

That's How Strong My Love Is: From Rock n Roll to James Dean

David Loehr

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That's How Strong My Love Is is the exuberant memoir of a New York City sophisticate who moved to rural Indiana to open a nostalgic museum.

Centered in music and art, David Loehr's fascinating memoir *That's How Strong My Love Is* is about preserving the legacy of James Dean.

Spanning decades, from 1960s to 2015, the book vivifies the hippie counterculture, the glam rock scene, and punk rock. Loehr's firsthand experiences with David Bowie, Iggy Pop, and other rock and roll acts are covered, as is his friendship with Andy Warhol and his participation in the gay rights movement. But his fascination with James Dean propels the book: it led him and his partner to move from New York City to a small town in Indiana to open the James Dean Gallery, a local museum in the actor's hometown that features a collection of Dean memorabilia. The museum counts Bob Dylan and Meatloaf among its notable visitors.

Loehr's work is exuberant. The book's chapters move through his life in order of its periods, sharing stories as of seeing the Rolling Stones in Madison Square Garden, hanging out in Warhol's Factory, and hitting up a White Castle late at night after organizing a benefit concert. These memories are further embellished with photographs of rock stars and celebrities, as well as colorful collages incorporating postcards, news clippings, magazine covers, concert posters, ticket stubs, and other memorabilia. The result is a kaleidoscopic sense of the cultures covered. But while the book's procession of celebrity references is enthusiastic, it also reads like name-dropping. It lists musicians and actors, but without enough context to flesh them out.

To its benefit, though, the book treats Loehr's Indiana neighbors with the same excitement, and its love story elements have a humanizing effect. Still, though it led to a happy marriage, Loehr's love story is not a smooth one: he recalls challenges including dealing with prejudice and harassment. The couple also faced a robbery and health issues, though some such elements are skimmed through.

In the end, the book is most interested in detailing rock shows, Dean's career, and hunts for rare collectibles. Its language is direct, conversational, and uncluttered, covering events with efficiency and pithiness. It builds toward the construction of a James Dean monument, though its closing reflections are also somewhat scattered.

Gathering riveting rock-and-roll stories together, the memoir *That's How Strong My Love Is* recounts the excitement of following grand passions.

JOSEPH S. PETE (January 10, 2023)

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