



The Commitments

Roddy Doyle

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Barrytown, Dublin, has something to sing about. The Commitments are spreading the gospel of the soul. Ably managed by Jimmy Rabbitte, brilliantly coached by Joey 'The Lips' Fagan, their twin assault on Motown and Barrytown takes them by leaps and bounds from the parish hall to the steps of the studio door. But can The Commitments live up to their name?

The Commitments Details

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From Reader Review The Commitments for online ebook

Hobart says

An expanded version of this appears on The Irresponsible Reader.

Will yeh please put your workin' class hands together for your heroes. The Saviours o' Soul,
The Hardest Workin' Band in the World, —Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes —The Commitments.

This is a tough one for me to talk about -- long time fan, read it a dozen or so times, it's all I can do to not turn total fan-boy and just gush. eh, I might not try too hard.

It's the late 80's and three young Dubliners (from the poorest part of Dublin) have formed a band -- sort of. Not everyone in it are musicians yet, but they're working on it. Thanks to the direction of their keyboard (defined in the loosest possible way) player, they're going to play synth-pop and go by the name "And And! And" (and, yes, I got the exclamation point in the right place). Their first order of business (while learning how to play) is to hire a manager. Jimmy Rabbitte is the guy from their school/neighborhood who's the area's music/music industry expert. As evidenced by the fact that he's the first one anybody knew of that was aware of Frankie Goes to Hollywood -- and, even greater -- he's the first to realize how bad they were. Jimmie gets things going immediately by dropping the name (especially that !) and the keyboard player.

Instead, they're going to play American soul music -- and then put an Irish twist on it -- local slang, geographic references, and so on. Jimmie puts an ad in the paper to recruit some musicians, hits up a coworker he heard at a company party, and so on. As a result, he collects a very strange crew of musicians -- including a trumpet player decades older than the rest of them, with plenty of professional experience (the trumpet in "All You Need is Love," for example). The rest, as they say, is history.

The story of The Commitments is told through a very unconventional prose and dialogue style. It's like Doyle took Leonard's 10 Rules to the furthest point possible (other than #7, which he violates in every line). You can hear these characters talk, you can feel the energy in the room -- heck, this book comes closer to capturing musical performances better than anything this side of Memorex or vinyl. Couldn't tell you what anyone looks like (well, The Commitmentettes are pretty attractive -- especially Imelda), what their homes are like, the weather, or anything of that other stuff that tends to fill the pages of novels. But I can tell you what happened, to whom, and how all related reacted. Which is good enough for me.

This isn't one of those books that gives you diminishing returns upon re-reading. It's fresh (while dated -- no idea how Doyle pulls that off), funny, and full of soul. Dublin soul, of course. Just like the rag-tag musicians that come to life in its pages.

TK421 says

Back in the day (I always wanted to use that in one of my reviews) my buddies and I from the old neighborhood had a dream. Besides wanting to be starting shortstops for our favorite baseball teams (Red Sox for me) we wanted to reach fame and fortune through music. There was only one hitch: none of us could sing, and none of us could play an instrument. Nevertheless, we moved forward with our dream and started

penning lyrics to songs with no music...our muses were more than confused. For the most part, most of us wanted to be the next Def Leopard or Poison, a few of us wanted to enact the Wayback Machine and summon our Dylan or Doors or Led Zeppelin inner spirit. (I personally wanted us to be the next Pink Floyd.) We would stage mock practices, mostly we played Tetris on the Nintendo, and if we remembered discussed what one of us had written. When not discussing our lyrics, we discussed the second most vital component in any band...girls. We were all in agreement that we needed dancers. So, on one foggy day (I can't really be expected to remember if it was foggy, can I?) we went to all the girls in our neighborhood that were about our age, never younger only older, and asked if they would like to tryout for our band as dancers. Surprisingly, there were a few girls that really wanted to do this. We built a stage in one of our garages and started up a mixed tape and let the girls do their thing. Heck, we were the first version of America's Got Talent. One by one we told so-and-so that we thought she "just wasn't what we were looking for" and continued on evaluating the others. This went on for about three or four songs. Finally, when one of the girls clued in that we really didn't care about their dancing abilities, and were only interested in watching parts of their bodies dance did the fun come to a crashing halt. Our band broke up after that...

