

John Lennon Did Not Die a Slow Death: Dislodging an Urban Legend About a Legend (And 9 Other Stories)

By Jim O'Donnell

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JOHN LENNON'S LAST MOMENTS The title piece in this 10-story book tackles the question of whether former Beatle John Lennon died a swift death in seconds when he was shot in 1980, or an appallingly slow death over several excruciating minutes. Urban legend has it that Lennon was actually able to speak within minutes after being shot. But through many interviews with police officers and doctors, and a thorough look at various reports, author Jim O'Donnell dislodges this urban legend about a legend. Although some of the details about Lennon's death are graphic, they serve to show that Lennon most likely died a fast death, not a slow, tormented one. For example, there were two officers first on the scene where Lennon was shot. One of them told O'Donnell: "His [Lennon's] face was right into the floor, actually, face down. He wasn't turned left or right. His arms were spread out in front of his head, almost like you were taking a dive. He was actually turning white at that point." The remaining pieces in the book present the stories of nine other deceased people from the world of rock, including six rock stars, a DJ, a TV host, and a writer. CONTENTS 1. John Lennon Did Not Die A Slow Death 2. Jim Morrison: Rock's Wildest Celebrant 3. Elvis Presley (Occupation: Pop Singer) 4. And the Wind Cries Jimi 5. Janis Joplin: Lone Star 6. Getting Zapped by Zappa 7. Bill Haley: Rock's William the Conqueror 8. The Freed Kingdom 9. A Dick Clark Special 10. Ray Coleman: Author, Journalist, Mentor Excerpts On John Lennon: "It is time to put to rest the story that after being shot John Lennon was living, talking, conscious. Actually, he was dying, moaning, unconscious. This man who lived a fast life died a fast death, not a slow, tormented one." On Jim Morrison: "No singer before or since has had such a gift for embodying and dramatizing the search for self. He ate up every deep, dark aggression in the room, and sent it back in the emotional colors of his art. He was a natural. All Jim Morrison did for stardom, claimed Jim Morrison, was stop getting haircuts." On Elvis Presley: "It is the face that sailed a thousand hips. Twentieth-Century man—and woman, especially—knows the first name better than any other two names that ever graced the lips of humankind—Charlie Chaplain and Beethoven, Walter Cronkite and Sandy Koufax, Jane Fonda and Harry Truman, notwithstanding." On Jimi Hendrix: "He raised the performance level of rock 'n' roll in one blazing fell swoop. He was virtuosity AND flash. And once you saw him put the two together, the image was harder to shake than dandruff. You couldn't help demanding more from every

performer you saw thereafter." On Janis Joplin: "Some performers let off steam on a stage. Janis Joplin let off lava. She was so volcanic, her back-up bands functioned mainly as rumbling blue clouds harboring her lightning bolts." On Frank Zappa: "Ugliness objectively correlates Zappa's thoroughly anarchic notion that acting and thinking strictly within society's unwritten rules prevents you from being fully and freely you. (Whew! What a long way of saying nicety is the mother of prevention.)" On Bill Haley: "Bill Haley was a smuggler: he smuggled rock 'n' roll past adult customs and into teen toyland. He had a diamond in his shoe—though he didn't really know it, or intend to break any laws. It was just that the commodity he offered was as freakoid to his public as fifty years earlier the horseless carriage that Barnum and Bailey Circus offered was to their public." On Alan Freed: "He is the reason the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame is in Cleveland—not in Memphis or Liverpool. He gave rock 'n' roll its name by using rock to do what it's supposed to do: free the spirit. And he freed many."

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Editorial Review

About the Author
From Michael Lydon, a Founding Editor of ROLLING STONE: “Jim O’Donnell has a reporter’s curiosity, a rock ‘n’ roller’s heart, and he writes like a lyrical Irish poet.” About the Author Jim O’Donnell is a longtime music writer whose work is in the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame library in Cleveland. He received his first professional newspaper byline for a sports story in 1969. Since that time, his features, profiles, columns and essays have focused mostly on rock ‘n’ roll. His work has been syndicated in newspapers ranging from the San Francisco Chronicle to the Cleveland Plain Dealer to the Boston Herald. O'Donnell has written several books, including The Rock Book (Pinnacle, 1975), Born to Rock (Peacock, 1981), Wonderful Tonight (Hall of Fame, 1993) and The Day John Met Paul (Penguin, 1996; Routledge, 2006). The Day John Met Paul details the day John Lennon met Paul McCartney in Liverpool in 1957. The book was internationally acclaimed. Pete Shotton, John Lennon's best friend in their younger years, said: "Once I started reading this book, I couldn't stop. This is a realistic portrayal of Lennon as a teenager. O'Donnell gets it right." Bob Molyneux, who taped John Lennon playing on the day he met Paul McCartney, said: "It was absolutely incredible to have the day brought back so perfectly. I couldn't have told the story more accurately myself." The Day John Met Paul has been published in several languages, ranging from Japanese to Czech to French, and is available in an audio edition read by Rod Davis, a personal friend of John Lennon. O’Donnell has appeared frequently on CNN Radio and has done many television interviews. His biggest TV moment came when he didn't appear on the screen at all, but rather had his name show up in a Jeopardy question. The contestant answered correctly for $400. He holds a Master's Degree from St. Peter's College and studied journalism under New Journalism pioneer Richard Goldstein at New York University. He has also completed graduate courses in Creative Writing and The Teaching of Writing at Harvard University. Whether sitting front-row-center at an Eric Clapton concert in New York City, or standing front-row-center at the gates of Strawberry Field in Liverpool, O'Donnell has traveled the globe as a journalist for many years, searching out stories. He lives in New Jersey with his wife and three children.

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