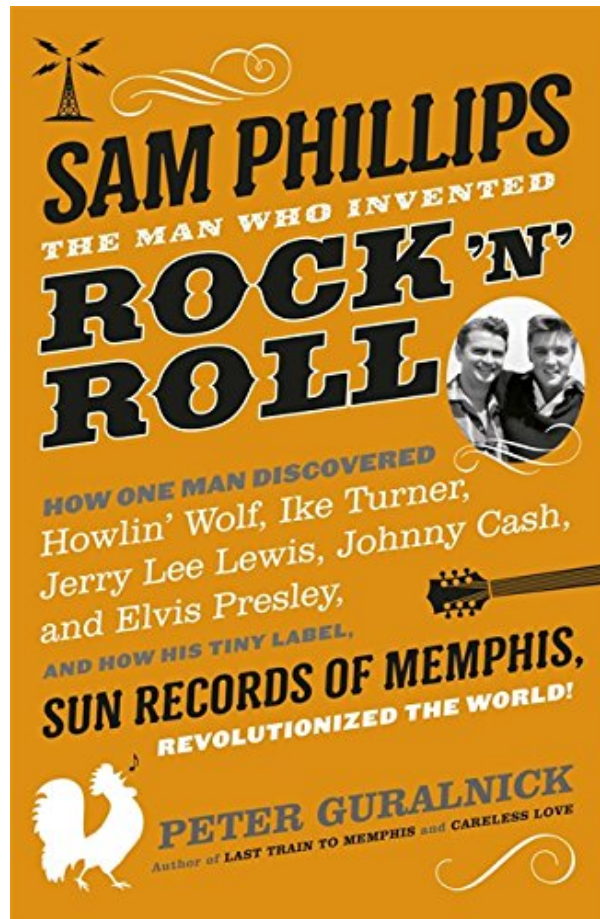
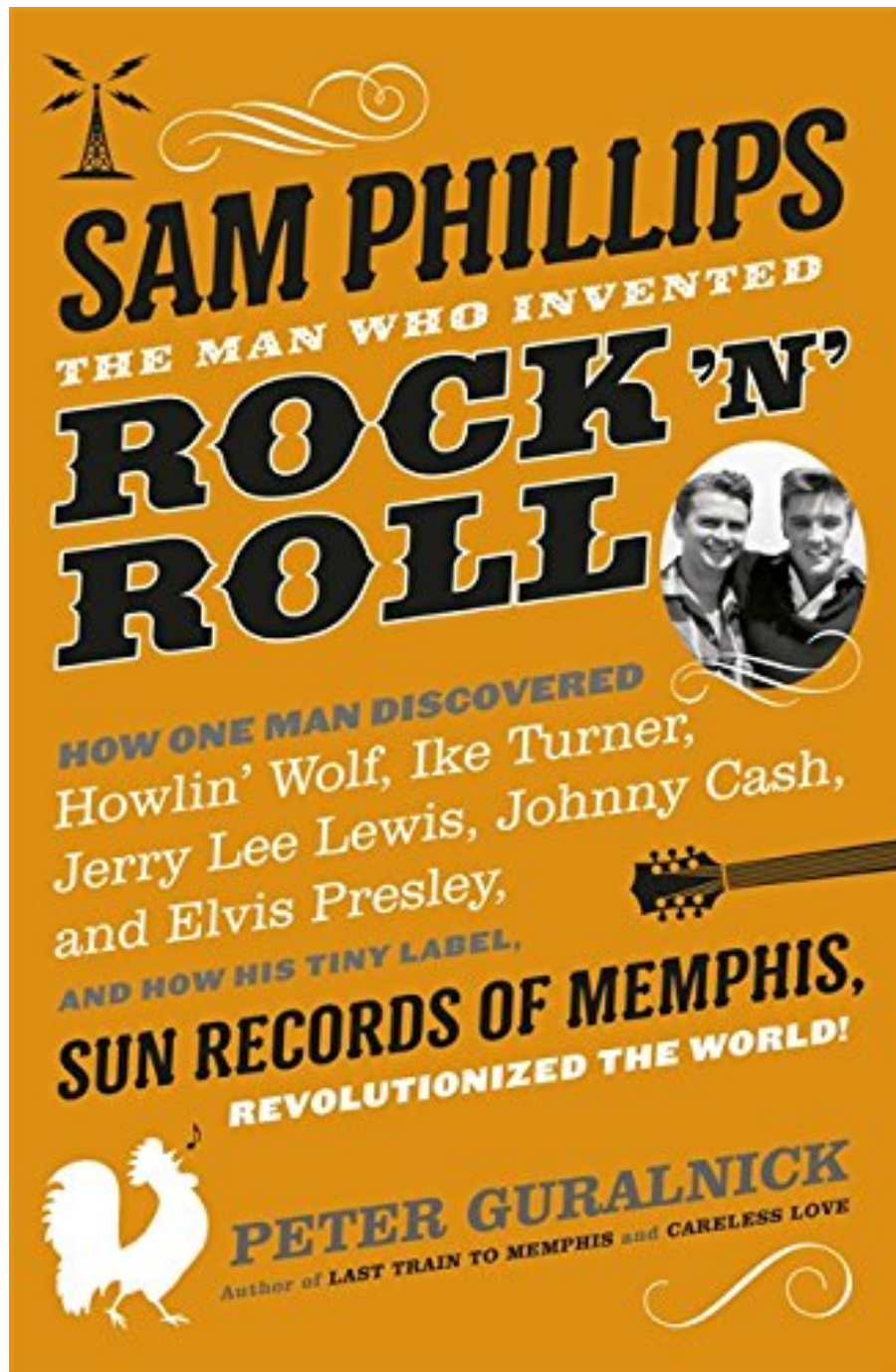


