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David Bowie Is... (Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago: Exhibition Catalogues)



Synopsis

David Bowie Is is the first book that grants access to the internationally acclaimed artist and performer's personal archive of costumes, ephemera, original design artwork, and more, bringing it together to present a completely new perspective on his creative work and collaborations. It traces Bowie's career from its beginnings in London, through the breakthroughs of Space Oddity and The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars, and on to his enormous impact on 20th-century avant-garde music and art. Essays by V&A curators Victoria Broackes and Geoffrey Marsh on Bowie's London, image, and influence on the fashion world are complemented by Christopher Frayling, Mark Kermode, and Philip Hoare on film; Howard Goodall on musicology; Camille Paglia on gender and decadence; and Jon Savage on Bowie's relationship with William Burroughs and Bowie's fans. The more than 300 color illustrations include personal and performance photographs, album covers, performance costumes, original lyric sheets, and much more. Praise for David Bowie Is: "Perusing David Bowie Is (V&A Publishing, distributed by Abrams), the exhibition's catalog, with its procession of poses and costumes and weighty essays tracking the cross-references to pop culture and high art, you get a sense of how much hard work it took to be Mr. Bowie." • The New York Times "The fans of 50 years or those making discoveries in retrospect will be intrigued by the accompanying book David Bowie Is that is far more than a fanzine." • The New York Times "Lends context and picks away at Bowie with such insight that it's a rare hagiography with soul." • Chicago Tribune "Combining top-notch articles on the singer/actor's life and work with official images and reproductions of his fashion and associated ephemera, the hefty, mango-colored book is nothing short of a treasure trove of all things Bowie; a one-stop smorgasbord for the eyes whose pictorials chronicle the groundbreaking star from Ziggy Stardust to Thin White Duke to Heathen and every personality in between." • Examiner.com

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Bowie once complained that the Bowie biography books were "a bloody cottage industry". Recently, there have been several major fantastic books of photography devoted to him from Sukita, Mick Rock and a compilation "Moonage Daydream". If you are a fan, you will want to have this one. Currently, at the Victoria and Albert Museum is an exhibition which is the basis for this book. I have not seen the exhibition, and I will probably not, so ordering this in advance was the way to go. It is spectacular. Much of the beautiful photography is a chronology of the 50 years of Bowie's stage clothes dressed on various headless mannequins. Interspersed with this are various sections devoted to the album covers, original penned lyrics, proof sheets of different photo sessions and a long running commentary, with quotes from Bowie. Filler pages of one white lyric on a black background, or one phrase in black type on a white background occur, but we must leave the book designer with some discretion. I have not read the whole thing, and may not. Having been a die hard fan since I first passed a record store in Upper Darby, London in August, 1972 and was dazzled by about 50 copies of Ziggy Stardust hanging by threads in the window, I have kept pretty close to everything Bowie for 41 years now. So most of what other people have to say about Bowie, I most probably already know. And sometimes, the history is not always accurate. As for the various interpretations in this book, the more words are written about someone, the more fascinating they may become. But, if you weren't there watching Bowie for the last 41 years, you missed something tremendous. Ultimately, however, this book is really a fashion book.

This book is visually stunning. From the typeset to the pictures it is indeed a thing of beauty. However, I must agree with the other three star reviewer that "Britain is Bloody Bitter". As a long time Bowie fan, I never even thought that the English might be angry that one of her favorite sons fled the isles. Bowie probably contributed to this by convincing us he beamed in from another planet. (There are baby pictures in this book that prove otherwise.) Whether Bowie left England to avoid taxes (the same reason the U.S. split with the Brits, I believe.) or for some other reason, the

Brits are not happy and this book is the curiously Anglo-centric product of that dismay. Apparently, when Brits are peeved, stuff gets left out. Important stuff, like most of Bowie's post "Scary Monsters" career and his appearance on the cover of "Time" magazine. The most glaring omission, the proverbial "elephant in the living room" is Angela (Barnett) Bowie, his first wife. She is given only a cursory mention. It is ridiculous enough that there is no photo of her in this book; but instead an actual photo of her, there is one of Bowie with a model portraying Angie. How crazy is that? Talk about revisionist history. I agree with the other reviewer that most of what is written in this book is stuffy and becomes terribly academic. Pompous doesn't begin to describe the intellectual name dropping that goes on in the final chapter of the book. David Bowie is a brilliant artist, but the self-important, pretentious, academic, one-upmanship that comprises the last chapter completely loses the fact that Bowie is a pop star. He wrote the lyrics "With just a beer light to guide us" and "Wham! Bam! Thank you, ma'm!".

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