



Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography

Andrea Warner

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Folk hero. Rock icon. Living legend. Buffy Sainte-Marie is all of these things, and Greystone is proud to celebrate the incredible Cree singer-songwriter, activist, and educator with her authorized biography.

For more than 50 years, Sainte-Marie has made her voice heard through her music, art, and activism, establishing herself among the ranks of folk greats such as Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan. She's released more than twenty albums and ten singles, survived being blacklisted by two U.S. presidents, and has received countless accolades, including the only Academy Award ever to be won by a First Nations artist. Her most recent album, *Power in the Blood* (2015), won the Polaris Music Prize and two Juno Awards. But Sainte-Marie is so much more than a musician; she is also an entrepreneur, a pioneer in digital art, and an important cultural activist who has worked tirelessly advocating for and protecting Indigenous rights and freedoms. Her incredible contributions to society will be recognized when she receives the Allan Waters Humanitarian Award at the 2017 Juno Awards, and will also come to light in her forthcoming biography.

Penned by leading music, culture, and feminist writer Andrea Warner, *Buffy Sainte-Marie: An Authorized Biography* will weave a powerful, intimate look at the life of a beloved artist and everything that she has accomplished in her 76 years (and counting).

Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography Details

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From Reader Review Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography for online ebook

Ellie says

Buffy Sainte-Marie is a native Canadian singer-songwriter, member of the Cree First Nation, and a social activist. She has fought for the rights of indigenous people for the last 50 years. I grew up listening to her music in the early 1960s (early in my life and her career). I remember hearing her first album, It's My Way featuring the haunting protest for peace song, "Universal Soldier" and falling in love both with her voice and with her message.

Sainte-Marie was born on a reserve in Canada, but was taken from her indigenous family and adopted by a family in Massachusetts. This was apparently a common event back then. I knew such things had happened in the past but I didn't realize this was still going on in the 1950s. Sainte-Marie knew nothing of her birth family; she didn't even know her birth date.

Living with abuse, Sainte-Marie turned to music from an early age. She taught herself to play the piano and expressed all her feelings through music and being in nature. She writes of how miserable she was at home and at school but how free she felt in nature and when making music. These things saved, if not her life, then at the very least her sanity. They kept her whole when the rest of her life would have fractured her.

I used to wonder why I didn't see or hear her as much as my other favorites, Judy Collins or Joan Baez. I knew a little about her social activism but learned much more from this book. This book helped explain why she was lesser known than some of her counterparts. Partly because of her troubled childhood and partly because of her dedication to other causes, Sainte-Marie has not been comfortable being the focus of public attention for herself. Much more than the other singers I knew about, Sainte-Marie's dedication to her causes, to the indigenous peoples, has driven her life—and continues to do so. She is now in her 70s and her voice is still beautiful. She gives concerts in which people are moved in a very personal way and seek her out to tell her. She says she is touched by how her songs express the feelings of so many. But she has dedicated herself as much to the cause of the indigenous peoples as she has to her career, one reason why she may not be as well known as some of her peers. But she has helped many others, particularly indigenous peoples, to better lives and, sometimes, to careers in music.

Her passion for both music and social justice remain strong. She is a singer/songwriter I have long loved and admired but, after reading this book, my respect and admiration for her has grown exponentially.

The biography is an easy read but full of information and insight. Buffy Sainte-Marie emerges as a fascinating, talented, and dedicated woman who has lived life (despite many difficulties) on her own terms.

I received this book from LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program.

Daniel Rowe says

Really great look into the life of such an icon of so many things. Very well worth the read.

John says

I liked this better than the 3 stars I gave it... the story is so rich and interesting, but I think the book is flawed. Many people (like me) know a little bit about Buffy St Marie, but to have her whole life story presented to you is amazing. This woman was at or near the centre of so many of the most interesting and important cultural moments of the past 60 years. It's almost like Forrest Gump, except instead of just being there, Buffy St Marie was making stuff happen. That said, I found Andrea Warner's narrative hard to follow. She's clearly established a close relationship with Ms St Marie, and has heard ALL the stories; this is what makes the book a challenge. While it's told in a roughly chronological manner, the timeframes are often layered over each other; episodes are often interpreted in light of later episodes, and so on. In the end, though, it's a great resource on this amazing woman's life.

