



Porcelain: A Memoir

Moby

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From one of the most interesting and iconic musicians of our time, a piercingly tender, funny, and harrowing account of the path from suburban poverty and alienation to a life of beauty, squalor and unlikely success out of the NYC club scene of the late '80s and '90s.

There were many reasons Moby was never going to make it as a DJ and musician in the New York club scene. This was the New York of Palladium; of Mars, Limelight, and Twilo; of unchecked, drug-fueled hedonism in pumping clubs where dance music was still largely underground, popular chiefly among working-class African Americans and Latinos. And then there was Moby--not just a poor, skinny white kid from Connecticut, but a devout Christian, a vegan, and a teetotaler. He would learn what it was to be spat on, to live on almost nothing. But it was perhaps the last good time for an artist to live on nothing in New York City: the age of AIDS and crack but also of a defiantly festive cultural underworld. Not without drama, he found his way. But success was not uncomplicated; it led to wretched, if in hindsight sometimes hilarious, excess and proved all too fleeting. And so by the end of the decade, Moby contemplated an end in his career and elsewhere in his life, and put that emotion into what he assumed would be his swan song, his good-bye to all that, the album that would in fact be the beginning of an astonishing new phase: the multimillion-selling *Play*.

At once bighearted and remorseless in its excavation of a lost world, *Porcelain* is both a chronicle of a city and a time and a deeply intimate exploration of finding one's place during the most gloriously anxious period in life, when you're on your own, betting on yourself, but have no idea how the story ends, and so you live with the honest dread that you're one false step from being thrown out on your face. Moby's voice resonates with honesty, wit, and, above all, an unshakable passion for his music that steered him through some very rough seas.

Porcelain is about making it, losing it, loving it, and hating it. It's about finding your people, your place, thinking you've lost them both, and then, somehow, when you think it's over, from a place of well-earned despair, creating a masterpiece. As a portrait of the young artist, *Porcelain* is a masterpiece in its own right, fit for the short shelf of musicians' memoirs that capture not just a scene but an age, and something timeless about the human condition. Push play.

Porcelain: A Memoir Details

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Writer's Relief says

When you think of electronic music and the rave scene of the early-to-mid 90s, you don't often think of young Christian, sober, balding, vegan kids. But this was Moby when he got his start in New York City.

As Moby's music became more popular in New York, and got airplay in the greater U.S. and in Europe, the crowds got bigger and certainly more attentive. But as popular as he became, his pre-performance nerves never seem to really went away (he later experienced debilitating panic attacks). To read about his admission is refreshingly honest in the world of pop star memoirs.

Moby's writing style is influenced by Herman Melville (which is where his name comes from), and it is fairly erratic. He often starts a chapter in the middle of a certain situation and then goes into how he got there?at times with no seeming transition or even a paragraph change. He is deeply in love with a girl in one chapter and in the next she has disappeared. He might mention something very important that happened seven years ago, but there was no hint of that event in previous chapters. And yet, somehow, none of this really takes away from the writing. It's as if he's telling his story right to you; "...I was surprised to see Sarah at the party that night; oh right, I forgot to mention this but we met twelve years ago when I was living at the warehouse..."

Porcelain concludes in the year 1999, right before Moby really hit it big with his album PLAY. It's an interesting choice to have the memoir end right before his big rise to fame, but if anything, the decision adds to the book rather than takes away from it. Despite some of the holier-than-thou feelings he has toward his contemporaries early on, he mostly comes off as a fairly humble individual—see his reaction to meeting David Bowie—and the decision to end the book where it does reflects this.

JC says

Moby is a good writer, but he really could have used a better editor. Some things to know about Moby: he is a vegan, he's really judgy, he's a vegan, he's a Christian, he was sober and judgy, he fell off the wagon hard, and HE'S A VEGAN.

