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**Chris POTASH, *The Jimi Hendrix Companion: Three Decades of Commentary***

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**Chris Potash, *The Jimi Hendrix Companion: Three Decades of Commentary*, Schirmer Books, New York, Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996.**

Few icons of the 20th century have carved and retain as distinct and influential a presence on the cultural landscape as James Marshall "Jimi" Hendrix. As a creative performance musician, he not only made incalculable contributions to defining the voice and presence of the electric guitar in popular styles, but he also defined new possibilities for blues, rock, jazz, soul and folk music during a meteoric rise to prominence at the end of the 1960s. Hendrix is, as Franco Fabbri would indicate, "a musical event" that impacts not only his own time, but resonates forward into the present day. This event is presented here as refracted through the prism of personal experience, reportage and the scrutiny of the academy.

The *Jimi Hendrix Companion* profiles the life and career of this seminal musician through original reviews of Hendrix's music from the British and American press, provides insights into his guitar techniques and recording styles, and invites the reader to construct their own 4-dimensional vision through interviews and scholarly exploration of the Jimi Hendrix phenomenon. Drawing on the work of well-known writers, including Jon Pareles, John Rockwell, Dave Marsh, P.J. O'Rourke, and Lester Bangs, this text provides a perfect introduction to Hendrix, his music, and his times.

The 57 pieces collected here are arranged in seven evenly-weighted chapters. As in Henry James' evocation of the House of Fiction, each writer layers their view through press reports, two sections of criticism, periodical journalism, a breath-taking section of academic scholarship and

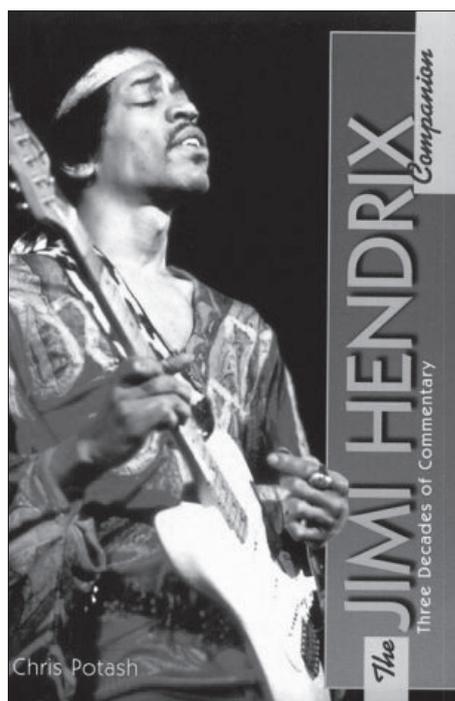
a touching final and forward-looking memorial in order to build a panoptic view of their subject.

Potash seeks to "...document and illuminate the phenomenon of Jimi Hendrix as it was and is being played out", and to "...create a charged pastiche of more and less complex verbal constellations that conducts feeling - much like Hendrix's approach to recording, layering sounds to build a heavy composition - as well as simply to collect some essential writings about Jimi into one volume". Evoked via inspiring, intriguing and multi-layered texts, Hendrix defies reduction to a cipher; as one layer or perspective is revealed, further dimensions unfold.

The strength of the collection is its breadth of scope: each section compliments and contextualises the next, allowing not only Jimi Hendrix but his circumstances to be illustrated from multiple viewpoints. Each chapter opens with a quotation from Jimi himself and, where appropriate, pieces are followed by a bibliography. The whole is supported by a comprehensive index. There is, however, a near-total absence of illustrations or diagrams - the exception to this being the graphic scores that accompany Sheila Whiteley's brilliant and evocative essay. The text would benefit from imagery as intimate and intricate as some of the pen-portraits and explorations contained here.

From Dawn James' tentative flirting with Jimi, to frankly baffling evocations of what might-have-been from Lester Bangs and Tom Gogola, the collection is challenging and informative in equal measure. The limitations of language to describe

## The Jimi Hendrix Companion



music are evidenced in Paul Suave's 1968 work, whilst the heady excitement and regal power of Jimi's presence is sensitively illustrated by Albert Goldman.

Jimi Hendrix emerges from this room full of mirrors remarkably fully-formed, and it is a tribute to Potash's ability as an editor - and to the skill of the contributing writers - that their subject remains

mercurially enigmatic yet engaging throughout. Ultimately, the companion is exactly that: a text which guides and informs the reader and drives them back to the greatest source of primary communion and reference; the music itself. Although out of print, the breadth and finesse of this 1996 volume demonstrates the necessity for an updated second edition that takes into account the influence of the Internet and 21st-century modalities on the Jimi Hendrix legacy. Recent years have seen the release of newly edited films, freshly discovered audio material and the marketing of innumerable digital tools, instruments, musical effects processors and clothing branded with the Hendrix name. As the Companion indicates, Jimi Hendrix is placed in human experience not as a time-locked artefact - but as a nexus of possibilities, and as an axis from which to embark on our own artistic and critical endeavours.

This text is recommended for any scholar or fan with even a passing interest in this remarkable musician and his incalculably influential music. In addition, those researching post-modern notions of intertextuality, identity and the continuing inter-disciplinary and mythological effect of seminal performers by way of posthumous performance and semiological influence will find much to consider and digest within these pages. As with Jimi's music, this particular collection stands up to repeated reading and extended consultation over time.

Tom ATTAH