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Tragedy: The Ballad Of The Bee Gees



Synopsis

The rise and fall of the brothers Gibb--Barry, Robin, Maurice, and younger brother Andy--is perhaps the greatest saga in Australian music history. Although the Bee Gees enjoyed several rebirths in a career that spanned many decades, it seemed that tragedy followed the Gibbs like a curse. For every incredible career high there was a hefty personal downside: divorce, drunkenness, and death seemed as synonymous with the Gibbs as falsetto harmonies, flares, and multi-platinum record sales. Not long before his death, Robin made it clear that he believed the Gibbs had been forced to pay the highest possible cost for their success. "All the tragedies my family has suffered . . . is a kind of karmic price we are paying for all the fame and fortune we've had." This is the story of the brothers' incredible careers and an examination of the Gibb 'curse'--an all-too-human look at the rollercoaster ride of fame.

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Customer Reviews

"Somehow, with all the juicy stories, the decades of artistry, fame, and lifestyle excess, Tragedy presents the Bee Gees' story in a very matter-of-fact way - The A.V. Club. What Apter does do better is delve more into the psychology of the Gibb brothers in terms of their relations to each other, and the jealousies and power struggles that ran throughout their seemingly united front. - Houston Press

Jeff Apter is the author of more than twenty books. His work includes the bestselling Up From Down Under: How Australian Music Changed the World; A Pure Drop: The Life Of Jeff Buckley; and

Together Alone: The Story of the Finn Brothers. He also worked on A Little Bird Told Me (with Kasey Chambers) and Dirty Deeds (with AC/DC's Mark Evans).

I discovered this book shortly after a recent showing of the "One Night Only" concert on PBS. I LOVE the BeeGees and loved this book. I've read it through twice since purchasing it. Because of things happening in my life in 1967, I missed this group as they were getting started -- a significant part missing from my life!! Now I can't get enough of them and have purchased CDs and a video in addition to this book. Thanks to Jeff Apter for writing it and for making it available. Only one Gibb brother left and I sure would like to see him in his solo concert.

Three brothers, who border on being sociopaths when they are young, become pop stars at the top of the heap----not once, but twice. As youngsters, they delighted in going about setting fires to other peoples' property, and then acting completely innocent of it. A concerned policeman suggested to the family that they get the hell out of the whole Isle of Mann. Barry, especially, drove one brother to drink, and another to madness. He had intense ego battles with Robin, and later effectively cut Maurice out of the record-making process altogether with his (Barry's) reliance on studio musicians. His ego-mania extended as far as this: He would seduce girls by giving them a gold ring, as if they were engaged, so that he could have his way with them. He did this, over and over, even while married. Then Andy died, then Maurice, then Robin. Robin ended up in an "open" marriage with a bi-sexual woman. He had an eight-year affair with his housekeeper, producing a daughter. Maurice was just getting his life back on track when he suddenly died. Barry is going through guilt, remorse, and repentance. This attractive book is well-written, with affection and with lots of anecdotes that I have seen about the Bee Gees over the years, plus many things I did not know about them, such as the above. They made some good music. I saw them live during their "Lonely Days" tour. Dynamite show. I have always felt a rather spiritual dimension to some of their music, and I wish the author had touched on it. But, maybe it really was not there.

a great read

really disappointed - nothing new - everything in this book looks like it has been copied from one of the other books on the Bee Gees' don't waste your money

Love this book!

