



Party of One: A Memoir in 21 Songs

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From former MTV VJ Dave Holmes, the hilarious memoir of a perpetual outsider fumbling towards self-acceptance, with the music of the '80s, '90s, and today as his soundtrack

Dave Holmes has spent his life on the periphery, nose pressed hopefully against the glass, wanting just one thing: to get inside. Growing up, he was the artsy son in the sporty family. At his all-boys high school and Catholic college, he was the closeted gay kid surrounded by crush-worthy straight guys. And in his twenties, in the middle of a disastrous career in advertising, he accidentally became an MTV VJ overnight when he finished second, naturally, in the Wanna Be a VJ contest, opening the door to fame, fortune, and celebrity—you know, *almost*.

In *Party of One*, Holmes tells the hilariously painful and painfully hilarious tales—in the vein of Rob Sheffield, Andy Cohen, and Paul Feig—of an outsider desperate to get in, of a misfit constantly changing shape, of a music geek who finally learns to accept himself. Structured around a mix of hits and deep cuts from the last four decades—from Bruce Springsteen's "Hungry Heart" and En Vogue's "Free Your Mind" to LCD Soundsystem's "Losing My Edge" and Bleachers' "I Wanna Get Better"—and punctuated with interludes like "So You've Had Your Heart Broken in the 1990s: A Playlist" and "Notes on (Jesse) Camp," this book is for anyone who's ever felt like a square peg, especially those who have found their place in the world around a band, an album, or a song. It's a laugh-out-loud funny, deeply nostalgic story about never fitting in, never giving up, and letting good music guide the way.

From the Hardcover edition.

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From Reader Review Party of One: A Memoir in 21 Songs for online ebook

Tess says

Is there anything better than eagerly anticipating a book for 2 years only to finally have an ARC of it in your hands a month before its release, and it exceeding your expectations? I think probably not. I have been a fan of Dave Holmes since high school, when I was a religious MTV watcher and he hosted many of my favorite programs. When he started writing articles for Vulture, I would often save them for Friday afternoons when I was already checked out of work, hanging on every sentence as he would make me laugh out loud with pitch-perfect pop culture references seemingly made just for me to get me to 5pm weekend freedom.

When he announced that he was writing a book (as my friend Eleanor and I would always said, after sharing articles of his back and forth, we wished he would) I was overjoyed. I knew his memoir would be hilarious and full of great references, especially since he was in the heart of the apex of pop music from my childhood (anything that was played on MTV between 1999 - 2001). But what I didn't expect was such a heartfelt, truthful, and comforting memoir of his life. His time at MTV is indeed a wonderful part of the book, but his stories about growing up, and feeling lonely in college, and feeling lost in your 20s in New York, and working at doing what you love, resonated with me in completely unexpected ways.

I loved reading about how music and movies were comforts to him the same way they were to me. Talking about how much pop culture means to me can often times be frustrating or embarrassing, but Holmes writes about it ways I completely get, and helps me feel a little less weird about it. Being an outcast is no fun, no matter how or why you feel like one, but culture is always there as a cushion to soften the blow of real life. It was fascinating to me to read about how he felt on the outside for so long and how things both changed, and didn't, once he was on the inside.

With all that being said, I legit could not put it down. I wanted to wait and start this on my west coast bound plane trip tomorrow for vacation reading but once I started I couldn't stop and now it is over before vacation has even begun. This is a book you want to read. Your heart will be warmed and you will smile when you get lyrics from songs that he drops into sentences, feeling like he knew only you would pick up on them. You will feel nostalgic and you will want a laptop next to you to YouTube both music videos of songs he mentions, and clips from the golden age of MTV when he seemed like the only cool person working there. Trust me, read this book.

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

April Cote says

I wish this book came with a soundtrack.

lit.erary.britt says

I really enjoyed this little jaunt down 90s and early 00s memory lane, but the book was about much more

than that. It's about finding your place. Dave shares what it was like realizing he was gay at an early age, the struggles to live life honestly, and feeling accepted.

Scottsdale Public Library says

I'm old enough to remember Dave Holmes first and foremost as the guy who came in second, during MTV's "Wanna be a VJ" contest (Anyone recall Jesse Camp?) There's more to him, of course: comedian, Esquire contributor, and now book author. And a good one at that; I found his narrative to be really entertaining and poignant. It was great hearing about his experience during the MTV competition, especially as he was the "underdog". His observation about the changing nature of the music network puts into words what I myself felt (and why I eventually stopped watching): music became less important, shock and reality programming more so. Holmes is super intelligent and funny: Chris Kirkpatrick is referred to as a Rastafarian pineapple, I mean come on! – Sara Z.

