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Beloved TV comedic actor Phil Hartman is best known for his eight brilliant seasons on *Saturday Night Live*, where his versatility and comedic timing resulted in some of the funniest and most famous sketches in the television show's history. Besides his hilarious impersonations of Phil Donahue, Frank Sinatra and Bill Clinton, Hartman's other indelible characters included Cirroc the Unfrozen Caveman Lawyer, Eugene the Anal Retentive Chef and, of course, Frankenstein. He also starred as pompous radio broadcaster Bill McNeal in the NBC sitcom *NewsRadio* and voiced numerous classic roles -- most memorably washed-up actor and commercial pitchman Troy McClure -- on Fox's long-running animated hit *The Simpsons*.

But Hartman's seemingly charmed life was cut tragically short when he was fatally shot by his troubled third wife, Brynn, who turned a gun on herself several hours later. The shocking and headline-generating turn of events stunned those closest to the couple as well as countless fans who knew Phil only from afar. Now, for the first time ever, the years and moments leading up to his untimely end are described in illuminating detail through information gleaned from exclusive interviews with scores of famous cast mates, close friends and family members as well as private letters, audio/video recordings, extensive police records, and more.

Both joyous tribute and serious biography, Mike Thomas' *You Might Remember Me* is a celebration of Phil Hartman's multi-faceted career and an exhaustively reported, warts-and-all examination of his often intriguing and sometimes complicated life--a powerful, humor-filled and disquieting portrait of a man who was loved by many, admired by millions and taken from them far too early.

You Might Remember Me: The Life and Times of Phil Hartman Details

Date : Published September 23rd 2014 by St. Martin's Press

ISBN : 9781250027962

Author : Mike Thomas

Format : Hardcover 328 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Humor, Biography Memoir

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Linda says

In all of Saturday Night Live, Phil Hartman was my favorite. I went on to watch News Radio partially because he was on it. I was subsequently deeply saddened when he died so young and unexpectedly. This book is a well researched explanation of his life but no adequate explanation of his death. Hartman comes across as mostly a decent, contented man.

Lee Anne says

2 1/2 stars, really.

A perfect example of "good research doesn't make a good book." It's clear author Mike Thomas read some books and magazine articles and conducted some interviews. But he is completely unable to take that information and use it to breathe life into his subjects. Admittedly, Phil Hartman had a bit of that cliched comedian personality, where he was only himself when he was being someone else, a bit of a cipher and hard to reach offstage, but Thomas' writing abilities render him unable to make Hartman a real character in his own story.

This book reads like reportage, and rather dull and off-target at that: "...he spent high five to low six figures on a French-made TB200 Tobago XL GT by Socata. With its white top, gray bottom, and dark-orange body stripes, the handsome single-prop model--tail number N3057D--had a 200-horsepower Lycoming 10-360AIB6 piston engine, fixed tricycle landing gear, and room for four in its spacious cabin." Zzzzzzzzzzz. Unless you're an airplane geek, who cares? Why not just say, "Phil bought a single-engine airplane, which he used to fly to Catalina Island?" As for the off-target, later, after Hartman's death, there is a chapter that is divided out with the reminiscences of people's reactions to the news. His brothers? Sure; they were close. Celebrity friends? Definitely; one doesn't read a celebrity biography unless one likes celebrities. But call me callous, I'm not really interested in a long story about his NIECE driving to Arizona and having to pull over and freak out. Of course she was upset, as I'm sure ALL of his family was. But I don't need to hear the reactions of every cousin and ex-sister-in-law, especially when they have not figured prominently in the narrative up to this point.

Thomas does an equally poor job of characterizing Brynn Hartman. Some people liked her, some did not. She barely figures, except for several stories in which Phil comments on the problems in their marriage. Julia Sweeney is the only person who seems to have interacted with them as a couple on multiple occasions and can talk about their relationship from an insider's perspective, and she's Team Brynn, for the most part, which is unsettling at times. Others tell stories of Phil fighting with her, but only what Phil told them second-hand. Where are all the people who could give a more complete picture? Would no one talk on the record? Not until the story of the night of the murder-suicide do any of Brynn's friends come into it.