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The author of the critically acclaimed Elvis Presley biography *Last Train to Memphis* brings us the life of Sam Phillips, the visionary genius who singlehandedly steered the revolutionary path of Sun Records. The music that he shaped in his tiny Memphis studio with artists as diverse as Elvis Presley, Ike Turner, Howlin' Wolf, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Johnny Cash, introduced a sound that had never been heard before. He brought forth a singular mix of black and white voices passionately proclaiming the vitality of the American vernacular tradition while at the same time declaring, once and for all, a new, integrated musical day. With extensive interviews and firsthand personal observations extending over a 25-year period with Phillips, along with wide-ranging interviews with nearly all the legendary Sun Records artists, Guralnick gives us an ardent, unrestrained portrait of an American original as compelling in his own right as Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, or Thomas Edison.

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Perfect Imperfections: A Mini-series for the Mind

By Mark S. Crawford

Peter Guralnick paints a vivid picture of the man and the legend Sam Phillips. So vivid is the book, it almost feels like a “mash-up” of three books. One book could be a straight-up biography of Phillips, a second book could be of the artists and recording sessions that Phillips produced, and the third book could be that of Guralnick’s personal and work relationships with Phillips.

The biographical information completes the arc of a man shaped by his youth and how those unique traits and talents developed throughout his life. However, even with all the great descriptors and mental pictures provided by Guralnick, it’s too bad the reader cannot hear Sam Phillips’ voice. To really “get” Sam was to hear him expound on a given topic. Those who have been in his presence know what I’m talking about!

Guralnick also provides ample information about the artists and recording sessions Phillip produced. So much information that in the midst of reading about Howlin’ Wolf, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, and many others, I had to remind myself that this was a book about Sam Phillips. Though this ample information may seem like a diversion in the overall narrative, what it provides is a greater understanding of how Phillips was able to relate and work with a diverse stable of artists.

What could be interpreted as the “third-act” of this book, Guralnick’s telling of his personal involvement with Phillips began to read like a memoir. The attention seemed to drift away from Phillips and my focus through these pages was challenged. With that said, I suppose if I got to work with someone like Phillips, I, too, would want to relay my story.

Once I finished the book there were some loose ends that I would like to have had tied up. Since they were important enough to be included in Phillips’ biography, I would like to know: who is now overseeing the Sun catalog, what Knox and Jerry are currently doing, what Sally has been doing since Phillips’ death, and why

Sam and Becky are buried in different cemeteries.

While reading the book I became aware that we are looking at this story in hindsight. How different this story must have felt as each episode was unfolding. So many events occurring by chance, so many novices trying their hand at a new endeavor, so much uncharted territory. I don't think we as readers will ever be able to know that "flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants" feeling that had to be present. It boggles my mind that so many talented and musically significant artists came through 706 Union Ave, and one man was the facilitator of that talent. What are the odds!?