Pghbekka says

Your mileage may vary - I liked the book up until about Chapter 8, when I started to loathe Dave Holmes. I'm sure he's probably lovely and it wasn't his fault, and in his defense, spoiler alert, he didn't do anything evil. He just started to grate on me.

Larry H says

Full disclosure: I received an advance copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review. Many thanks to NetGalley and Crown Publishing for making it available!

Dave Holmes' *Party of One* worked for me on so many levels, but mainly because, except for the fact that he was a former VJ on MTV and actually famous, we pretty much lived parallel lives. Pop culture-obsessed? Check. Growing up knowing he was gay but knowing the world wasn't too keen on people who were different in that way, so he did everything he could to (not quite successfully) hide it? Check again. Music playing a huge factor in his life? Yup. Turning to humor and sarcasm in an effort to get people to like him and help him fit in at a time when he really didn't feel he fit in at all? Umm, hello, have you *met* me?

"I did a lot of embarrassing things and put myself through a lot of useless trouble on the road to accepting myself, and it would have been a much more painful experience had I not had access to the most powerful stimulant known to humankind: the music and popular culture of the last forty years."

Holmes talks about growing up in a Catholic family in St. Louis, where he succeeded in being the funny one so no one noticed how non-athletic he was, and what it was like going to an all-boys Catholic school, surrounded by boys that he was absolutely infatuated with, but he and his other gay friends (although none of them acknowledged this fact) had to pretend this wasn't the case. He also shares memories of going to a Catholic college while toying with the idea of coming out of the closet and starting to accept his sexuality. (Needless to say, that wasn't easy either.)

While there were so many moments in this book that I utterly identified with him and how he felt at various

times in his life (hell, we even had obsessions with many of the same male celebrities in the 1980s and 1990s), it was so enjoyable getting his take on what it was like to be a part of MTV in its late-90s heyday, finally getting the chance to do what he loved and be with people who shared the same interests. He name dropped a little without being pretentious, and shared some of the eye-rolling moments of his pseudo-celebrity status as well as some of the ultra-cool ones. And he also touched on what it is like to be a pop culture aficionado who suddenly feels like that world is passing him by, because he's not as up on the new musical acts as he once was.

This is a funny and at times emotional book, probably more so because I know what it feels like to finally come to terms with who you are and finally not give a damn what people think. But Holmes doesn't hit you over the head with inspirational lessons—he doesn't pretend to know more than anyone else about self-discovery or self-acceptance; this is just his story.

I don't know that this is a book for everyone, but if you grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, and remember what it was like when MTV played music videos; if you remember shows like *Punky Brewster* and the ABC Saturday night lineup of *The Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island*; or if you know what it's like to struggle with knowing you're different, then *Party of One* will be right up your alley. I think Dave and I would be either really close friends if he lived in this area, or we'd constantly try to one up each other. Either way, sounds like fun.

I loved this.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>....

Julie Ehlers says

I related to this book so hard. Be my friend, Dave Holmes! I mean, I already have a friend named Dave Holmes (hi, Dave!), but I want this Dave Holmes to be the Other Dave Holmes.

Jeff Raymond says

So I feel like I completely missed the *TRL* era of MTV, at least in terms of when I watched MTV. The years of N'Sync, Britney, et al were sometime in high school for me, so Dave Holmes is a name I only kind of know. But a friend raved about this book, and so I grabbed it because I sometimes like books like this, and it just worked out really well.

The book follows Holmes as he grows up, goes to school (local to me, at that), gets to MTV, and all the stuff in between. As a gay man, he talks about how his sexuality was handled at his Jesuit college and how it's worked out in the entertainment industry, and there are *tons* of fun musical and cultural references to fill up the spaces in between.

This is a very light read, but that's not anything negative about the book itself. In terms of a book I could just pick up and put down every so often, it was near-perfect, and Holmes knows how to tell a good story on a whole. I really have no complaints, and I tend to be very critical of memoirs anyway.

Pick this up, especially if you know Holmes or love pop culture. Just a quick, fun, enjoyable read.

Lorilin says

I grew up watching Dave Holmes, Carson Daley, and, yes, crazy Jesse Camp on MTV in the 90s. My little sister and I would come home from school and immediately flip on the TV to watch TRL (even though our parents specifically told us not to). Every song that Holmes mentions in this book, every artist he refers to, I am not only familiar with, but I also have some sort of emotional attachment to (good or bad). In other words, this book was basically written for me! I AM the target audience. *Party of One* should be my jam!