I have always loved that memory, and since my wife was one of the girls it makes it all that more meaningful. (She would kill me if she knew I was writing this.) Anyways, I came across this book a few months back while rifling through a stack of discarded books at a used bookstore. I had read Roddy Doyle before and enjoyed his sleek approach to storytelling. Man-o-man did the memories rush back with this one. Here we have a group of kids in Dublin that have one goal of becoming a soul band! A soul band! Like my friends and I, they have no clue on how to start the process. However, they do have knowledge of how to play instruments. So they did what we neglected to do: they hired an outsider to manage them. (If we had done that I may not be writing this review...who am I kidding? I'd still be writing this review.) Through a hilarious romp of what it takes to become a band, Doyle doesn't sentimentalize the journey. Instead of the schmaltz, he writes about missed opportunities and possibilities with the same lens of innocence that might be portrayed if looking through a blacked-out, cracked window in the middle of the night.

If you have ever, for even a split second, dreamed of being a rocker, this book is for you. And even if you haven't thought about your name in lights, belting out lyrics that mesmerize the masses, this book is still for you. If anything, it's a quick read. Go on, give the Irishman a chance...you may even want to see if some of your friends want to dance.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Paul Bryant says

In the grim north side of Dublin Jimmy decides to put together a band to play soul music from the 60s. His mates think he's mental. They say, But that kind of stuff is sung by... black people. Ain't it? And we're just scummy white kids, ain't we? But Jimmy has a reply to that :

Do you not get it, lads? The Irish are the blacks of Europe. And Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. And the Northside Dubliners are the blacks of Dublin. So say it once, say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud.

Dean, Jimmy's mate, a little uncertainly: *I'm black.... and I'm proud.*

Amongst many issues covered in The Commitments is how to cope with a lead singer who has a fabulous voice but who is a belligerent egomaniac with vile manners.

And indeed many other lessons in etiquette are expounded.

Actually, this is one example where the movie is better than the book, however excellent, ribald and racketty a read it is - which is not something I generally say. But seeing the chaotic Commitments forming, fighting, swinging, performing, achieving their brief moment of glory, and disintegrating amongst hurled beer glasses and foul curses is frankly nothing short of glorious.

Maija says

Onpas ensiluokkaisesti toteutettu äänikirja!
Lukijalla on oikeanlainen aksentti ja hän jopa laulaa!
Voisin kuunnella saman tien uudestaan.

Inge says

brilliant! though you end up thinking in an irish accent

Algernon says

Have you got Soul? If yes, The World's Hardest Working Band is looking for you. Contact J. Rabbitte, 118, Chestnut Ave., Dublin 21. Rednecks and southsiders need not apply.

I don't think I ever recommended before seeing a movie before reading the book it was based on, but in the case of Roddy Doyle's debut novel I believe this order will enhance the experience. You see, this is a musical novel, and it's done in a combination of dialogue and song lyrics, with minimal stage directions, no descriptive passages and no internal monologues, It's all out in the open and it rocks and rolls with the rhythm of Motown transplanted to the not-so-green suburb of Barrytown, Ireland.

I know the Alan Parker's movie would not exist if Roddy Doyle didn't pen his foul mouthed, irreverent and energetic novel first, but words on paper don't capture in the same way the Irish slang used in all the dialogues and the driving force of "Mustang Sally" or "Chain of Fools". The movie is also an almost line by line rendition of the scenes in the book, which is not surprising, given that the author worked on the script.

So, what it's all about and why do you need to give an answer to the opening question : "Have you got Soul?" It's about the power of music to cross geographical borders, language barriers and generational gaps and to

give meaning and direction to your life. It's not about making money, hitting on the groupies or being famous. It's about shouting as loud as you can your joy, your anger, your dreams and the audience reflecting it all back at you - sitting up and dancing and clapping and singing along with you.