As Guralnick's biography points out, Phillips was not a perfect person, but in was his imperfections that made him who he was. Much like his recording sessions, it was his unbridled passion and desire to express what was in his soul that enabled him to leave his mark.

43 of 48 people found the following review helpful.

**THEE BOOK ON SAM PHILLIPS.**

By Stuart Jefferson

"I was 16 years old. We drove down Beale Street in the middle of the night and it was rockin'". Sam Phillips.

"It ain't for you to put me in a good light. Man, I don't give a damn if you say one good thing about me." Sam Phillips to Peter Guralinick.

This book, if it isn't the definitive book on Sam Phillips, is certainly one of the best books ever written about him. The author, Peter Guralnick, has written a number of other very fine, in-depth books like "Last Train To Memphis" "Lost Highway", "Feel Like Going Home", "Sweet Soul Music", "Dream Boogie", and others, all having his talent for informative, interesting, and sometimes exhaustive research on the subjects (Elvis, soul music, blues, Sam Cooke, etc.), and this book is no different. I was lucky enough to be loaned an advance copy of this book (and another music oral biography) several days prior to it's release if anyone is wondering how I read this thick tome in less than one day. But if you're a fan of Phillips' importance to 20th Century music you too will gobble this book up.

"I knew the physical separation of the races--but I knew the integration of their souls." Sam Phillips, when he opened Sun Studios.

Guralnick has crossed paths with Phillips for 25 years or so, which gives him a closer and better understanding and insights of who Phillips was early on, and who he is as we know him today, with his great contributions to music. Beginning with Phillips' early life as a boy and up through his death, Guralnick has painted a (much needed) portrait with many layers coming to light of Phillips' life, as a boy in the Depression era, his early important influences (a blind sharecropper, a deaf aunt, and a female owner of a whorehouse in the Depression era), the people who crossed his path (both in and out of music), and of course, the artists and music he envisioned and recorded (and sometimes sold to other labels for much needed money) in his studio.

The book is laid out in chronological style which gives Phillips' story a more straightforward, no nonsense, "big picture" feel as you read about his life, both in and out of music. The various period photos (like Phillips as an 8 year old, fishing with his young son in a rowboat, standing with Elvis and Phillips' Sun Records secretary Marion in 1956, Phillips with his grown son working together in the studio, or vocal group The Prisonaires in the studio with pin-up photos on the wall, or Cavalry Trooper Pvt. Chester Arthur Burnett (Howlin' Wolf) cleaning a horse hoof in 1941, Billy Riley on stage--rockin', Jerry Lee Lewis (at the piano) Boots Randolph and Philips in the studio) also help tell Phillips' story. Of course the music is dealt with at

some length, and the many artists he recorded (like Howlin' Wolf, Rufus Thomas, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Sonny Burgess, B. B. King, Roscoe Gordon, and a number of others maybe lesser known) are pretty much accounted for in the book. There's a Bibliography, a Discography section, and (thankfully) an Index, especially useful in a book of this type with so many people and places across Phillips' life.

Never before has there been such an accurate, in-depth book on Sam Phillips. And it took someone like Guralnick to flesh out this story in an accurate, intelligent, informative and interesting way. And with a person as complex as Phillips, Guralnick's clear, concise style makes for good reading. If there's anyone who isn't familiar with Phillips' work, this book will tell you all you need to know. And I'm pretty sure everyone's heard at least a few artists/songs from Sun Studios. On that point, there's a 2 CD set (Yep Roc) of Phillips' work that's been released around the release date for this book, but there are better sets with better sound, so look around if you want to hear the real-deal proof of Phillips' magic. After reading this book you'll come away with a better understanding of a man who did things his way--in life and in the studio. This has to be one of the best books of it's type this year. Quite possibly he did invent rock 'n' roll. And if he didn't, he was darn close to it's birth.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Too Much of a Good Thing for Me