But, weirdly, it just isn't. God, this book bored me. Even though there was the potential for something really good here, most of these stories fall flat. Holmes stays so light and chipper about everything that it's hard to connect with him--which is weird, because he does touch on some intense personal topics. He talks about struggling to fit in for most of his life, but he never really expands on that. He even talks about struggling to be gay in a family that does not approve of homosexuality, but even those moments--which should have been heartfelt and emotionally gripping (I mean, really, how can they NOT be?)--were just kind of meh.

There's something about the way he talks about the experiences from his past. He speaks the words and strings the thoughts together...but he never really SAYS anything--at least not anything that feels meaningful. Throughout the whole book, I could tell there were places emotionally that he wasn't willing to go. Like it was more important that he come across as a carefree, jokey, nothing-phases-me! sort of guy. I don't know. It just struck me as inauthentic.

But I should add that there were some good moments, too. Like other reviewers, I really liked the brief Interlude sections peppered throughout. Those sections were funny and entertaining, a little bit more honest. And they helped break up the longer chapters.

Still, overall, *Party of One*--and I really hate to say this!--is a disappointment. It just didn't live up to my expectations. And while it was kinda fun to take a walk down memory lane, I can't help but wish I had been walking with a more engaging companion.

ARC received through Amazon Vine.

See more of my reviews at www.BugBugBooks.com.

Jamie says

Born in 1980, I am not a Gen X'er but like all people born in 1980 I wish I was. Instead, I'm part of this nebulous no-generation generation. Dave Holmes is definitely Generation X and he has written a book that makes me misty eyed and nostalgic and made me add 30 deep cut songs to a spotify playlist. This book is laugh out loud funny (but not LOL funny, because I'm not a Millennial) and it's about growing up with pop culture and being gay when it wasn't still really a stigma but also wasn't quite accepted. "Party of One" made me so damn HAPPY.

Jessica says

I adore Dave Holmes, but I also have a confession to make. Even though I'm exactly the right age, he wasn't a fixture of my teenage years because we weren't allowed to have cable while I was growing up, and my exposure to MTV was more or less limited to the handful of times that my brother and I could sneak off to the basement during visits to my grandmother.

So I guess I'm a little bit of a Johnny-Come-Lately here, but I mostly became re-introduced to Dave through his appearances on VH1's various *I Love the ____s* incarnations and his Somewhere in Time columns for Vulture, which were the fucking best. They captured Buzzfeed-style decade nostalgia the right way, remembering what the music meant to us back in the day without being disingenuous or saccharine. I miss them terribly now that he's moved over to Esquire to write primarily about politics and LGBT concerns. I mean, good for him. He's good at that, too, but I could read him talk about pop culture all day, no matter how inane. Take, for example, his reaction to watching a 1991 Sizzler ad.

The subtitle of this book is maybe a little misleading, because even though the chapters are each titled after a notable song that corresponded to the era, the chapters themselves didn't necessarily reflect on the songs themselves the way I expected. It's really just a series of essays reflecting on significant moments from his life, ranging from the time that he tried to go as a punk rocker for Halloween by donning a sequined pantsuit-beret combo taken from a neighborhood mom ("a solid 70 percent of houses guessed that I was dressed as a fancy pimp. Whatever—I still got candy.") to his experience coming out as an undergrad at a Catholic college that probably wasn't the right fit for him to his MTV audition and his decision to leave New York after 9/11. Music is a pretty constant presence throughout, as it's long been the tool that Dave's used to orient himself in the world, referring to pop culture as "the most powerful stimulant known to humankind." I think a lot of us feel the same way, we just haven't been able to turn that into any kind of sustainable career.

This book hit all the right notes for me—I howled with laughter and I got a little teary eyed. He strikes exactly the right balance between self-deprecation without self-pity, insightful personal reflection and growth without preaching overwrought Life Lessons, and just enough detail of life at MTV without obnoxious, gossipy name-dropping. It's incredibly relatable and pretty much exactly what I'd hoped it would be. I think it'll appeal to just about anyone out there who loved those Vulture columns or anyone with a mean late 80s or 90s nostalgia streak (my God, he made me wish I'd been born about 8 years earlier so that I could have more fully appreciated 1994). Even if celebrity memoirs aren't your thing, this one's worth checking out.