Why Barrytown and why Soul instead of punk-rock or heavy metal or rap? Jimmy Rabbitte explains it to the couple of young local wedding singers who are tired of playing the same old crooner standards:

- The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.

They nearly gasped: it was so true.

- An' Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin' everythin'. An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin. - - Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud.

Outspan and Derek decide to let themselves be carried away by Jimmy's enthusiasm and start a new band, a band that will bring the music of Otis Redding, Al Green, James Brown and Wilson Pickett to the working class suburb of Barrytown.

Jimmy Rabbitte knew his music. He knew his stuff alright. You'd never see Jimmy coming home from town without a new album or a 12-inch or at least a 7-inch single. Jimmy ate Melody Maker and the NME every week and Hot Press every two weeks. He listened to Dave Fanning and John Peel. He even read his sisters' Jackie when there was no one looking. So Jimmy knew his stuff.

With Jimmy as manager, the newly fangled Commitments start recruiting and practicing in earnest, first in the garage of the only elderly band member ("Joey The Lips was a baldy little bollix nearly fifty."), later in improvised venues in front of a raucous audience. In between rehearsals Jimmy and Joey the Lips educate their fellow band members on the meaning of Soul:

Soul isn't only music. Soul is a double-edged sword. The first side is sex, righ'. - An' the second one is - - REVOLUTION!

Soul is the politics of the people.

Our people. - Soul is the rhythm o' sex. It's the rhythm o' the factory too. The workin' man's rhythm. Sex an' factory.

[...]

Soul is - - Dignity.

Soul is lifting yourself up, soul is dusting yourself off, soul is - - Soul is Dignity. - - Dignity, soul. Dignity is respect. - Self respect. - - Dignity is pride. Dignity, confidence. Dignity, assertion. - Dignity, integrity.

Dignity, elegance. - - Dignity, style.

Will the Commitments be a success or a failure? Will they be able to overcome their technical difficulties with their new or second-hand instruments, their day job worries, their clashing personalities and their sudden rivalries to become a true Soul Band and score a record deal?

Read the book, see the movie and sing along with them on a journey to "Destination Anywhere", the theme song of the band. Remember them with fondness and indulgence for their invective-laden repartees and their fallible hearts. The show must go on:

They were all there, their first time together.

Jimmy Rabbitte; manager.

Outspan Foster; guitar.

Deco Cuffe; vocals.

Derek Scully; bass.

James Clifford; piano.
Billy Mooney; drums.
Dean Fay; sax.
The Commitmentettes : Imelda, Natalie, Bernie
And Joey 'The Lips' Fagan on trumpet.

- - -

[Disclaimer] I must have seen the movie at least ten times before reading the novel, rating it among my top five modern musicals, side by side with "Almost Famous" or "Hair". (Favourite scene - the auditions with the "What's Your Influence?" quiz). I am also a long term fan of Soul, Blues and Classic Rock, among other musical interests, so my opinion is skewed towards a higher rating, but I think it's fair to add that Roddy Doyle has written an excellent debut novel, and that I plan to continue to read his Barrytown books.

Neira says

Of dreams and dreamers. Light-hearted, funny, charming. I'd even give it 4.5 compared to the other books I'm reading/have recently read. Read in 5h.

Glenn Sumi says

I was going to attempt to write this review in the working class Dublin slang that Roddy Doyle's colourful characters use, but, *ya know, Jaysis, I'd come o' looking like a fuckin' eejit.*

I'm one of the few people on the planet who's never seen the Alan Parker movie, and when I was in London last fall, I noticed there was even a long-running stage version of it. But I guess through cultural osmosis I knew what the book was about: the making (and abrupt unmaking) of a north Dublin soul band.

It's riotously fun, filled with piss and vinegar and great snatches of music, and boy do these characters know how to talk. (No wonder it was adapted for actors to perform.) Slagging each other over a few pints, joking about everything, is a sport – it's the way they communicate.