By rockabilly blues

I am a long time fan of both the author and Sun records, and I have already read a ton on the subject matter...so I don't know exactly what I was expecting from this book but somehow I thought I would enjoy it a little more. This book leaves absolutely nothing on the cutting room floor...every single fact/anecdote that you have ever read/heard about Sun records is here and it's written as densely as a set of Bear Family liner notes. That approach works great for liner notes, when you are trying to pack as much info in as you can, but I found it to be too much when stretched out to nearly 800 pages. To be fair, this could also be looked at as a strength, ... we now have everything on Sun Records and Sam in one , expertly written, place...but sometimes, just like those mammoth box sets with every take of a song, everything can feel like too much...it might make sense to do a slimmed down,coffee table, version of the book with the key points of the story supplemented with lots of photos to allow you to wade through and revisit in phases...or perhaps I should have gotten the kindle version for the same reason...as it stands, I'm not sure I will ever read this all the way through.

See all 152 customer reviews...

# **SAM PHILLIPS: THE MAN WHO INVENTED ROCK 'N' ROLL BY PETER GURALNICK PDF**

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Review

New York Times Bestseller

One of The Washington Post's Notable Nonfiction Books of 2015

"Mr. Guralnick is a sensitive biographer who has landed upon a perfect topic in Phillips, the brilliant Memphis producer who, in the 1950s, recorded the earliest work of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Howlin' Wolf. This is vital American history, smartly and warmly told."?Dwight Garner, New York Times, Top Books of 2015

"Definitive...With Presley's story at its core, Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock 'n' Roll is in some ways the third volume [to] Guralnick's double-volume Elvis bio. What makes it more illuminating and arguably truer is seeing Elvis in the broader context of Phillips' career, [which was] in many ways a mission to transform [t]his nation's history of bigotry....You may come away born again."?Rolling Stone

"A book so thoroughly steeped in its subject that it is almost an autobiography in the third person.... 'This is a book written out of admiration and love,' Guralnick states frankly in an author's note. As such, it honors Sam Phillips elegantly, by devoting itself to the one subject Phillips seemed to admire and love as much as he did music: Sam Phillips himself."?David Hajdu, New York Times Book Review

"Lovingly crafted.... With crisp prose and meticulous detail, Guralnick gives Phillips the same epic treatment he previously employed in acclaimed biographies of Sam Cooke and Elvis Presley.... An astonishing feat.... It is difficult to imagine a more complete or poetic account of his life than this remarkable volume.... 'I didn't set out to revolutionize the world,' Phillips once told Guralnick in a moment of humility, but in this book [the author] convincingly argues that Phillips did just that."?Charles Hughes, The Washington Post

"Peter Guralnick isn't just a music writer or a biographer--he's one of the essential chroniclers of American popular culture, and his work illuminates some of the crucial components of our national identity: race, religion, fame, and the big business of having fun, among others. In this epic biography of Sam Phillips, Guralnick bears witness to the birth of rock and roll and the cultural revolution it inspired. It's not only an unforgettable portrait of an eccentric visionary, it's a testament to the power of ordinary people to change the world with nothing more than a beautiful idea and a handful of songs."?Tom Perrotta, author of The



## Leftovers

"When Elvis Presley stepped into a Memphis recording studio with producer Sam Phillips in 1954, they defined rock 'n' roll as we know it. Peter Guralnick already gave us Elvis's story in two landmark books. He now returns with a brilliant, intensely human look at Phillips, the endlessly fascinating figure who also recorded Johnny Cash, B.B King, Howlin' Wolf, and Jerry Lee Lewis. It's a bold, insightful work that tells us in novelistic detail about the obsessions and struggles of the man who presided over the uneasy birth of rock 'n' roll."?Robert Hilburn, author of Johnny Cash

"Sam Phillips is an epic biography, at once sweeping and personal, in which the gifted writer Peter Guralnick captures the voice and life of a transformational figure in American music."?Jess Walter, author of Beautiful Ruins

"A monumental biography of the larger-than-life loner who fought for the acceptance of black music and discovered an extraordinary group of poor, country-boy singers whose records would transform American popular culture.... A wonderful story that brings us deep into that moment when America made race music its own and gave rise to the rock sound now heard around the world."?Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

"Guralnick wrote definitive biographies of Elvis and now does the same for Phillips, a visionary who gave voice to a rich and diverse culture long marginalized.... Essential reading for music fans."?Ben Segedin, Booklist (starred review)