Jessica says

Disclaimer: When I was in college, I wrote a poem about having sex with Dave Holmes; it was critically acclaimed by my Advanced Poetry class. Dave Holmes was #1 on my list from 1998 - 2013 (he was replaced by Idris Elba).

On the whole these days, I'm Not Doing That Great. Grief sucks and is hard and is compounded by job responsibilities and school. Sometimes I resent having to get back to life before we lost Yaya, and it's because I'm bewildered: I mean, doesn't everyone walk around all day feeling like they've been punched in the stomach? Isn't everyone one second away from a crying jag because you see a bottle of curry in a grocery store? How dare you ask me for a book when I'm upset! This is how I'm feeling.

I'm also not really reading. The process of decoding letters and getting engaged in a book almost seems to much for me to bear, and if you know me at all, that's not my normal.

But along comes this beautiful, funny, gem of a book that's an ode to my favorite things: pop culture, dubious celebrity status, the 1990s, and love. About navigating a world where you don't fit in and fit in perfectly and you're never quite sure why you got there or how you're making it, but you are and you aren't and it's going to be okay. This book has been a raft for me, so much so that I didn't want it to end.

Dave Holmes was 27 when he came in second on Wanna Be A VJ and worked for MTV when TRL was its bread and butter, that is to say, it was still playing videos. Music, even extreme pop that now plays on Jack FM, was important. What better place to find yourself, among having to interview people about Drew Lachey's abs? (I'm happy to hear that the 98 Degrees guys were genuinely nice people.) I think that's why my crush on him was so defined: I knew, at 20 years old and born in 1978, that I wasn't its demographic anymore either, and that's crushing: suddenly coming to terms with not being a teenager or a target market that sets trends any longer.

Holmes walks this line continuously throughout the book: he's the only openly gay guy on an extremely Catholic college campus. (So much for my poem.) He's a Gen X dude in a sea of kids who will be considered the first millennials (and people my age, who are firmly ensconced in the nebulous five-year range of Generation Catalano). He's a vaguely overweight guy on tv in a culture who still thought Kate Moss was the hot look. But he handles all these things with grace, mostly, and when he doesn't, he has the hindsight to cringe when reminiscing. In short, we are all Dave Holmes, but not nearly as funny or thoughtful.

Highly recommended for those who were born 1968-1982, for those who loved MTV or VJ stories, for those who voted for Dave over Jesse Camp, and for those who fit in everywhere and nowhere at once. I'd like to buy Dave Holmes a beer and talk about the best Ben Folds songs for a few hours.

Kate says

I just really really enjoyed this. Dave Holmes has always been sort of on the periphery of my awareness - I watched MTV in his era, but not religiously, and I enjoyed him on VH1 - but I got to really love his Vulture columns and his Twitter presence over the last couple of years. This was exactly the book I wanted it to be.

Gregory Baird says

You may remember Dave Holmes as the guy who came in second place in MTV's first Wannabe a VJ contest to Jesse Camp, but managed to walk away with a job at the network anyway. I certainly remember him from those days, when his affable demeanor made him a lot more accessible than anyone else on MTV at the time, especially Jesse Camp, who mercifully faded away after a year. Anyway, Holmes uses that experience as something of a metaphor for his life in *Party of One: A Memoir in 21 Songs*. He presents himself as a lovably awkward hero who can't really catch a break but keeps on truckin' anyway. It makes for a fun, quick read.

Party of One is also a great read for anyone who grew up LGBT in the days before Ellen or the It Gets Better campaign, when struggling with one's identity was a profound and confusing experience. I was a teenager in the 90s and felt many of the same emotions Holmes did when he was growing up and coming out, so I appreciate his story all the more for its openness and honesty about this time of his life, and his continued struggles to find his place as a gay man even as an adult.

Everything from Holmes' childhood in St. Louis through his days living in Los Angeles trying to make it as an actor as a former VJ is wonderful and funny, but the last quarter of the book begins to feel like it loses focus, or as though Holmes is rushing to the finish line. If I'm being honest, the memoir-as-mix tape angle also didn't quite gel for me either, since there's really not much connection to the songs that frame the 21 chapters aside from a sometimes tenuous thematic connection. Still, I quite enjoyed this book and found it to be a breezy, easy read.

Grade: B

Full disclosure: I received a copy of this book for free from Amazon in exchange for a review. That did not have any impact on my perception of the quality, I assure you.

Rebecca McNutt says

Well, *Party of One* is certainly nostalgic and innovative, to say the least. I wasn't sure about it at first but now I really like it.
