



Furious Cool: Richard Pryor and the World That Made Him

David Henry, Joe Henry

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No one who saw Richard Pryor alone on stage with nothing but a microphone in his hand could have doubted that here was a man possessed of genius. But few have any sense of the strange, violent, and colorful landscape from which he emerged.

His childhood in Peoria, Illinois, was spent just trying to survive. Yet the culture into which he was born—his mother was a prostitute; his grandmother ran the whorehouse—helped shaped him into one of the most influential and outstanding performers of our time.

Pryor attracted admiration and anger in equal parts. He was a comedian who many consider the greatest ever, yet his triumphant stand-up work has been largely eclipsed by his mediocre movie output. His personal life was likewise something of a contradiction, because Pryor was a man of deep intelligence and sensitivity yet was also someone who could never seem to make the pieces of his life come together to create a whole. His was a fascinating, larger-than-life personality; he was as pivotal and essential a figure as Bob Dylan, Miles Davis, or Muhammad Ali. Pryor the solo artist brought to a pop-obsessed generation the news that they had a past with deep roots that spoke to our shared humanity. Through David and Joe Henry, Richard Pryor speaks to us still.

Furious Cool: Richard Pryor and the World That Made Him Details

Date : Published November 5th 2013 by Algonquin Books

ISBN : 9781616200787

Author : David Henry , Joe Henry

Format : Hardcover 297 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Humor, Comedy, Biography Memoir



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From Reader Review Furious Cool: Richard Pryor and the World That Made Him for online ebook

Stephen Curran says

Pretty good book on Richard Priors life. It is clear he walked the thin line between genius and madness. The book is a bit arty in places but overall it is a good read.

Terri says

Very interesting and very sad. I could hear Richard Pryor's voice in all the character bits and understand a little better who he was. When I think about artists like Pryor, Robin Williams, Philip Seymour Hoffman and others who gave such beautiful and unique performances but were eventually consumed by addictions or demons, I wonder about that line between genius and madness. Hopefully not all geniuses have to be mad in that way. p.s. I won this book in a Goodreads Giveaway.

Orsayor says

Recommended Reading..

Arlena says

Title: Richard Pryor And The World That Made Him

Author: David Henry and Joe Henry

Publisher: Algonquin Books

Reviewed By: Arlena Dean

Rating: 4

Review:

"Richard Pryor And The World That Made Him" by David Henry & Joe Henry

Book Description....

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What I like about this novel.....

I found this novel very interesting. Yes, I was one who watch some of Mr.. Pryor's movies. I especially love watching with my sons the one called 'Moving.' I never laughed so hard in my life...oh well let's get to my thoughts on the novel where after reading this novel I found is story rather a sad one. The authors however did give the reader a well written script of Mr. Pryor's life that gives a thoughtful look at this person, his relationships, his work and his internal struggles. Yes, even with all that was on Mr. Pryor was one of the greatest stand up artist. I thought the read was good and very informative read of Mr. Pryor, who was a 'standup comedy, pop and social cultures during the years of 1960 and 70's, and historian of those turbulent decades.' If you are a fan of Mr. Pryor, this read would be of interest to you and I would definitely recommend this to you.

Jeff says

I grew up in the '80s, so as a kid, even though I was aware of stuff like "Stir Crazy" and "Silver Streak," my formative Pryor experiences were with "The Toy" and "Superman III" -- and even though I knew there was a lot more to the story, and I was familiar with the basic contours of Pryor's bittersweet tale, much of what David and Joe Henry delve into in "Furious Cool" was new to me.

Of course, plenty has already been written about Pryor's life and times, but that's because his story is so compelling; his comedy came from a dark place, a stab at self-preservation as much as a desire to make people laugh, and he was just as fascinating off the stage as he was in front of a microphone.

Ultimately, Pryor's story is a sad one -- a life less lived than expunged, littered with broken relationships and terrifying anecdotes. But none of that really detracts from the legacy of his groundbreaking comedy, and even though the Henrys refuse to pull punches in their look at Pryor's rise and fall, they never pass judgment, and they never let the reader lose sight of his lasting legacy.

M.R. Dowsing says

I came to this more from being a fan of co-author Joe Henry's music than anything else, although I already had some appreciation for Pryor. Henry once opened an album with a beautiful song called 'Richard Pryor Addresses A Tearful Nation' and it seems that he has spent quite a few years working on this with his brother. Both are clearly passionate about their subject. The result is not really a straightforward biog, but it IS a well-written and thoughtful look at the man and his work. It's especially good at putting Pryor in context and on the history of black humour in America. Pryor himself comes across as a very fucked-up guy, even

repellent at times, but his talent is undeniable.

