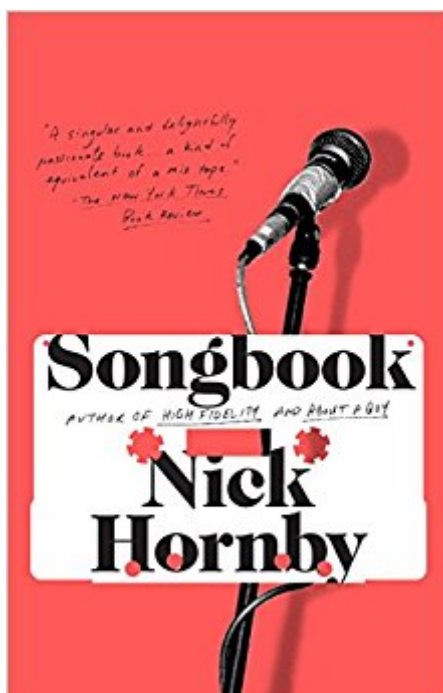


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Songbook



Synopsis

“All I have to say about these songs is that I love them, and want to sing along to them, and force other people to listen to them, and get cross when these other people don’t like them as much as I do.”

• Nick Hornby, from *Songbook*

A wise and hilarious collection from the bestselling author of *Funny Girl*, *About a Boy*, and *High Fidelity*. Songs, songwriters, and why and how they get under our skin

| *Songbook* is Nick Hornby’s labor of love. A shrewd, funny, and completely unique collection of musings on pop music, why it’s good, what makes us listen and love it, and the ways in which it attaches itself to our lives – all with the beat of a perfectly mastered mix tape.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The personal essays in Nick Hornby’s *Songbook* pop off the page with the immediacy and passion of an artfully arranged mix-tape. But then, who better to riff on 31 of his favorite songs than the author of that literary music-lover’s delight, *High Fidelity*? “And mostly all I have to say about these songs is that I love them, and want to sing along to them, and force other people to listen to them, and get cross when these other people don’t like them as much as I do,” writes Hornby. More than his humble disclaimer, he captures “the narcotic need” for repeat plays of Nelly Furtado’s “I’m Like a Bird,” and testifies that “you can hear God” in Rufus Wainwright’s coy reinterpretation of his father Loudon’s “One Man Guy” (“given a neat little twist by Wainwright Junior’s sexual orientation...”). Especially poignant is his reaction to “A Minor Incident,” a Badly Drawn Boy song written for the

soundtrack of the film version of Hornby's book *About a Boy*. While Hornby was writing the book, his young son was diagnosed with autism--a fact that adds greater resonance to the seemingly unrelated song he hears much later: "I write a book that isn't about my kid, and then someone writes a beautiful song based on an episode in my book that turns out to mean something much more personal to me than my book ever did." Meandering asides and observations like this linger in your mind (just like a fantastic song) long after you've flipped past the final page. The 11-song CD that accompanies the book is a great touch, but it's too bad it doesn't contain all of the featured songs--most likely the unfortunate result of licensing difficulties. Overall, Hornby's pitch-perfect prose, the quirky illustrations from Canadian artist Marcel Dzama, and a good cause--proceeds benefit TreeHouse, a U.K. charity for children with autism, and 826 Valencia, the nonprofit Bay Area learning center--add up to make *Songbook* a hit. Solid gold. --Brad Thomas Parsons --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"That whole subculture, all those mournful guys to whom the sound of record-store bin dividers clicking by is almost music enough, should love *Songbook*, yet so should anyone interested in great essays, or in the delicate art of being funny, or in how to write about one's feelings in such a way that other people will actually care." --*The San Francisco Chronicle* "Delivered in a hugely enjoyable, invisible prose that does in words what Hornby's tunesmiths do with sound. He writes good." --*Time Out London* "Quintessentially Hornby: an idiosyncratic and charming exploration of the meaning of music and how it changes as we grow up and grow old." --*SeattleWeekly.com* "A book about the joy of listening to great pop songs, about the elusive genius of a catchy chorus...what shines most is Hornby himself--his wry self-awareness, his disarming honesty. Effortlessly readable, every chapter reminds us how special an observer of human behavior Hornby is." --*Heat* "A small, singular, delightful collection [about] the power of songs to bind people culturally and to reach deeply into the human spirit, bending the heart into new shapes with new potential." --*The New York Times Book Review* "When Hornby writes about his enthusiasms and how they intertwine with his life, he's amusing and inspiring." --*Rolling Stone*