This is a book I'm trying very hard to be fair with in reviewing. It's difficult because the theme is supposed to be about the tragedies that befell the Gibb brothers after all their amazing success. It doesn't really address that issue in a major way, the book is more of a recap of the Gibb history and what could be an interesting thesis to explore is only touched upon in a peripheral way. Not that the book isn't worth a read; the author does manage to include some information I hadn't read previously in other books. But, it misses the mark on why things started to go horribly wrong for the brothers, starting with the 1988 death of their brother Andy, just five days after turning 30 years old from a heart related ailment. Barry, Robin and Maurice were an amazingly creative musical force, from the 1960s to the early 2000s. Had death not claimed brothers Maurice (in 2003) and Robin (in 2012), one suspects the brothers operating as the Bee Gees would still have been a musical force to be reckoned with, despite the personal troubles they experienced in the early 2000s. Whatever troubles befell the brothers, they always seem to rally and get past what it was that had created an impasse for them. Barry and Robin had a volatile relationship within the group as songwriters and singers, each of whom sought to have as many of their songs included as possible, as well as consideration for the A-side of singles. Maurice, the brother who was the man in the middle, was often the one who broke the tie. He was also described as the glue. His own creativity was often sacrificed for the good of the group and he didn't always get a vocal on every album, which he should have. He also never got an A-side, despite having sung the lead on a few songs that should've been considered. Ironically, what separated the Gibb brothers from all the other acts, family or otherwise, was their unique harmonies and the unique feature of blending two or all three of their singing voices together on one song, with it sounding as though it was just one voice singing. They did that time and time again and while it was easy to spot some of the blended voices, other times it was more difficult. You could almost always spot a dual blended lead from Barry and Robin, but it was less so with Barry and Maurice. They were often said to have soundalike voices. Even more interesting was when all three voices blended into what sounded like a one voice lead. The brothers did it effortlessly. The tragedies that befell the group, aside from the health problems that claimed Andy, Maurice and Robin included the group's original break in 1969, when Robin briefly left the group because he felt his music was being passed over in favor of Barry's. Maurice was the true victim of his songs being passed over or holding back if it meant keeping the peace. Andy felt unworthy and unsure of his success because Barry wrote and produced many of his songs, although Andy himself was a songwriter. His record label (same as his older brothers) always went with brother Barry's songs for singles rather than Andy's own songs. Andy also felt his

success was because of his older brothers and not because of his own efforts. Barry and RSO meant well but the focus should've been on picking Andy's songs to be his singles and seeing where things went from there. Maurice likewise felt unworthy of his part of the success in the group, even though he didn't have that many lead vocals, from the 60s to the early to mid-70s, he supplied much of the instrumentation heard in the Bee Gees' songs. Of the brothers, he played the most instruments. He was credited on albums as playing bass, all kinds of keyboards (piano, organ, mellotron, synthesizer, Moog), lead and rhythm guitars, mandolin, lute, percussion, harmonica and reportedly, even the drums. It's possible he played other instruments not mentioned on a Bee Gees album. As a vocalist, his voice was that of a tenor baritone, although he sang some high harmonies (in Barry's falsetto range) and some bass notes. He also arranged the songs and came up with the chord progressions for the songs Barry and Robin came up with, as well as his own songs. He deserved recognition for his contributions to the Bee Gees' records. He also deserved to have a lead vocal or two on each album. That he didn't wasn't the fault of Barry and Robin, but of Robert Stigwood's. Stigwood considered the brothers to be the equivalent of the Beatles but Maurice was more a silent Bee Gee than George Harrison was a silent Beatle. Harrison always had a vocal or two on each Beatles album. And then we have Barry's tragedy, which was that at the time of each of his brother's deaths, he was not on speaking terms with them. God only knows what that did to Barry as there's no question he loved his brothers. Andy's and Maurice's deaths were unforeseeable. Barry had no way of knowing that was going to happen. He had no way to make peace with them and put whatever trouble there was behind them. He shouldn't feel guilty. With Robin, it was more known that he was ill but he kept his family in the dark for so long as to his condition, that Barry only had a short time to spend with his remaining brother and say goodbye. I truly hope Barry has found peace. He and his brothers have a legacy that many envy. And this book again isn't a bad book, just doesn't tackle the main theme. Still worth a read, though. Many have believed that because they achieved success, fame and fortune, that they were also cursed because of it. I remember reading that Robin and Barbara, the mother of the brothers, both felt there was a curse that came with the success.

I resisted reading this biography simply because the title "Tragedy" sounded too tabloid or gossipy. I finally relented and was surprised to read a completely thorough and well-paced biography of the Bee Gees. In fact, unlike other bios, this one is perfectly paced with each segment of the Gibb brothers' lives well thought out and presented without excessive verbiage or lack of vital information. The author did his homework. (The only omission I found was

about the *Midnight Special* (1950). The book might have been called, *Tragedy & Triumph*, but I am not the author. There were stories in here that I have never read before and certainly many I had. It's a fast read. There was so much success and turmoil in the Gibb family since the 1950s and I found some of it heartbreaking, even though I knew the stories.

If you are a Bee Gees fan you will like it. It's interesting to learn about their lives. I like to read biographies from the music world. What I did this time was go to YouTube and take a minute and watch the actual interviews, music and videos as I was reading. Really brought it all to life.

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