Jim Turnbull says

What an amazing person Buffy is. And what a wonderful revealing and captivating biography. Though a fan of her music for over 50 years, I now have a much fuller appreciation of an incredible human.

Ryan Christopher Coleman says

5 big stars for Buffy's incredible life. 3 stars for this pretty generic biography. you get the details from Andrea Warner that you need. she tries to embellish, inspire, and be creative here and there and it just doesn't register. i remember during a chapter on the electronic indigenous education program Buffy founded in the 90s thinking, ohhhh. when you have lots of facts to work with, the prose flows clear and diamond fine. but when warner has to handle softer matters - the way a song makes you feel, characterizing buffy's feelings with regard to this or that ... she kinda loses it. there's just not really a voice here. every description of every song sounded the same, and if you listen to literally any two buffy sainte-marie songs you'll know she's never made anything that sounds remotely like anything else she made before.

buffy's life is that extraordinary, yes, but warner is one of those profilers who is given to constant and noodly exaggeration, which then swiftly collapses into absolutism. what i mean - when describing this or that shit thing buffy had to endure to say, record a song or travel to a show, warner would hammer on about colonialism and sexism in the same programmatic way every. then you'd hear a quote from buffy, her insight would be so rich, complex, damning and also precise it really made me :/ for warner's prose. she means well - this is one of those biographies of someone who should be WAY more famous, respected, beloved, played, honored, etc, and i mean REALLY. REALLY REALLY - the amount of things buffy did literally decades before any white dudes got famous for them is astounding. but - in warner's fervor to prop buffy up she's given to trite maximalisms that ultimately just don't sound genuine or like they mean anything.

all that being said, god, the life relayed here. to hear buffy speak of greenwich village, carrying around joni mitchell's tapes in her guitar case, participating in indigenous demonstrations in the 70s, clashing with pete seeger, basically bringing the internet to classrooms, creating an album in 1990-91 over a rudimentary email pilot program, breaking SO MANY representational barriers in her stint on sesame street, embracing tech innovations in music - including synthesizers and samples ... i could keep going. i almost can't blame warner

for her limp astonishment in the face of buffys life, career, and philosophy. and oh my god! Power In The Blood, the album she made 50 YEARS after her debut, It's My Way, really is fresh, powerful, bloody, and good. i liked buffy to begin with but have truly been bowled over by her wit, her power, her work ethic, her evolving political philosophy, the way she syncs art and activism ... andrea you have nonetheless made a stan out of me.

UPDATE: i came back to rant about something i will always rant about in profiles / biographies - OH MY GOD NO READER ANYWHERE ON THIS GREEN PLANET CARES ABOUT YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SUBJECT. oh. MY GOD!! EDITORS! WHY DO YOU LET THEM DO THIS TO US TIME AND TIME AGAIN. I don't need to know what brand of sleepytime tea your subject served you during your first (we knew we'd become best girlfriends :) right then :)) interview! whhhjajakaaaaskskdksksk

Val says

Miss Sainte-Marie decided early in her music endeavors that she needed fame and fortune less than she needed to speak about the realities of her people. I learned much about this singer-songwriter. In fact, I never even knew she had been taken from her indigenous family and raised by a family in Massachusetts. I think it's fair to say that if anyone ever had a right to protest, Miss Sainte-Marie does. She does it through her music, and continues to do so today. She has more than wealth - she has integrity and strength of character.

Mina says

Inspiring and eye-opening!

Buffy Sainte-Marie is truly a women ahead of her time: musically, for indiginous representation, support, and activism; her experimentation with synthesizers; her use of computers in education, pioneering recording an album over the Internet, and so on and so on and so on!

Scratch all that, and this book is also a great human story of perserverence in spite of everything that could knock a person down, with a dash of wisdom here and there. e.g. Don't fuck the band. :-)

Thank you for writing this biography and telling Buffy's story.

Earl says

Like one reviewer commented, this is not the usual biography where the biographer fills in gaps with what they "think" should be added. This is Buffy Sainte-Marie's life as she chooses to share it. If you believe, as that reviewer does, that she should be forced to share more than she cares to in order to please those who want gossip and filler, then you may be disappointed and, more importantly, you also neither understand nor care for Sainte-Marie.