I was hoping for some insight to his music, but there is none of that. What we have is an anxiety-ridden man with seemingly little self-confidence. He over-compensates for their lack of confidence by being smug and judgemental. This book could have been a look into why and how he made his music because of these characteristics. He could have shared his self-awareness and where it's led him instead of showing us a pic of his dick and a list of all the women he slept with and judged harshly.

Disappointed, but would totally read a follow up to see if he's grown up yet.

Vanessa says

5 stars!!!!

This deserves all the high praises, incredibly well written memoir. I devoured every word. I knew about Moby through his music but nothing else about him really. The mood he captures around the emerging electronic and rave music scene in the early 90's, about his beloved New York..feels like I'm walking it with him, the grimy underworld of nightclubs is so vividly described here. Moby is a unique guy that defies the stereotypes in the music industry, his devotion to veganism, (mostly) sober living, animal rights and welfare is admirable, especially as he is surrounded by such a drug addled culture. He really keeps true to himself. I love Moby's self deprecating wit not afraid to lay bare his many foibles and neurosis. It goes to show that most creative types are usually riddled with insecurities and doubts which usually further enhances ones creativity, some of the passages are quite sad, the immense poverty, the loneliness the lack of hygiene made me squirm and I thought I had it tough!

As much as I loved this book it falls short as in it didn't explore enough of his later more recent successes of him actually making it big in the music world, I thought he could have explored the later stuff further and maybe have condensed some earlier recollections to fit it all in, hopefully this could mean a further publication and I for one would be first in line to read more from this incredibly talented musician and now talented writer. Oh how I enjoyed your narcissistic time travel Moby! Please sir I want some more

Greg says

Listening to "Play" and "18" while reading this book added a new layer to my appreciation of his music. Moby writes, before he begins working on "Play": "All I had hoped for ten years earlier was to be able to live in New York City...maybe release a couple of dance singles...I'd traveled the world...stood on stage in front of thousands of people...if this was the end of my career, that was okay. I'd had a remarkable and unexpected run." But only after this ten year run does his career reach worldwide stardom. Towards the end of this book, when he tells us about the writing of a few of the songs on "Play", it is as beautiful and fascinating as when William Finnegan tells us about the best waves he surfed in his autobiography, "Barbarian Days." "Porcelain" is a beautiful work: honest, heartfelt and graphic (both in words and photos). Salman Rushdie writes, in a blurb on the book jacket, that this book is "...full of spit and semen and some sort of Christianity..." so let that serve as a warning of sorts, as Moby holds absolutely nothing back. This is by far my favorite biography of this year.

Ashley Montulli says

Last night I gave this memoir 4 stars because I was too programmed for a harbinger to understand that Moby was not going to take me where I was expecting. And then this morning, I realized, that is the essence of the memoir.

Moby dropped me into his world during the decade of 1989-1999, while he was living in a violent, drug-fueled and filthy New York City. He then spit me out on the curb exhausted, frustrated, sad, anxious and ultimately, hopeful. I lived inside his head for that decade and sped alongside his haphazard musical journey to the bass line of unyielding veganism and a quest for meaningful love.

Moby does not flinch with his account of creating music, sobriety, falling off the wagon, sex, poverty, failure and wanting to be understood. It is a journey that left me desperately wanting to find relief with his ultimate stardom, but instead really made me understand him more for not giving it.

Chris Hubbs says

Vignette after vignette of a searching life. So empty. Really sad.

P says

Moby is much funnier than expected, in a winkingly petulant kind of way. Tons of great anecdotes here for those into early 90s New York rave tunes. Less surprising: a scion of Melville, the Voodoo Child is an excellent writer, and adeptly makes the descents into punk, alcoholism, bad relationships, Christianity, and veganism charming.

John Lamb says

This book is 400 pages (and it stops in 1999) and could have benefited from being about 399 pages shorter. Mainly just vignettes of him getting drunk. No real in-depth discussion about the process of composing. If you want to read about Moby having sex with a woman openly in club full of drag queens or see a photograph of him peeing, then this might be your dreams come true. Also, the fact that Play is built upon the bones of 20th century African-American musicians in field recordings and never once mentions in the book the process or admiration he had for these artists is the very definition of white privilege.

