



Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee

By James Gavin

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From the author of the “definitive” (*Vanity Fair*) biography of Lena Horne, *Stormy Weather*, comes a brilliantly written portrait of recording artist and musical legend Peggy Lee.

“She made you think that she knew who you were, that she was singing only to you...”

Miss Peggy Lee cast a spell when she sang. She purred so intimately in nightclubs that couples clasped hands and huddled closer. She hypnotized, even on television. Lee epitomized cool, but her trademark song, “Fever”—covered by Beyoncé and Madonna—is the essence of sizzling sexual heat. Her jazz sense dazzled Ray Charles, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. She was the voice of swing, the voice of blues, and she provided four of the voices for Walt Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp*, whose score she co-wrote. But who was the woman behind the Mona Lisa smile?

With elegant writing and impeccable research, including interviews with hundreds who knew Lee, acclaimed music journalist James Gavin offers the most revealing look yet at an artist of infinite contradictions and layers. Lee was a North Dakota prairie girl who became a temptress of enduring mystique. She was a singer-songwriter before the term existed. Lee “had incredible confidence onstage,” observed the Godfather of Punk, Iggy Pop; yet inner turmoil wracked her. She spun a romantic nirvana in her songs, but couldn’t sustain one in reality. As she passed middle age, Lee dwelled increasingly in a bizarre dreamland. She died in 2002 at the age of eighty-one, but Lee’s fascination has only grown since.

This masterful account of Peggy Lee’s strange and enchanting life is a long overdue portrait of an artist who redefined popular singing.

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Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee By James Gavin Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #625415 in Books
- Published on: 2014-11-11
- Released on: 2014-11-11
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.70" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 608 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Eminently readable ... fascinating, suspenseful, musically detailed and insightful." (*Anita Gates, New York Times Book Review*)

"Astute, unblinking." (*Washington Post*)

"Lee led a captivating life full of pioneering moments and deep insecurities. With meticulous research, Gavin captures them all." (*Sarah Rodman, Boston Globe*)

"As with his other biographies, the meat of *Is That All There Is?* is Gavin's adroit music writing and the dimension he brings to the details of Lee's life. His command of the artistry and musicology in the worlds of jazz and Lee's contemporaries is first-rate." (*Lew J. Whittington, New York Journal of Books*)

"With the same repertorial elbow grease and musical savvy found in Gavin's biographies of Lena Horne and Chet Baker, 'Is That All There Is?' surges forth as an epic American saga." (*Gene Seymour, New York Newsday*)

"Probing, perceptive." (*David Freeland, Wall Street Journal*)

"Comprehensive and immensely readable." (*David Munk, Huffington Post*)

"A killer biographer ... Gavin makes you understand [Lee's] disillusionment and gift." (*Tim Appelo, Hollywood Reporter (#2 of the HR's Top 10 Music Books of 2014)*)

"A penetrating portrait of a woman embittered by childhood memories and failed marriages, struggling with alcohol and drugs, yet determined to have a career worthy of her voice...Old and new fans will appreciate this revealing portrait of a troubled and talented woman." (*Booklist*)

"[A] stimulating biography of the late jazz chanteuse...raucously entertaining...Full of evocative scenes, wry humor and exasperated sympathy, Gavin's is an engrossing account of a singular talent." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"Absorbing...the meat of *Is That All There Is* is Gavin's adroit music writing and the dimension he brings to the details of Lee's life. His command of the artistry and musicology in the worlds of jazz and Lee's contemporaries is first rate....Gavin keeps focus on what Peggy Lee was doing musically even as everything else in her life was sensationally spiraling out of control." (*New York Journal of Books*)

"Gavin numbers among that rare breed of biographer capable of tremendous style and substance, meticulous about detail and accuracy yet blessed with exceptional storytelling élan. what emerges is a masterwork of balanced reporting, unflinchingly honest yet eminently respectful." (*Maclean's (Canada)*)