"Epic, elegant and crisply told."?Henry L. Carrigan, Jr., BookPage

"Acclaimed music historian Guralnick has written landmark accounts of Elvis and the history of American roots music, and he now turns his considerable skills to the life of Sun Records producer Sam Phillips in this delightful and comprehensive volume. Guralnick energetically tells the must-read tale of a Southern boy intent on enacting his vision of freedom and justice through music."?Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"The book is a labor of love. Guralnick is passionate about the music, but he doesn't let his passion overinflate his prose, and he seems to know everything about everyone who was part of the Southern music world... It's natural for us to take events that were to a significant extent the product of guesswork, accident, short-term opportunism and good luck...and shape them into a heroic narrative....But a legend is just one of the forms that history takes -- which is why it's good to have Guralnick's book."?Louis Menand, The New Yorker

"With his latest book, Guralnick has penned his most intimate work yet. Over the course of 700-plus pages, Guralnick documents Phillips as both a musical visionary and a champion of a kind of humanist democracy--someone who sought to document the expressions of the poor and disenfranchised, those consigned to the narrow margins of society. In trying to understand Phillips' work, legacy and philosophies, Guralnick doesn't shy away from the more difficult aspects of his life. By doing so, Guralnick creates a complex, compelling and unflinching portrait."?Bob Mehr, Memphis Commercial Appeal

"Peter Guralnick tells it like it was. If you want to dig into the truth and read about what really went down in Memphis in the '50s, this is the definitive book."?Lucinda Williams

"Mr. Guralnick has conjured the magic of Elvis in the Sun studio as Presley's biographer, but his knowing Sam Phillips makes this the superior version... Mr. Guralnick takes you right to the room, and rather than gliding past a scene that has been written about many times, he immerses himself comfortably in it and

revives its original intensity....[He] has produced the gold-standard Presley bio and now a complete portrait of his inspiration. Mr. Guralnick, the historian, writer and fan, has captured what was different, real and raw about a great artist."?Preston Lauterbach, Wall Street Journal

" With this book, Peter Guralnick brings popular music and the man who gave us so much of it, Sam Phillips, to the very centre of American social history. And he does it quite brilliantly."?Roddy Doyle, author of The Commitments

"Superb.... No one could tell Sam's story -- a complex mixture of music business reportage and personal narrative -- with the level of detail and affection that Guralnick brings to these 700-plus pages. Sam Phillips may well be the capstone to Guralnick's career.... This book gives Phillips and his judgments their due. Bridging American music's racial divide and transforming its pop, he was as much an original as the artists he nurtured."?Matt Damsker, USA Today

"Guralnick's book is comprehensive, warm, thorough, captivating, and compulsively readable....It may just be the best music book of 2015."?Henry Carrigan, No Depression

"A rollicking good time. Sometimes reading can rattle the cage and stomp the floor, and no one rattled the cages more than Sam Phillips."?Memphis Flyer

"A cornerstone addition to Guralnick's unmatched backlist of music history and biography."?Shelf Awareness

" A deeply intimate portrait that never veers into hagiography....For Guralnick and for the reader, the book becomes the quintessential Phillips production: an altogether profound and revelatory experience."?Memphis Commercial Appeal

"A sprawling, engaging biography stuffed with stories and tidbits."?Knoxville News

"Much-anticipated and long-awaited, Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock 'n' Roll, is as much a labor of love for Peter Guralnick as Sun Records was to Sam Phillips. And that's saying something."?Trevor Cajiao, Now Dig This

"Thoroughgoing and thoroughly satisfying.... Guralnick has injected enough helium and momentum into the material to get it airborne and moving stately forward."?Peter Lewis, Christian Science Monitor

"If his two-volume life of Elvis Presley, biography of Sam Cooke, Dream Boogie, and trilogy on southern roots music haven't convinced you that Peter Guralnick is our finest chronicler of American music, [this] should do the trick....Magisterial yet lively....it's a book that places Guralnick in some pretty heady company. Arguably, he is to music what Robert Caro is to politics: a dogged researcher and graceful writer who has a genuine feel for his subjects and the knowledge to place them in a larger context.... A wonderfully nuanced and shaded portrait."?Best Classic Bands