I thought this book was outstanding. It was very interesting to hear about Mr. Hornby's relationship to music and certain songs in particular. It was fascinating to get inside the head of someone who wanted to be a musician, but decided to become a writer because it was the closest he could get to writing songs. These aren't necessarily Mr. Hornby's favorite songs; they are songs with which he

has a special relationship; not necessarily because of certain memories that the songs summon up, but because the song themselves, the music and the lyrics together, give him something to think about. If you enjoy reading about the impact music has had on the lives and thoughts of other people, I would suggest reading this book. It is well-written, and personally, I always find Mr. Hornby can make me laugh, even while he's discussing a serious topic. Definitely worth the price of admission!

I didn't know all the songs that he writes about, but in a way it doesn't matter as there are some great insights and riffs on songs and the meaning they accumulate in a person's life. It made me want to search out the songs and listen to them for myself. As with other Hornby books, the readability of his prose belies the complexity and layering of ideas. There is a compelling momentum that builds within each piece. Each "little" essay is self contained insight into the music and the man. It has the flavour of an auto-biography told through his relationship with music. It takes great skill to write like that. It's a fantastic book to dip into, but the pre-condition is you need a similar obsessive sensibility to music, or more properly popular music, as Hornby has. If you think of music as background, this book is not for you. But if you still remember the first record you bought or concert you went to, where you were, how old you were then you will relate to this book.

I bought this book, sight unseen, simply because of the description, which was: Nick Hornby, one of my favorite writers, had written a book about a bunch of his favorite songs. That's all I needed to know, that sounded great to me, I was sold. I've been a Hornby fan since *Fever Pitch*. When *High Fidelity* (the book) came out, I was amazed: it felt like Hornby had been eavesdropping on my mind, because I tend to agree with a lot of his opinions about music and music lovers. Similarly, I'm a big fan of the reviews he wrote for *The New Yorker* a few years ago. So I ordered the book and it showed up in my box and I immediately turned to the table of contents to see: which songs did he write about??? And I was surprised, and a bit disappointed, to see that I only recognized about a dozen of the titles. And there wasn't one song in the bunch that I considered a personal favorite. And when I listened to the songs I didn't know (included on a handy-dandy CD)... they didn't blow me away. But that's the beauty of a mix tape and, despite the fact that it's printed on paper, this is a mix tape. And this one comes with great liner notes. Hornby's a smart, entertaining, intuitive writer. I may sound like a disappointed fan trying to make the best of a book that didn't satisfy me 100%, but even when Hornby's writing about music I haven't heard, it's still enjoyable, it's still worthwhile, it's still exposing me to things I previously didn't know about. Even when he's confessing to not being a

huge Dylan fan and confesses to preferring a Rod Stewart cover of one of my favorite Dylan songs to the original (which is, of course, the true road to eternal damnation), he does so in a way that's completely relatable even to a Dylan fanatic. Even when he's extolling the virtues of a song I find to be "sad bastard" music (like he does in his essay about Mark Mulcahy's "Hey Self Defeater") he manages to include a great, conversational subtext about the virtues of small, privately owned, slowly-becoming-extinct record stores with a personal touch. This is also a beautifully designed McSweeney book, with a beautiful "Maxell XL-II" mix-tape cover and with clever illustrations by Marcel Dzama. The book also benefits Treehouse Trust and 826 Valencia, organizations that are extremely worthy of the extra money. Hornby should do one of these a year, I think. And next time, it'd be nice if he'd touch on his favorite Stones songs, his favorite Stax songs, his favorite Steve Earle songs, his favorite blues, his favorite jazz, his favorite Clash songs, etc, etc. If he'll write it, I'll read it.

whilst i'm thoroughly enjoying the content of this book, there are so many typos that it's becoming a burden to read. i have no idea how books are converted for kindle, but someone's finger has spent too much time on the c key making the word "does" into "docs" over and over again, a "J" has morphed into an open bracket, and lower case "t" is masquerading as lower case "l". and i'm only 40% into the book. not so good, .

If you are a serious lover of pop music, you'll love this book. I've been listening to a lot of music of all kinds for more than forty years, but Hornby managed to introduce me to a number of songs I knew nothing about. His take on each song is always interesting, and he often uses the song as a springboard to say something profound about popular music in general. His views on the pre-processed, mass-produced garbage that passes for music these days are especially trenchant. As with other books by Hornby that I've read, the tone is always modest and unassuming, the writing graceful, insightful and witty.

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