

Why Patti Smith Matters

Caryn Rose

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Veteran music journalist Caryn Rose became an instant Patti Smith fan at the age of twelve, when she saw Smith appear on *Saturday Night Live*. Her book *Why Patti Smith Matters* brings that fan enthusiasm to bear, resulting in an enjoyable retrospective of Smith's career.

Though the book recounts Patti Smith's life from childhood to the present, its primary focus is on her music career, starting with the early days. She read poetry set to music, became a star at CBGB, and released the seminal record *Horses*.

Rose goes through each of Smith's albums—treating them with cogent analysis of each track, recapping the press's reactions, covering Smith's statements from the time, and adding context about where each release fits in the arc of Smith's career. She considers the events of Smith's personal life, too, from her marriage and move to Michigan to her return to the stage. And she ties more recent developments, like Smith's *Just Kids* memoir and her performance while accepting Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize on his behalf, into the larger narrative.

Throughout, Rose threads her own experiences of, and thoughts about, each stage of Smith's career in. She recounts thrilling concert experiences, parses why a particular song did or did not connect with her, and defends Smith from dismissive critics. Her personal connection, combined with her critical analyses, add a valuable layer, taking the book beyond a retelling of Smith's storied trajectory and turning it into something more specific and meaningful.

Part biography, part memoir, *Why Patti Smith Matters* tells the music icon's story through the eyes of a knowledgeable lifelong fan, demonstrating how much Smith and her music still matter nearly fifty years after *Horses* signaled the rock poet's arrival.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2022)

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