This is not all laughter and/or tears. The emotion some seem to find missing is very evident to some of us, probably because we find the events and beliefs that she sings about very emotional and personally impactful

on our lives. Not just the music but the injustices she addresses for all of us.

If you're only familiar with her music then this book will give you a very good grasp of who she is and, more importantly, who she chooses to be. The hardships and the amazing ability to still seek a positive and goal-directed approach rather than simply a rage-filled confrontational approach. Make no mistake, the rage is there, but the desire to find solutions outweighs, for her, the need to simply rant and rave.

I would recommend this to fans of Buffy Sainte-Marie as well as those who like biographies. If you prefer a biography that uncovers the subject's secrets and fills gaps with gossip and pseudo-context, you might be middle of the road on this one.

Reviewed from a copy made available by the publisher via LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

Kristine says

This book is easily one of the best biographies I have ever read. Warner's treatment of Sainte-Marie's story is beautiful, eloquent, thought-provoking, and so earnest that you can't help but walk away from this book feeling that Buffy is really the coolest person to have graced Mother Earth.

Buffy Sainte-Marie has zero interest in celebrity and is notoriously private. And in this biography, she keeps it that way. We get a peek into her life and the healing that has come from the tragedies she has experienced. The reader is allowed in, but only so far. This is clearly intentional; Buffy wants you to know she's been victimized but she is not a victim. Her story is about so much more than victimhood. It's also about the work: the music, the art, the philanthropy, being on the cutting edge of technology, and the desire to move, shake, and re-shape Indigeny. The author is correct in stating Sainte-Marie's fingerprints are on every page. Sainte-Marie is a private person living in a very public world. In this biography, you can feel Sainte-Marie not so much controlling the narrative, but moving it towards what she wants us to know, what she needs us to know. Sainte-Marie and Warner stay away from the darkest of corners and one has to wonder if it is about protecting Sainte-Marie's privacy AND not falling into that trap of exploitation so many Indigenous leaders are dragged into.

Don't fuck the band and light shit on fire.

Will George says

Buffy is a legend, and this book reinforces that role in both her music and activism. To say I admire her is an understatement, and reading this book just added to that admiration. Buffy was involved in this book all the way through, so it is authentic, but that also means that nothing got in that she didn't approve of. But she doesn't come across as the type who feels the need to hide anything. But I'm sure there are some aspects of her life and career that she prefers not to discuss publicly. Andrea Warner is clearly a fan and is not looking for salacious gossip, and represents Buffy with the dignity and respect she deserves. An underrated artist, this is essential reading for anyone who is interested in indigenous rights and activism as well as Buffy's music and life.

Jay Gabler says

One of the pleasures of Sainte-Marie's new authorized biography, penned by Andrea Warner with a short but admiring foreword by Joni Mitchell, is that it illuminates not only Sainte-Marie's musical journey but her much broader cultural significance. I reviewed *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography* for The Current.

Lauren says

A very interesting biography of a singular musician, songwriter, and activist. It's definitely authorized - the lack of critical distance made me a bit uncomfortable and I felt like it lacked context or sense of place. The biography really came alive when discussing her work as an activist and teacher. There's also quite a bit about First Nation music and Indigenous rights - inspiring to read about!

My review copy lacked photos and the intro by Joni Mitchell which would have been great to read. That might have provided some of the context I was looking for.

Many thanks to the Library Thing First Readers program which gave me a copy in exchange for a fair and balanced review.

Julie says

Buffy Sainte- Marie: The Authorized Biography by Andrea Warner is a 2018 Greystone Books publication.

Between the ages of five and seven, I liked the am pop radio stations that came in clear enough in my small rural location. Those stations were more apt to play 'These Boots are Made for Walking' by Nancy Sinatra than anything remotely folk sounding. However, folk music was all over the television in prime time variety shows, the news and other mediums and we even sang some generic folk songs in our music class at school. I loved it, to be honest. My mother allowed me, at the ripe old age of seven to buy Judy Collins and Joan Baez records, and I nearly wore them out- before I fell in love with David Cassidy, Bobby Sherman and The Osmond Brothers, that is. ?