I say "characters," but there's not a lot of depth to them. (A day after finishing this I devoured the second in the Barrytown Trilogy, *The Snapper*, and among other things it shows that Doyle can write complex, nuanced characters.) In fact, for half the book I had to keep going back to the page that listed the band members' names and what instrument they played:

Jimmy Rabbite; manager.
Outspan Foster; guitar.
Deco Cuffe; vocals.
Derek Scully; bass.
James Clifford; piano.
Billy Mooney; drums.
Dean Fay; sax.

And Joey The Lips.

Later they're joined by three women – the Commitmentettes. And here's what happens: they rehearse; Jimmy books them first one gig then another; they perform them both; another character (Mickah the bouncer) joins them; they get a nice write-up in a local paper; one player gets interested in jazz; the vocalist (whom everyone hates) gets a big ego; and all the men are attracted to Imelda, one of the backup singers.

So: not much plot. There's a rich sense of social milieu, but mostly this book is about people interacting, bouncing off each other. Here's a little exchange between the drummer and the vocalist:

– An' here, you, George Michael. If yeh ever call me a fuckin' eejit again you'll go home with a drumstick up your hole. The one yeh don't sing ou' of.
He started to pick up the drum.
– The one yeh talk ou' of.

Touché! And it's not all salty dialogue. Here's a little bit of exposition during the band's first performance:

The ones not from Barrytown studied Mickah [the bouncer]. He wasn't what they'd expected; some huge animal, a skinhead or a muttonhead, possibly both. This Mickah was small and wiry, very mobile. Even when he was standing still he was moving.

“Even when he was standing still he was moving”: that's fine writing. Other gems are sprinkled throughout, showing you that Doyle is a novelist, not just a playwright or screenwriter. *And he's an artist.*

Fair play tha'.

Garlan 🖐️ says

A quick little read; heavy on dialogue. Irish dialogue. Very thick and very fast. I loved the movie and wanted to read the book before I watched it again. I really liked the antics of Jimmy and the gang as they progressed from a group of wannabe musicians to small time fame in central Dublin. There's a great group dynamic going on behind the story; everyone's in love with the backup singers, everyone hates the lead singer, Joey The Lips Fagan keeps everyone on an even keel, and Jimmy tries to keep everyone focused long enough to get a few gigs in. Lot of humor, and a great sense of *place*. 4 stars.

El says

The Commitments is a small band formed in Dublin by a group of young and unemployed folks. Their one goal in life is to bring SOUL to Dublin. The biggest problem is the leading members really don't know that much about music history, so they hire a friend to manage them and help create the image they have for themselves.

There isn't a lot of story here. Quite simply it is about music, but deeper than that is the will to be more, to bring more to the table. Quick read, which was nice in that it wasn't very deep, though not nice in that I never connected with any of the characters. Maybe I'm just not garage-band-y enough.

Barbara says

A classic. Now the Doyle is writing about middle-aged Jimmy Rabbitte in *The Guts*, it is essential to go back and remind ourselves of the young Jimmy. In the late 80's, Dubliners were still underemployed, and things were cheaper. They had to be. No one had any money! I have always loved this story of a Dublin soul band. I'd forgotten how short-lived this group was. But while they were together, they had a terrific time. Ireland and Dublin have changed dramatically in 25 years. Ireland boomed and became a nation of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. I wonder what young people who never knew the "old Dublin" would make of this story of a group who describes "Irish as the n-----rs of Europe and Dubliners as the n-----s of Ireland and northside Dubliners as the n-----s of Dublin".

Ram says

That's the problem with reading a book after watching the movie (or vice versa). If you liked the first, the second has to be really brilliant for you to like it.

The 1991 Alan Parker movie is one of my all time favorites, and the book.....it was ok, but from my point of view, a disappointment.

First, a short book that has a considerable percentage of it wasted on lyrics of songs in uppercase is kind of lame.....considering that I saw the movie (which had a different set of songs), where you actually saw the songs performed.