Well worth a read for anyone who's interested in the man many believe was the greatest stand-up of them all. In fact 'stand-up' is woefully inadequate to describe what Pryor did, and the authors make the point well that part of his genius lay in his willingness to, at times, not be funny at all. Be warned, though - this book may lead to extra expense as it WILL inspire you to track down his live recordings (if not many of the movies) if you don't already have them.

Janet says

I enjoyed this biography of one of the most brilliant comedians and truth tellers of the 20th century.

Patty says

I proofread this book for the publisher. This is one of those books where it was hard to read it like a proofreader, because I wanted so much to just READ it. I found it compelling, hilarious, poignant, tragic, and above all, well-told. It brought back many memories of my life and Richard Pryor's place in it, and I learned many things about his life that I had not known.

Marty says

This book provided a descriptive look into the life of a comedian that was considered a genius but failed in the rest of his life as a, responsible father, husband and generally overall as a person. At time the book reads so sad, I guess that I have become jaded with so many celebrities destroying their lives not know the consequences of their horrible choices of consuming substances that destroys their body and eventually themselves.

The author describes time of brilliance of Pryor being more than an exception comedian to lookup upon by others in the field as being the best, but the rest of his life proved such a wasteful time of his life.

The author explains Richard Pryor's deeply rooted emotional issues of race and the processes he used to survive in two culturally different and polarizing worlds of race, sexuality, mixed with alcohol and drugs to maintain his stability.

Richard Pryor is like so many great artists who chose a career in the arts and are not able to manage their celebrity status, money, alcohol and illegal drugs that destroys their potential and provides the structure for a dysfunctional family life.

Vannessa Anderson says

The greatest tragedy of Richard Pryor may have been that he was content to be labeled a comic. If you read transcripts of his breakthrough routines, you'll find nothing remotely funny in the words themselves as printed on the page. It was all in his delivery, his empathy, his willingness to give himself fully to the characters he portrayed, and to let them take possession of him—so much that it seems blasphemous to speak of other comedians when discussing Richard Pryor. There are no others. No one else could do onstage what Richard Pryor did. As his friend David Brenner says, He stands alone.”

Richard Pryor and the World that Made Him was an enlightening read about a man I admired. Readers will learn a lot about how Richard Pryor grew into becoming one of the great comedians and the demons that haunted him into death. I ache for the little boy who had such a tumultuous childhood.

The authors were thorough in their research but I was overwhelmed with information. The print used made it easy to read as the print did make my eyes tired. Was it a fun read, no, but was an insightful read learning Richard Pryor's life was not unlike many others who grew up in abject poverty.

Mark says

A riveting portrayal of an American icon. *Furious Cool* is two books, really. The first half is a fascinating exploration of the sociological and cultural landscape surrounding Pryor's development as a person and as a comedian. The second half is more of a compilation of events, stories, recollections revolving around the comedian's ascendancy and eventual decay. I found the book at once an exciting, riveting, and heartbreakingly frustrating portrayal of this deeply important performer who also happened to be a profoundly flawed man.

The first few chapters were the most interesting to me. The stories of the early vaudeville and black performers who influenced his life are captivating and an eye-opening glimpse into a world of American performers that have been woefully underrepresented in history books.

Context is given to Richard's performance, not only in terms of his tumultuous younger years, but how the style and subject matter were a natural extension of early black performers like Moms Mabley and Bert Williams. The development of Richard's voice and content was not isolated or solitary; it was an organic progression of a long, heralded tradition of mostly forgotten black performers. Many of the anecdotes in this bio help illuminate how Richard's personal expression through stand-up comedy represented an important evolution of that heritage.

The book puts Richard's decisions- both in his career and in his personal life- into the context of the times, and shows how his rise served as an important cultural touchstone in breaking down America's racial barriers. He has epiphanies, apes Bill Cosby, finds his own voice, hits milestone after milestone, loses his voice, finds it again, loses it again, makes a ton of cash, fails miserably in his personal life. Strangely, the more he makes a mess of things in his life, the more iconic he becomes.

The movies that many of my generation associate with Richard Pryor- 80's fare like *The Toy* and his work with Gene Wilder- are for the most part tossed aside with displeasure as mediocre tripe. After the storm of

innovation and artistry that preceded it, those movies represent the part of his life where he had given up his voice for a paycheck. Ironically, much of the work casual comedy fans associate with Richard is looked back upon- by both himself and his peers- with disdain, regret, and a big heapin' helpin' of yearnin' for what might've been.