"What shines through this sympathetic but warts-and-all bio is that for Phillips it wasn't about the money or even just about the music. It was about music's ability to bridge the considerable racial divide that existed at the time....Compelling and even revelatory to those who thought they knew it all."?Curt Schleier, Minneapolis Star Tribune

"Phillips's stories and philosophies light up these pages....By the book's end, the weight of Guralnick's

mission comes into full view. Phillips had advised him early on, "It ain't for you to put me in a good light. Just put me in the focus I'm supposed to be in." And that's exactly what Guralnick has done. His subject would no doubt be proud that he got it right."?James Reed, Boston Globe

"Guralnick's biography of Sam Phillips is a key work of Americana."?Downbeat

"An accumulation of minute and fascinating details about apprenticeship, the glory, and the very assembly of a man who conjured spells out of valves, wrestled with small-time double-dealers, caught lightning, and swam against the tide to introduce the world to Howlin' Wolf, Elvis Presley, and Johnny Cash, to name but three. An exceptional portrait of a singular force."?Elvis Costello

"The story of Sam Phillips is not just a musical journey; it's a portrait of a polymath, an incredibly driven Southern eccentric....Guralnick clearly delights in telling Phillips's tale. He is known for being an excellent and empathetic biographer: straightforward, never florid. ...Forty pages before the end of this tome, the author comes uncharacteristically clean. "Hell, why not just come out and say it? I loved Sam." By that point, so do we."?Michael Barclay, MacLean's

"Guralnick paints a detailed and sympathetic picture of Phillips as a relentless visionary, a talker, a loving but imperfect family man and a perfectionist who relished imperfections that could make recordings special."?Michael Hill, Associated Press

"Just as the two magisterial volumes of Guralnick's Presley bio paint a much more nuanced picture of Presley, *The Man Who Invented Rock 'n' Roll* captures the complexity of the colorful Phillips....The author loves his subject and loves writing about him.... A book that can stand with his best, and that is [both] entertaining and lively....For that rock-and-roll fans should be eternally grateful."?Dan DeLuca, Philadelphia Inquirer

"Essential reading."?Isabella Biedenharn, Entertainment Weekly

"Phillips' rich and oracular storytelling permeates this book....He was huckster, trickster, dreamer and architect compressed in one roiling, flamboyant package. If he hadn't existed, it would have been necessary for Mark Twain to invent him."?Gene Seymour, Newsday

"Few biographies have anything like this degree of insight, rigor, or command of detail; crucially, it also drives you back to the music. Written with sensitivity and love, it captures more than any other book this writer can remember the Fifties' limitless possibilities, and is a gripping depiction of an empire in its pomp--not only Sun Records, but also America."?Paul Trynka, Mojo

"A large part of the book's appeal consists in Guralnick's easy, conversational style. With its frequent use of anecdote and reliance on reported conversation, Sam Phillips could have been sprawling and uneven. In the hands of a storyteller as deft as Peter Guralnick, however, it effortlessly engages the reader throughout."?Lou Glandfield, Times Literary Supplement

"One of the most profound biographies of recent years....Sam Phillips has many of the characteristics of a Sun recording session: epic but as intimate as sex...[and] delivering a figure so quintessentially American he might almost be a character in Mark Twain or Melville."?Brian Morton, Glasgow Herald

"Sam Phillips is Guralnick's most personal book....The author injects himself into the book more than ever before--not only because he's part of the story in the later years but also because Phillips' credo of breaking

down of class and race barriers through the 'extreme individualism' is so essential to Guralnick's life work-- and his conception of American music. You can hear Phillips' evangelical fervor resonating in Guralnick's prose much as you could once hear it reverberating in Presley's vocals."?Geoffrey Himes, Paste

#### About the Author

Peter Guralnick has written extensively on American music and musicians. His books include the prize-winning Elvis Presley two-part biography *Last Train to Memphis* and *Careless Love*; an acclaimed trilogy on American roots music, *Sweet Soul Music*, *Lost Highway* and *Feel Like Going Home*; the biographical inquiry *Searching for Robert Johnson*; the novel *Nighthawk Blues*; and *Dream Boogie*, a biography of Sam Cooke. He splits his time between Nashville and Massachusetts.

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