences a career-changing epiphany by way of LSD, but the emphasis is on business, not his personal life. Loren’s tone is fairly restrained throughout, and though he drops a lot of names, from John Belushi to Bobby Kennedy, he seems to strive to shed the most positive light possible on these complex personalities. His respect for Garcia is unshakable; even as he mourns Jerry’s unstoppable withdrawal into heroin addiction, Loren continually credits the Grateful Dead leader’s creativity and generosity.

Loosely chronological, Loren’s story jumps kaleidoscopically from scene to scene. One moment he’s navigating the closed circuit of the roadies’ subculture, then he’s on the Schuyler Hotel roof with Jefferson Airplane, and before you know it, he’s making deals with Clive Davis. Loren doesn’t deny that the negative side of the scene exists, or even pretend that he himself was above the fray, but things like the escalating drug scene are treated as part of the overall picture and never as a personal or moral failing. Perhaps it’s this nonjudgmental attitude that allows Loren to offer such a clear-eyed chronicle of some of the most tumultuous times in music history.

SHEILA M. TRASK (Winter 2015)

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