

The Last Holiday



Synopsis

The stunning memoir of Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winner Gil Scott-Heron, *The Last Holiday* has been praised for bringing back to life one of the most important voices of the last fifty years. Now in paperback, *The Last Holiday* provides a remarkable glimpse into Scott-Heron's life and times, from his humble beginnings to becoming one of the most influential artists of his generation. The memoir climaxes with a historic concert tour in which Scott-Heron's band opened for Stevie Wonder. The Hotter than July tour traveled cross-country from late 1980 through early 1981, drumming up popular support for the creation of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. King's birthday, January 15, was marked with a massive rally in Washington. A fitting testament to the achievements of an extraordinary man, *The Last Holiday* provides a moving portrait of Scott-Heron's relationship with his mother, personal recollections of Stevie Wonder, Bob Marley, John Lennon, Michael Jackson, Clive Davis, and other musical figures, and a compelling narrative vehicle for Scott-Heron's insights into the music industry, the civil rights movement, governmental hypocrisy, and our wider place in the world. *The Last Holiday* confirms Scott-Heron as a fearless truth-teller, a powerful artist, and an inspiring observer of his times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A jazz and blues poet-musician known as a spoken-word performer, Scott-Heron is often called the godfather of rap and is indeed considered one of the founding fathers of hip-hop. Among his most influential works is the composition *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, which originally appeared

on his album *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox* (1970). This well-written and fresh memoir, posthumously published in 2011, recalls Scott-Heron's upbringing in Jackson, Tennessee, and New York City. He was the son of an opera singer and a Jamaican soccer player (the first black athlete to play for the Glasgow Celtic football team in Scotland) and was among the few black students to attend the prestigious Fieldston School in New York. Scott-Heron comments on his love of language and his respect for education. He discusses his recording career, including the critically acclaimed *Winter in America* (1974); his publishing career; and his 1980 tour with Stevie Wonder. Engrossing and even at times uplifting, Scott-Heron's self-portrait grants us insights into one of the most influential African American musicians of his generation. --June Sawyers --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The publication of *The Last Holiday* gives Heron the final word on an extraordinary life that has often been invoked as a prime example of artistic tragedy . . . but the memoir never achieves the formal economy or evocative force of Scott-Heron's best song lyrics. --Brent Hayes Edwards --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I was looking forward to reading this very, very much. I've been a huge Gil Scott-Heron fan for decades, primarily for his amazing music, but I also enjoyed his two novels and some of his poetry. By the time I was 50 pages into this book I was mesmerized, awestruck, totally enraptured by Gil's writing. And then ... things started to unravel. Maybe that's not the right word, but events as described in the book started jumping around and I felt the narrative just wasn't flowing like it had in the early chapters. The murky, middle passages also felt less eloquent and moving, compared to what had first hooked me. I thought that the strongest parts were early in the book, when Gil describes growing up, being raised by his grandmother, working his first jobs, experiences in school, getting to know his mother again. Ironically, we don't get that much insight into the making of his music, and absolutely zero about the problems he later had dealing with drugs. Maybe those details were planned for another memoir. Ostensibly, as the title indicates, this book is mainly about "The Last Holiday," that being the campaign to get Martin Luther King's birthday declared a national holiday in the USA. Gil shines his light on that campaign, particularly the crucial role that Stevie Wonder played in getting this done. But even Stevie's "role" and what he did, other than organizing some concerts and writing a song on "Hotter Than July" about the idea, isn't fully explained or detailed in this book. We aren't told, for example, what exactly was the tipping point that caused the holiday to finally become a reality. Also, there are too many inconsequential references to the

band's road crew on tour, and inane details about sound and lighting problems that really aren't relevant to the rest of the story. So, those are some of the frustrating elements to this book. I realize that compiling and editing an unfinished work by a writer who passed away before everything was completed is a difficult, if not thankless task, but something struck me as missing in this book, something that could have connected the threads of the story more cohesively. All that criticism aside, Gil redeems himself in the final three chapters, when he shifts the focus once again to his family, and the flawed but intense relationships he has had with various people. He admits his imperfections in that profound and articulate way you have come to expect from him. And the last two pages are incredibly moving, forcing my tear ducts to work overtime. A flawed but important book.

Gil Scott-Heron, poet, writer, lyricist, musician, performer, academic, activist and most of all cultural icon. Thanks to his estate, another title can be added, that of memoirist. This is an exceptional work that taps into his early childhood and progresses through to the period where he experienced his greatest commercial acclaim. Since this is a memoir, not an autobiography, the reader must accept the snap shots the author provides. Readers who have more than a passing familiarity with the artist's life and work will find equal significance in what events were omitted as to those milestones that were included. There's no doubt, given his creative stature, that a biography, detailing his entire life and contributions, will be published sometime in the future. Until then, this work will serve to provide a first hand account of GSH's talent, struggles, passion and love. The first half of the book is focused on his family. He paints a marvelous portrait of his immediate relatives and his strong relationship with his mother. He reflects on the cultural influences the various geographic locations as Jackson, Tenn., Chicago and NYC had on his later life and work. He provides vivid detail of his academic life experiences associated with Fieldston Academy and Lincoln University. The challenges faced during this period, helped shape the artist he was to become. Remarkably, during this period he had already published a novel and a collected work of poetry. It's fascinating to learn of his passion for academia, which he admits was equal to his artistic commitment. He completes his graduate work at John Hopkins University and accepts an Associate Professorship position at Washington's Federal City College. This milestone occurring at the same time his music was achieving an expanded commercial appreciation. The second half of the memoir is primarily focused on the growing maturity of his artistic endeavors. His descriptions of meeting and working with the legendary Bob Thiele at Flying Dutchman Records (home to artists as Leon Thomas and Lonnie Liston Smith) and his musical partnership with Brian Jackson proved critical in enabling GSH to

elevate his art to the next plateau. Next, he shares his association with Clive Davis and the Midnight band's tenure with Arista records. This period would prove to be the peak of his commercial success. Entwined throughout are brilliant antidotes of fellow artists Gill met along the way including, Bob Marley, Donna Summers, Michael Jackson and countless others. Chapter 31 is particularly illuminating with GSH discussing his meeting with Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and the legendary authors John Alfred Williams (" The Angry Ones ") and John Oliver Killens (twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize). His observations and insights of Stevie Wonder, the artist / social activist and their 1980/81 tour are particularly insightful. At the conclusion of the memoir the reader feels better for the experience. Your humanity is a little more finely tuned and one is a little more optimistic about the future of the human race. Thanks in large part to the contribution of Gil Scott-Heron. The "Minister of Information" has fulfilled his mission." Each one reach one, each one teach one " GSH

This was a page turner, I didn't want to put this book down and I didn't want it to end. Mr Heron was the real thing, a beautiful person inside and out. A true artist who for me died a tortured soul, I sensed this from the things he said after his Mother passed. This man put some plain down to earth talk in this book and yet at times he spoke like the professor he was, some things he said really blew my mine. I will read more of his works.

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