Lynn says

The electronic musician Moby writes a memoir which I loved for many reasons.

NOSTALGIA: Moby is from CT and so am I, we attended UCONN at the same time, and he lived in the same East Village neighborhood a decade after I did.

HUMBLE: Moby is a famous musician but he details his meteoric rise and subsequent falls in a straight forward unassuming manner. He seems like a regular guy

CONUNDRUM: Moby the veganarian is a sometime Christian teetotaler who strives to stay celibate but hangs out at Raves amongst the drug addled and often falls prey to the allure of alcohol and one night stands.

NO NEED FOR A GHOST WRITER: Moby's descriptions of the music scene, his childhood, being homeless, his quest for love, and the joys of playing music for sweaty revelers are stellar.

NO COMPLAINTS: Moby grew up poor, had an unavailable mother, suffers from panic attacks, and is an alcoholic. He describes all this without judgment or grievance.

CAVEAT If you are unfamiliar with Moby's music scene you may find this book alien and uninteresting. I admit to being a tad bored with yet another Rave description in the middle of the book.

Mike says

This memoir traces the familiar arc of the artist- it may feel too familiar to be believed, actually- but anyone with a creative impulse can probably identify with the difficulty and (occasional) pleasure of working hard at your craft, of truly wanting something you're working on to be perfect and complete (maybe not in that order), and feeling that its completion is dependent not on your will but on something outside yourself, something possibly mystical that either bestows itself on you or doesn't. Creating something that moves you and others, and then being able to make money off of your hard work? Well, that's where Moby and most of us part ways.

One thing that struck me was his almost total lack of introspection about why he makes music, although that's not necessarily a criticism- maybe that lack of introspection is part of what allows him to do it. I did have a difficult time with his sentimentality and the easy, self-deprecating humor about things like his receding hairline (it's mentioned not just once or twice, but quite often). This is the sort of humor that you (or I, at least) might use at uncomfortable social gatherings where you don't feel like opening up to the people around you, and whose real motive is to present yourself to others as modest and sympathetic; but a memoir should probably be the opposite of that. Lest anyone think I'm being insensitive, I first realized I was losing my hair at the age of nineteen; worse things can happen.

There are a few good anecdotes- like the one about the roommate who not only threatens to kill him in his sleep (that's common enough when people live together, in my experience), but actually goes out and buys the can of gasoline with which he intends to burn Moby alive- and more than a few, often about playing a show at this or that club in New York, that I found blended together. Maybe part of my boredom with these scenes was simply that the pleasure of listening to music is hard for anyone to describe in words.

I liked the second half of the memoir- in which he falls off the wagon and loses his religion (he sure does look like Michael Stipe, doesn't he?)- much better. It seems to me that most art benefits from an artist's understanding first-hand addiction, doubt and weakness- as a person, of course, you suffer. But it certainly made his memoir more interesting, and it seems to have been good for his art as well. Why do I say that? Because the book compelled me to listen to *Play*, the album he created soon after, and I think it's great. In fact I like it so much that it's hard to reconcile the memoir with the music. Here's a song I can't stop listening to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6Zwc...>

Renee says

I didn't like this book nearly as much as the masses, and it's not because I don't love Moby, I like him enough, and I've been to enough Raves, and can appreciate electronic music to get it. I also appreciate that he penned his memoir and it was not co-written by anyone. Turns out he is a thoughtful, clear and introspective writer.

What I didn't like about this book was the mundane, day to day recollection of every club he DJ-ed in, every vegan restaurant he ate in, and every chick he banged when he was drunk or high. I would have liked to read more about his music and influences. "Animal Rights", bombed, and "Play" was the album that turned everything around for him, so I wanted to know what it was that influenced this musical redemption. It felt like the last quarter of the book was missing.