Second, the book seems like a conceptual summary of the movie, many of my favorite scenes, expressions and themes were either not there or just mentioned.

However, not all was bad, I did like the writing, the setting, the characters, the language and more.

I will try the next book from this trilogy (or another book by this author), and if you have not seen the movie.....go for it.

Allan says

I'm not sure why it's taken me this long to read 'The Commitments' (I haven't seen the film either), but I purchased the book and decided to read it having heard many good reports about its recently released sequel, 'The Guts'. Such a short book, but what a treat!

I'm sure the narrative is pretty familiar to most-it was to me, just through clips I'd seen of the movie / things I'd read over the years about the book-but I have to say that, in the short time it took me to read the book, I was frequently in stitches. The description of their first gig was absolutely hilarious, and the introduction of Mickah at this juncture was classic.

I went off Roddy Doyle after reading 'Oh, Play That Thing', but he's won me back with this, his debut, and I now look forward to reading the next instalment, which I intent to buy on audiobook next month!

Jarkko says

What a fresh change to the books I've been reading lately. The Commitments is a story told almost only through dialogue in Dublin slang, kind of like a play, but at the same time more like a novel. It tells the funny, straightforward, and honest story of a short-lived Dublin band consisting of teenagers with bigger-than-life egos whose bravadoes don't fool anyone - except maybe the other teenagers. The band is nannied by a balding middle-aged man who, according to himself, has performed with James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Isaac Hayes and the likes, but now lives in suburban Dublin and wants to form part of this motley soul band. And soul do they give!

—*Soul is a double-edged sword, lads, he told them once.*

Joey The Lips nodded.

—*One edge is escapism.*

—*What's tha'?*

—*Fun. —Gettin' away from it all. Lettin' yourself go. —Know wha' I mean?*

[...]

—*Brothers, Sisters, said Joey The Lips. —Let Brother Jimmy speak. Tell us about the other side of the sword, Jimmy.*

They were quiet.

The first side is sex, righ', said Jimmy. —An' the second one is ————REVOLUTION!

Cheers and clenched fists.

Jimmy went on.

—*Soul is the politics o' the people.*

—*Yeeoow!*

—*Righ' on, Jimmy.*

—*Our people. —Soul is the rhythm o' sex. It's the rhythm o' the factory too. The workin' man's rhythm. Sex an' factory.*

Nancy Oakes says

First of all, I've not yet seen the movie that was made from this book, but now I want to. If the movie is at all true to the book, I know I'm going to love it.

Set in working-class North Dublin, the novel begins with teens Outspan, Derek and Ray, who have formed a new band called And And And. Only in existence for three days, Outspan and Derek decide they need help with the band's direction and go to music-manager guru Jimmy Rabbitte, who "ate melody Maker and the NME every week and Hot Press every two weeks." Jimmy "knew his music...knew his stuff alright." After convincing the two that they really should be doing "Soul. Dublin Soul," because it has both sex and politics, and because their music should be "abou' where you're from an' the sort o' people yeh come from," he gets rid of Ray and changes the band's name to The Commitments, with a "Good, old fashioned THE."

The story tracks The Commitments right up to the very edge of success. The group is a mixed bag of musicians and a trio of singers who, with one exception, are learning as they go. And all along, Jimmy Rabbitte, who isn't a musician, works tirelessly -- giving the musicians their own nicknames, trying to get and keep them inspired, finding the band its small gigs, publicity and whatever it takes to make a success of this group, but with the combination of egos and other problems, that's not always an easy task.

The book is mostly dialogue, in dialect and given without quotation marks, using only ---- to denote a change in speaker. Mixed in and noted in all caps are song lyrics as well as the transcription of the instrumental parts of a song such as The Four Tops' "Reach Out I'll Be There" -- "DONG CADDA DONG CADDA DONG CADDA DONG." It's a stylistic maneuver that brings a lot of energy to the page and had me playing the songs in my head while reading. The songs are also revamped to fit and unite a Dublin working-class audience, part of Rabbitte's original political vision.