I never really connected to folk music in the same way again, until I was much older. But, folk music was never a genre I was well versed in. I knew the heavy hitters from the sixties and seventies, but never scratched too far beneath the surface. So, to be perfectly honest, I had never heard of Buffy Sainte-Marie-although now, I realize I was marginally aware of one or two of her songs. Therefore, this is really my first introduction to her and her background.

For anyone else like me, who are mostly unfamiliar with this artist, Buffy is a Cree member- one of the largest groups of First Nations in Canada and has an Indigenous heritage. Her background has led her to focus on the rights and freedoms of the Indigenous people.

Her musical abilities are natural and self-taught, and her songs, while ever changing, usually stuck with

themes of peace over war and the individual's responsibility in helping to prevent further bloodshed. Her message truly resonated with the anti-war sentiment in the sixties and her signature song, 'Universal Soldier' became an anthem.

Yet, Buffy never did cross over into the mainstream the way her white counterparts did. She remained out of the public glare, while commanding the respect of many other folk musicians. Her songs were recorded and covered by Elvis, Glen Campbell, and Donavon, just to name a few. But, her personal life remained an enigma- maybe even to some of her biggest fans.

This book takes the reader back to Buffy's troubled childhood, which explains a lot about her aversion to socializing and publicity tactics. We follow her through her early years in the music business, her struggles with publishing rights, and her activism. She was even a regular on Sesame Street for a time until budget cuts forced her out. Her private life was also examined, which was not always easy to read about, so be prepared for a few uncomfortable passages.

However, once most of these bad patches were behind her, Buffy carved out a niche for herself and although still active musically, she put a lot of her energy behind teaching and education, paving the way for indigenous people in more ways than she is credited for, opening doors for them in many areas, including music.

I liked the fact that this was an authorized biography. The author has the permission to print and publish anything she wished with her subject's permission, which to me, says a lot. One thing I always look for in a biography is organization. This book has a nice presentation, mostly done in the traditional chronological way. She named each chapter after one of Buffy's songs, which was a nice touch, I thought.

While Buffy's life has certainly been extraordinary, her music important and emotional, the book, at times, is a bit dry. It is also rather brief, and I'm not entirely sure how well it fully captured Buffy's persona or spirit.

Other than that, the book is certainly worth checking out. I knew little or nothing about this artist and am glad to have discovered her. I learned more insights into the music business, how Buffy survived on the fringes of major, household name, success and was impressed by her musical abilities after watching a few YouTube videos. However, I also learned a lot about First Nations and the many challenges facing Indigenous people.

From a personal standpoint, I admired Buffy's forthrightness, and her boldness and courage. I see in her a little bit of a kindred spirit in that she sees through a lot of smoke and mirrors and refuses to play the required games. She was a true pioneer and a real life rebel- which always comes at a cost. She lives her life on her own terms and is someone who seems to need space away from the crowds and too much peopling. I can relate to that, but I'm happy she still performs, records, writes and is still a strong advocate.

This is a quick and easy read, but also an interesting outline of Buffy Sainte -Maire's life and times.

4 stars

*I was provided an advance reader's copy of this book as a part of LibraryThing's early review program.

Hanson Ho says

A powerhouse bio of powerhouse who is miles ahead of everyone, both as a musician that pushes the boundaries of the medium, and as a First Nations activist who puts achieving results ahead of everything else. There's so much we can learn from this legend, and this book catalogs her life thus far in an engaging, easy to read format.

Laurel says

Buffy Sainte-Marie, The Authorized Biography, was such a pleasant surprise. Not only did I learn a lot about her as an artist, I learned about her as a person and that, I think was the eye-opening and the best part. In addition, this book is not only a biography, but provides Indigenous history and self-help as well. To explain what I mean about the latter concerns Buffy Sainte-Marie's Cradleboard Teaching Project. She tells the students to imagine people on the plains, picking up dried buffalo chips and putting them in a bag. You should not hate them because they're stinky. You shouldn't throw them away because they have many uses. You can build a fire with the chips and read a book, keep warm, fall in love. You can fertilize your garden. "Guilt and bitterness and a lot of things in life are like that. Don't just hate it because it stinks; let it dry out and then use it... there are gifts in everything, even in the shit." I absolutely loved Andrea Warner's excellent biography of Buffy Sainte-Marie.

Thanks to LibraryThing for giving me the opportunity to read and review this book.