Jennifer Masterson says

The paperback version was just released.. I absolutely loved It! He is finishing writing a sequel to this one now.

I'd give Moby's memoir "Porcelain" 10 Stars if I could! This book is raw, real, honest and it made me feel. That's right! This is another book with all the feels!!! I had no idea what an impact this book was going to have on me. It packed a punch. One that I will never forget!

The book is broken down into 5 parts between the years of 1989 and 1999. It begins in Stamford, Connecticut. Moby is a passionate musician living in an abandoned factory. He is also a Sober Vegan Christian from a poor background teaching Bible Study to rich kids in Connecticut.

Moby goes from an aspiring musician to a successful musician to having much bleaker times in his career. His album Animal Rights was actually his "Big White Whale". During the middle of the book Moby gives up 8 years of sobriety and goes down a very very dark path of alcoholism and meaningless sex in public bathrooms with strippers and even one of Heidi Fleiss's call girls. Some of the book is so crazy that you couldn't make it up if you tried!!!

Moby is refreshing, candid, funny and sad. There were times I laughed so hard I was snorting. There were also times I felt such sadness for him that I cried and just wanted to give him a hug.

"Porcelain: A Memoir" turned out to be a very special book for me. Not because Moby and I are from the same part of Connecticut, not because I love animals, not because I love his music, but because I suffer from panic disorder. It's a tough subject to talk about, but he addresses it from his first panic attack in college, to getting panic attacks again years later while making the album Animal Rights, to panicking while on vacation in Barbados and feeling a need to flee the Island. This book is so raw that I could actually feel his angst when he was talking about his hotel in Barbados. I would have fled, too! He just shows such sincere honesty!

I listened to the audio version of this book. I highly recommend this version. Listening to Moby read his memoir made it all that more real. I listened to this book faster than I would have binged a season of one of my favorite shows on Netflix!!!

Highly highly recommended!!!

Katee says

hmm.. well, he is a good writer, although it needed a lot of editing (there are a lot of repetitive sentences and thoughts), but I'm not quite sure what the point of this was - it ends before the high parts of his career, and there were several parts of it where he seemed like an adolescent boy showing off his indiscretions.

Chelsea says

Within the first few chapters of this book, I thought to myself "Wow, Moby is dreadfully earnest" (This

didn't really surprise me, he wears his convictions on his sleeve within both print and social media, which I have always appreciated about him). He is also dreadfully honest throughout the entirety of this memoir. From living in near squalor in an abandoned factory to living in weird, uncomfortable excess, Moby lays out his truth for the world to see. As a fan of his music I had known a little bit about the depths of his lows (I'll never forget hearing "Southside" for the first time and being totally mystified at age 15, watching Señor Moby's House of Music late at night on MTV as he played Joy Division and Massive Attack music videos during a half hour block every week, listening to his album "Animal Rights" on headphones during lunch breaks in 11th grade, getting "18" on the day it came out and being too excited at the local Target). However, his descriptions of some of his debauchery took my breath away: not because he was actively bragging, or even apologizing - because his writing is so conversational you feel like a friend is confiding in you about their worst acts. When I finished the book last night, I was pretty bummed out. It was a little bit like saying goodbye over the phone to a friend who lives thousands of miles away.

Mary E. Gilmore says

First, a huge thank you to Penguin Press for the giveaway that ended with this jewel in my mailbox. Raw. Hilarious. Harrowing. I couldn't put this one down. Moby is an exceptional writer and shares the good, bad, and ugly with unflinching honesty. The journey he has taken from suburban poverty and alienation to create music that has lifted my spirits during some dark times, is quite remarkable. I especially loved reading a bit about my hometown. Yep, this Cleveland girl loves that his first US gig not in NY or Cali was in the Flats. Fingers crossed that his book signing tour brings him back to the 216. 5/5!stars.