I liked this book immensely. While very short, there's a lot going on here: the making of the band and the various personalities and conflicts involved after it comes together, and humor and irony that in more than a couple of spots had me laughing out loud. I think though, for me, it was all about what Jimmy Rabbitte developed in these teenagers -- which at the very least is a measure of self respect and a desire to be better than they are -- and the idea that when shit happens, you have to get up, dust your boots off and make things work for yourself. I'm sure there's much more, but as I'm so fond of saying, I'm an ordinary reader, not a lit major. Most definitely recommended.

Bob Lopez says

Goodness me what a great book!

Howard says

This bracing, funny, honest, and charming first novel tracks the brief existence of The Commitments, a working-class Dublin band bent on bringing soul to the people. Fortunately for Outspan and Derek, who've decided to form And, And!, And, a syntho-pop cover band (as soon as they get the money to buy instruments, anyway), Jimmy Rabbite consents to be their manager. Jimmy's the sharpest industry observer in northern Dublin ("Jimmy had Relax before anyone had heard of Frankie Goes to Hollywood and he'd

started slagging them months before anyone realized that they were no good"), and is able to turn the band to soul. Renamed the Commitments, Jimmy adds to the band - among others - the three Commitmentettes; and a pro, Brother Joey "The Lips" Fagan, a balding, motherly horn-player old enough to have fathered the rest of the band. Brother Joey, who's played with everyone from James Brown to the Beatles, takes over the band's musical training to great success, and is soon sampling the nonmusical talents of the Commitmentettes, much to the disgust of his frustrated younger colleagues. After a lot of amusing preparation, the band gains recognition in local pubs and the music press. But Deco, the band's talented but oafish singer, lets success go to his head, and despite an offer to record, friction breaks up the band. We leave Jimmy, Outspan, and Derek as they realize that what Dublin really needs is a country-western band. Brash, human, smoothly executed, and seemingly authentic, full of youth, energy, and good humor, this is a quintessential garage-band romance - and a fine and promising debut.

Michael says

A short, sweet tale of the birth and short life of an Irish soul band, full of humor and exhilaration. It feels like that sense of delicious surprise at being able to skate on thin ice. Young Jimmy Rabbitte, unemployed resident of a fictional working class neighborhood of Dublin, Barrytown, gets the brilliant idea that Ireland needs sex machine music like James Brown's. We get the pleasure of his imagination at work as he puts together his band one by one and works up a repertoire of songs.

The book is short and makes high art out of dialogue, which makes up perhaps 90% of the content. Here is the pitch of self-recruitment by a middle-aged horn player, "Joey the Lips", who is the only one who has had professional experience playing soul music:

--The Lord told me to come home. Ed Winchell, a Baptist preacher on Lenox Avenue in Harlem, but the Lord told him to tell me. ... Ed told me to back to Ireland and blow some soul into the Irish Brothers. The Irish Brothers wouldn't be shooting the asses off each other if they had soul. So said Ed. I'm not a Baptist myself but I've had a lot of time for the Reverend Ed.

Am I in? Joey the Lips asked.

--Fuck, yes, said Jimmy. ...

Most of Jimmie's recruits are old friends, like Outspan for drummer, his best friend from grade school days. A set of three teenaged girls with experience in a church choir are added for backup vocals, including the supremely sexy Imelda. For the vocalist, he picks a stranger who can belt them out, Deco. He has to learn his art:

Deco was on a strict soul diet: James Brown, Otis Redding, Smokey Robinson and Marvin Gaye, James for the growls, Otis for the moans, Smokey for the whines and Marvin for the whole lot put together, Jimmy said.