The book is organized into bite-sized snapshots of experiences, stories, recollections, moments, anecdotes, highlights, lowlights and events that shaped the comedy legend's lifetime. Paul Mooney provides a lot of the colorful stories from the Hollywood era, and stories of his sexual abuse, his drug addiction, his violence towards his various wives are explored, but not very deeply. The book isn't comprehensive or definitive, but it is compelling and prolific.

I recommend this book to any fan of comedy who wants a refresher course on Pryor, his life, his importance, his flaws, and his humanity.

Lance Eaton says

Furious Cool was a fascinating look into the life of Richard Pryor. I was somewhat familiar with his comedy and more familiar with him as an actor in a handful of movies I watched when growing up (e.g. See No Evil, Hear No Evil). However, the Henry brothers provide a rich history around Richard Pryor that marks him as one the best comics along with George Carlin. What I found most fascinating is how they are able to contextualize Pryor's work within the broader range of African American entertainment of the 1960s and 1970s and also mainstream culture while also being able to speak to the effects of his personal life around love and drugs that also filtered into his performances. The book is powerful enough that it is leading me to go back and watch some of the older Richard Pryor performances to see exactly what they were referring. What made the book equally chilling and fascinating was that I listened to it. It was narrated by Dion Graham who did some great impersonations of Pryor while also (as always) provided a strong narrative voice to keep me engaged.

If you enjoyed this review, feel free to check out my other reviews and writings at [By Any Other Nerd](http://ByAnyOtherNerd.com) /

Kevin Dubs says

Bios are always hard for me to "review" as I get caught up in rating the subject or the book! Like most 80s kids I knew of Richard from Stir Crazy etc and glimpses of stand up on various shows. I had ordered a compilation of Pryor's in November to catch many of his routines which has been great but as the book points out, recording do not capture the trip that Pryor takes you on. In a coincidence Joe Henry was playing a solo gig in Mpls that I read about and he mentioned the book. Being a fan of Joe's and Pryor's I decided to take a read. I usually grow tired of the tortured artist label as it gets tossed around frequently and is often used as an excuse for youth, stupidity etc. I wish I could use the excuse sometimes! Anyway the Henry's did a wonderful job of describing Richards life, relationships and most of all his internal struggles. Whether through his tough childhood or passed along genetically, Pryor was obviously mentally ill even before extreme chemical abuse rendered him nearly a shell of himself. I loved the research, the layout, the subject and the book in entirety. It was great that it was not just a list of jokes, one liners, character descriptions etc. To keep in short, read the @\$%#@\$% book. That being said, this review kind of sucks.

Rob Slaven says

Firstly and as usual, I received this book for because someone was giving it away in exchange for a review. Despite that kindness I'll give my candid opinions below.

This book is at once a biography and a textbook on sociology. The opening chapters focus on black comedy and the environment into which Pryor entered the entertainment world. Throughout the book the names fall like rain and anybody who ever was or hoped to be anybody entered the scene for at least a bit. About a third of the way in we get down to the man himself.

On the positive side, the background presented in this book is thoroughly entertaining and much of the information was eye-opening and uniquely informative. I found myself scrounging YouTube looking for snippets of the people and bits referred to. It's a fascinating period of history. As to the bits about Pryor himself, the story of his life is at once horrifying and hilarious. This lived a life of incredible pain, as with most comedians, and the book doesn't hesitate one bit to be absolutely candid about what happened. From the sexual abuse he suffered as a child to the night he set himself on fire, this book goes into it all in sometimes painful detail.

On the negative side, all that detail can sometimes be a bit much. The story is only roughly chronological and meanders in sometimes confusing fashion. All the parts of a great story are here but they need to be straightened out a bit into a more cohesive whole. I felt at times that we were just jumping about for no good reason. There's a real lack of cohesion.

In summary, after the first third of the book I thought this would be a keeper. I tend to get rid of almost all the review books I get but on rare occasion I'll keep one about permanently for future rereading. After getting to the end though, it's just not quite earned the bookshelf space. The first half makes me want to find a more general book about show business in the 60s-70s and put THAT on the shelf instead of this.

Maria says

My knowledge of Richard Pryor is pretty non-existent compared to some other comedians from my childhood; I remember him primarily from *Superman III*, which I know now is not his best work.

So I came into this book with no actual knowledge of Pryor and I can't tell you how weird it was to read this book and come to the realization that the man lived quite a life of either a lot of bad moments derived from bad choices or that he was born on a bad luck day and has made due with what he was provided or earned.

There's a plethora of information from sociology to cultural points of reference that really gave weight to what shaped Pryor as a person and comedian that gives light to his approach to living and providing the comedy he did which was then and still is considered as borderline genius.