"Nobody writes as eloquently, knowledgeably, and page-turningly about the midcentury music heroes who sang—and lived—our American story as James Gavin. His biography of Peggy Lee immerses us in a singular life of radiant self-invention. Peggy Lee patented the unlikely: she was the first white girl who sang

(and felt) black. She sounded cool and soft and ironic and understated, making you lean in. This elegant, confident book does that, too." (Sheila Weller, bestselling author of *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon and the Journey of a Generation*)

"My dad, Nat King Cole, was very friendly with Peggy Lee, his label-mate at Capitol Records. Her mysterious glamour made quite an impression on me. Peggy was a trailblazer—not just as a performer but as a songwriter, at a time when it wasn't very common for singers to write their own songs. James Gavin has captured the essence of the rich musical era that people like my dad and Peggy defined. In his keenly observed, scrupulously researched biography he has also illuminated something very true and touching about the woman behind the glamour. I highly recommend this book." (Natalie Cole)

Praise for Stormy Weather

"Eventful and suspenseful... A thorough and fluent biography." (*The New York Times Book Review*)

"Magnificent, gripping, marvelously written... [It] may just be one of the best biographies about show business, race, love, sex, and music ever written." (*Liz Smith, Variety*)

"A fascinating study of a complicated woman and the complicated times that shaped her." (*Usa Today*)

"In Gavin's capable hands, Lena Horne's story is both uniquely her own and an integral part of a larger cultural story." (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

"Sympathetic and tough." (*The New Yorker*)

"Savagely honest ... impeccably researched, elegantly written." (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

"Gripping ... fascinating ... brings Baker's personality vividly to life ... resonates on a level far deeper than most biographies of musicians." (*Boston Globe*)

"Splendid, fascinatingly thorough ... a book that remains a page-turner long after it's obvious what's coming next." (*Time Out New York*)

"A hair-raising, chilling, and always fascinating look at a tortured musician who became an American myth ... Gavin has delivered a masterful look at him." (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*)

"The definitive book about the golden age of cabaret." (*New York Times*)

"An evocative paean to a beautiful but vanished era." (*Newark Star-Ledger*)

"Via witty interviews and meticulous research, [Gavin] conjures long-forgotten, big-personality impresarios, singers, comedians and drag queens so vividly you can almost taste their sweat and tears." (*Time Out New York*)

"Gavin's book is fascinating, suspenseful, careful, musically detailed and insightful..." (*New York Times Book Review*)

"Astute, unblinking and ultimately dispiriting biography...of a woman who, like her idol Billie Holiday, could never master her own chaos." (*Washington Post*)

"A penetrating portrait of a woman embittered by childhood memories and failed marriages, struggling with alcohol and drugs, yet determined to have a career worthy of her voice... Old and new fans will appreciate this revealing portrait of a troubled and talented woman." (*Booklist*)

About the Author

James Gavin is the author of *Deep in a Dream*, *Intimate Nights*, and *Stormy Weather*. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Time Out New York*, among other publications. He lives in New York City.

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Is That All There Is?



"When she wanted me to play bluesy she'd say, 'Trains,?'" recalled one of Lee's musicians. The Midland Continental depot at Jamestown, North Dakota, c. 1910.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Floyd Lipp:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be upgrade about what going on or details even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era which is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will update themselves by reading books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know which one you should start with. This Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Mary Parker:

Do you considered one of people who can't read pleasant if the sentence chained within the straightway, hold on guys this particular aren't like that. This Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee book is readable by simply you who hate the straight word style. You will find the details here are arrange for enjoyable reading through experience without leaving also decrease the knowledge that want to give to you. The writer associated with Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee content conveys prospect easily to understand by many people. The printed and e-book are not different in the articles but it just different in the form of it. So , do you continue to thinking Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee is not loveable to be your top listing reading book?

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than some other make you to be great individuals. So , why hesitate? We need to have Is That All There Is?: The Strange Life of Peggy Lee.

Jennifer Chambers:

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