There are lots of funny scenes as they build up a repertoire in practice and start with venues such as a church bingo hall. They get past the priest by promising to knock drug use (they misspell "Heroin Kills" in their poster backdrop). Soul and Motown funk is well past its prime, but the marvel of their creation slowly gains an audience. Whereas the 1991 movie featured such songs as "Mustang Sally", "Chain of Fools", "Take Me to the River" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7CHPM...>), the songs featured in the book include "Night Train", "When a Man Loves a Woman", and "It's a Man's World". The backups get to lead with "Walking in the Rain". While the movie puts you in the audience, the book makes you imagine performing the songs and so well that you can hear them in your head.

The seeds of destruction of group cohesion emerge fast in the form of Deco's egotism and everyone's jealousy over Imelda favoring Joey. Also, the saxophone player Dean is becoming enamored of jazz, "the anti-people music":

--*What's Dean been listenin' to? Jimmie asked.*

--*Charlie Parker. He's supposed to be good but.*

--*Good! Joey the Lips gasped—The man has no right to his black skin.*

...Those polyrhythms went through Brother Parker's legs and up his ass.—And who did he play to? I'll tell you, middle-class white kids with little beards and berets. In jazz clubs. Jazz clubs! They didn't even clap. They clicked their fingers.

The book was the first of three in what came to be termed "The Barrytown Trilogy". I've had the pleasure of "The Van", which features a hopeless scheme of Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. to make a business out of a chip van during an international soccer match in Dublin. Again, the beauty lies less in attaining a dream, but in the infectious miracle of believing the dream. My impetus in reading "The Commitments" comes from the 2014 publication of "The Guts", which features Jimmy decades later milking the nostalgia for old music, this time Celtic Punk, while suffering the slings and arrows of cancer.

Kinga says

I went into this book knowing nothing about it, not having seen the movie, certainly not having seen the musical and not being familiar with the Irish institution that is Roddy Doyle.

Initially I thought there was a mistake and I somehow obtained the screenplay for the film rather than the novel. Doyle shows a true bravado in his disregard for what we assume to constitute a novel. His narrative is composed almost entirely of dialogues and some diminished descriptions which are no more than stage directions.

Yet, somehow, despite those self-imposed constraints and in just 140 pages he manages to capture the essence of teenage dreams, how they burn and then burn out, how they get lost in arguments and get flooded by hormonal rivers. It's all there in a story of a few Dublin teenagers who form a band and try to bring some soul into the Irish capital. Make no mistake, though, this is not a novel about sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. It's a lot more innocent than that. It's neither glamorous, nor bohemian. It's just working class. It's like that Lorde's song Royals.

Even though the format of 'The Commitments' didn't quite work for me, because I'm attached to the more Dickensian kind of narration, it did manage to extract some emotional response from me. However, I think this is one of the few instances where I think 'the movie is better.' And that is without actually having seen the movie.

*Knowledge of 60's r'n'b and soul music desirable but not essential for the enjoyment of this book.

Dannii Elle says

I read Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* a few weeks ago and found it both a harrowing account of one woman's life, as well as a subversive insight to suburban Irish culture. I was expecting more of the same with his other writing and was, sadly, a little disappointed.

The novel follows the formation of teenage band, *The Commitments*: through the choosing of band members, the finessing of performance, the highs from the shared passion for music, and the lows after the inevitable in-band clashes. This novel's entire focus is on music, and how it can enrich one's soul and move you, emotionally, the way no other can.

Despite not knowing every one of the band and artist's names that litter this piece, I did enjoy the message it was promoting and thought Doyle did a wonderful job of allowing his characters' passion for music to translate across the page. I felt both the rhythm of this story and the shared beat the individuals within were dancing to, which I can imagine is a terrifically hard thing to transform, from sound to word.

Another thing I adored was how absolutely I felt I understood each and every one of his characters. Nuance of action and dialogue make them all undeniably unique, and yet they also provide an illuminating insight to the culture they are representing. This is Doyle's forte, and his characters are what made for such an enjoyable and hilarious reading experience.

Whilst all these things accumulated to make this a joyful little piece, I finished it with none of the overarching understandings or intense emotions that his other work had given me. I appreciated this book for what it was, and it provided me with a fun hour or two of reading, but nothing to move me beyond the closing of the final page.
