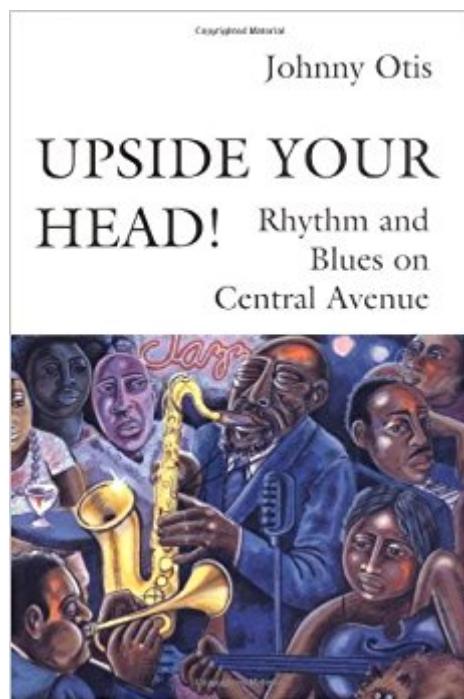


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Upside Your Head!: Rhythm And Blues On Central Avenue (Music/Culture)



Synopsis

Legendary jazzman Johnny Otis has spent a lifetime at the center of L.A.'s black music scene as a composer, performer, producer, d.j., activist, and preacher. His energetic, anecdotal memoir, *Upside Your Head! Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue*, recalls the music, the great performers, and the vibrant culture of the district, as well as the political and social forces -- including virulent white racism -- that have shaped black life in Los Angeles. Resonating with anger, poignancy, joy, and defiance, *Upside Your Head!* is a unique document of the African-American musical and cultural experience. *Upside Your Head!* recalls a 50-year career when it seems Otis either encountered, discovered, or performed with every significant figure in the early days of rhythm & blues and rock 'n' roll, including Count Basie, Esther Phillips, T-Bone Walker, Big Mama Thornton, and Lester Young. Drawing on dozens of vignettes, personal photographs, and hours of taped interviews from the popular "Johnny Otis Show," *Upside Your Head!* offers a moving tribute to the black community that gave birth to L.A.'s rhythm and blues. His stories celebrate the true roots in black culture of a distinctive American music while lamenting its eventual appropriation by the dominant white society.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Musician, painter, sculptor and preacher Otis (author of *Listen to the Lambs* and creator/performer of "Willie and the Hand Jive") is an angry and eloquent man who writes from the unique viewpoint of a white man who has been immersed in African American culture and music since childhood. His

assertion that racism in American society may be worse than ever glistens with conviction and rage. Otis uses as his backdrop the development of jazz, blues and rock--particularly on the West Coast--in the 20th century, giving a fresh perspective on the contributions of black musicians and composers, while lamenting the appropriation of what were essentially black art forms by white society. Otis's recounting of his daily association with musicians both famous and unknown provides disturbing insights into the struggles of black performers in the U.S., and, by extension, African American society as a whole. The clarity and pace of Otis's style are deceptive; this is a wake-up call for white America. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Music legend Otis's lifelong activism spans music, religion, politics, and business. This latest endeavor, a mix of music, culture, and race politics, is a bold and risky attempt to rattle white America's conscience. Otis assigns his intended readership of salvageable (socially conscious) whites the monumental task of going "upside" the head of the "lip-servicing" Euro-American whites, whom Otis most vehemently resents. The book basks in a bygone era, when black music as an American art form grew out of poverty yet sustained dignity. Remembrances, interviews, and abundant photos form the basis of a Who's Who of rhythm and blues and early jazz. From L.A.'s Central Avenue of the 1930s, to the rebellion of the 1960s, to Rodney King, Dan Quayle, and Maya Angelou's poem, there's much food for thought. Of interest to music and social historians as well as lay readers.- Cynthia Cordes, Onondaga Cty. P.L., Syracuse, N.Y. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book by Johnny Otis, the legendary R&B artist, producer, composer, band leader, and mentor of great R&B performers is a fun and fast enlightening read for anyone who enjoys music of the pre war - post war Blues and R&B era. With political hues and comments on the too slowly changing issue of racism in America as a background to the music, the book gives a rich history from Otis's point of view and quotes many other performers of the era telling the story of the period and growth of " Race Music " and Records, to R&B, and eventually to Rock and Roll - for better, or worse. Full of rich information and Otis's strongly articulated take on our culture and the subject era and music, it should be considered a " must read " for those interested in American 20th Century Music.

Otis provides interesting perspectives, nicely done!

This book deserves wider recognition. *Upside Your Head!*, written by Johnny Otis, was first published in 1993 but time has not diminished the merit of the subject matter. The author is a living R&B legend. His musical milestones are simply too numerous to list in this review. Throughout the book, the author provides riveting and vivid accounts of the African American musical contributions within the Rhythm and Blues genre. His detailed and lively profiles of the artists, tours, clubs and music business throughout the twentieth century are entertaining and insightful. Aside from his musical career, the author is a civil rights activist, pastor, painter, sculptor and successful businessman and farmer. All these elements play an integral part in his compelling story of the historical evolution of the Central Ave/L.A. African American cultural scene. His observations and personal experience on the impact of racism throughout the second half of the twentieth century is especially thought provoking. His writing is particularly effective when it addresses the abuse and injustices experienced by the author, his family and fellow performers. The pictures generously displayed throughout the book reflect a joy of being part of a musical movement that continues to resonate throughout the twenty-first century. The book provides the curious with an opportunity to explore the origins and artistic creative level of West Coast Rhythm and Blues. *Upside Your Head!* is a richly rewarding reading experience.

One of the true heroes of popular American music. Johnny knew everybody and has a depth of understanding and experience of the Black musical scene (and isn't all American music ultimately Black music?) that is unsurpassed. He's the only Black man I know of whose parents were Greek. I love this guy and love this book.

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