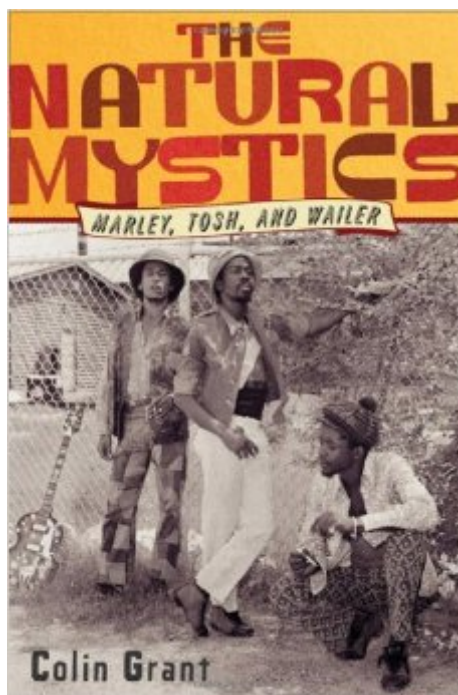


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The Natural Mystics: Marley, Tosh, And Wailer



Synopsis

The definitive group biography of the Wailers—Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Livingston—chronicling their rise to fame and power. Over one dramatic decade, a trio of Trenchtown R&B crooners swapped their 1960s Brylcreem hairdos and two-tone suits for 1970s battle fatigues and dreadlocks to become the Wailers—one of the most influential groups in popular music. Colin Grant presents a lively history of this remarkable band from their upbringing in the brutal slums of Kingston to their first recordings and then international superstardom. With energetic prose and stunning, original research, Grant argues that these reggae stars offered three models for black men in the second half of the twentieth century: accommodate and succeed (Marley), fight and die (Tosh), or retreat and live (Livingston). Grant meets with Rastafarian elders, Obeah men (witch doctors), and other folk authorities as he attempts to unravel the mysteries of Jamaica's famously impenetrable culture. Much more than a top-flight music biography, *The Natural Mystics* offers a sophisticated understanding of Jamaican politics, heritage, race, and religion—a portrait of a seminal group during a period of exuberant cultural evolution. 8 pages of four-color and 8 pages of black-and-white illustrations

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Customer Reviews

The most extraordinary musical group after the Beatles has to be the original Wailers--Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer. When they were joined with the Upsetter band--basically the Barrett brothers--they formed the greatest musical aggregation in reggae history. This relatively short book covers the life and times of these three, with particular emphasis on their early years. Both Marley

and Tosh died relatively young, and Wailer has become a bit of a recluse, so the book covers mainly the 1960s and early 1970s. Colin Grant is the son of Jamaican immigrants to Great Britain and a perfectly acceptable writer. The book reads like an extended magazine article, and Grant has a good sense of pacing. Returning to the land of his ancestors, he traces the parallel history of the Wailers and of Jamaican culture. Reading the book helps place many aspects of reggae music in historical and cultural context. I was disappointed however at the general lack of interest in the music--which is, after all, why many of us are interested in the Wailers. Grant seems more interested in them as crucial figures in Jamaican history, which is legitimate; however, I would not be bothering with the book if it was not for the music. He does do an excellent job of placing the Wailers in the context of their time and creating sharp interesting portraits of crucial moments in their lives. I valued the book for this. A fervent reggae nut case (hmmmm...we do exist you know, we are like the trainspotters of popular music) will be disappointed in the book for the lack of any in depth discussion of the music and even more disappointing, no attempt at a discography. It is a fine book for all my caveats and a general reader with no particular interest in reggae or Jamaica would find this a diverting and entertaining read--and a reggae nut will learn a lot before he throws the book against the wall ranting about some obscure single that goes unmentioned.

This is an impressive book. As someone who did musicology research on reggae in the early 70s, I found the deep insights into the culture of Jamaica after independence to be illuminating. I felt that the emphasis on politics and religion were slightly overdone, but I was not there, so who is to say? I did feel that the author stretched a bit to make his points, molding the facts for effect. The most jarring of the discontinuities came when the book suggests that the lines from "Burning And Looting" ("This morning, I woke up in a curfew...") were inspired by a 1976 political crackdown. Not likely, when the song was available on the "Burnin'" album released in the US in 1973. Makes you wonder about other points in the book. There is not much analysis of the music, or the music that came before. Nevertheless, a microscope into the life that reggae grew out of.

Pros: As the other reviewers have pointed out, if you want to learn about the history and culture of Jamaica and its influence on the people who made reggae, then this book is great. In fact for someone like me who loves the music, but never got references to words like *duppy*, then it's truly useful. Additionally, I had no idea that Rastafarianism was so controversial and dangerous on the Island, and that the Wailers were taking on a religion which only made their lives more difficult. Cons: I would be willing to bet that no more than 20% of the text is actually devoted to the Wailers in any

form, and of that less than 5% is actually devoted to the music. So if you're looking for any insight into the music at all you'll want to find another book. Let me know if you do.

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