There are too many chapters after the deaths, as well. One chapter summarizing the multiple memorial services and ashes scatterings would have more than sufficed. And what a shabby lack of epilogue! Is Doris, Phil's mother, still alive? And what about the children? I'm all for respecting their privacy, but not even a sentence that says, "Sean, now 25 (or whatever), still lives in Wisconsin and is a blah blah blah. Birgen, now 21, recently graduated from a California college." But there's nothing. I wonder if no one from the family but Phil's seemingly "eccentric" brother cooperated.

So overall, a disappointing book on a beloved subject. And why are my negative reviews always so much longer than my positive ones?

Katie says

This book desperately needed an editor!

Cathy Godfrey says

Interesting bio about Phil Hartman about his life and how he came to be on SNL and beyond. Anyone who is a fan would enjoy reading this book. I found out somethings that I didn't know so I felt it was worthwhile for me to read.

Julie says

I was interested to read about the life of Phil Hartman. His murder at the hands of his wife was so painful and shocking, that it was somehow comforting to read about all the triumphs and failings that preceded that moment. Hartman deserves to be remembered for all of his talents, not just for his time at SNL or the violent way he died. The author did a good job of examining Hartman's virtues and foibles, putting his life in context. He was not a perfect man, but was an extremely talented actor, artist, and comedian, and should be remembered as such.

Lisa says

I wanted to give this biography 5 stars, just because of the subject, but this book was in better need of an editor or proofreader. Obviously extensive research was done, but it still didn't flesh out the essence of Phil Hartman. If I hadn't had previous knowledge of him and his work, I don't think I would have been moved by his story and how he died, just by reading this bio.

I believe the author didn't want to attack Brynn Hartman too much, but in doing so, left us with a skeleton of a character - vapid, jealous and vain.

This particular paragraph bothered me because it repeats itself: ".....Often he floated at a remote spot called Lover's Cove, at the island's more developed east end, and fed spray cheese to swarms of Calico bass in a protected portion of Avalon Harbor. Just off shores where pirates, Spaniards, and Chumash Indians had dwelled in the 1700's, Phil also liked to moor his boat, kick back and chill out while blasting Neil Young's 1992 album Harvest Moon from the boat's speakers. Or he'd buy a can of spray cheese and feed it to swarms of Calico bass in a protected portion of Avalon Harbor...." I remember thinking, "did I lose my place and read that again by accident?"

Also, an epilogue is supposed to tie up all the loose ends and I didn't feel that was achieved. What happened to the Hartman children? A cursory, one sentence update would have been fine, all the while protecting their privacy and not giving out too many personal details. These children are now adults, so it would have put a

nice capper on the story. The omission of the status of the children was kind of disturbing - like they simply evaporated after their parents died.

The Phil Hartman case is incredibly fascinating and I feel there could have been more "meat" to this narrative.

Ben says

For anyone who watched Saturday Night Live or The Simpsons in the early to mid 1990's, it's impossible to hear the name Phil Hartman and not feel a sharp pang of heartbreak for the loss of such a great talent - and a sharp pang of anger for the person who caused that loss.

Even though a sense of dread permeates this book, it's a terrific portrait of a creative, proud, ambitious man with a couple fatal flaws - a habit for picking the wrong women, and a selfish streak that unnecessarily antagonized them. Had Phil lived at least another decade, we might not think back on him with such reverence - he had, after all, already missed the train to stardom that many of his fellow SNL mates had caught. But he's gone, so anything to keep his memory alive, like this well-written book, is welcome.

Brent says

I enjoyed remembering the focus that I enjoyed in Hartman's performances. This fine book gives more detail than we might need or want to enjoy his comedy. But I loved being reminded of his work, partly because I could not watch the SNL 40th special on TV.

Hartman's flaws are well documented here. For his genius, we found the SNL skits all on Yahoo. Recommended.

David says

I only knew Phil Hartman from the Colon Blow sketch on SNL. I saw this book at the library and thought, what else did this guy do that was funny? A lot! Phil Hartman was an SNL legend, and went on to deliver the fabulous Troy McClure character on the Simpsons. Sadly, he was taken too soon. Most biographies dig into a persons life and explore events that led to that person becoming who they were, whether that be a childhood trauma, etc. This biography does not do that, but rather acts like a timeline and talks about significant events and funny or interesting stories. But, that was what I was really looking for, and thats what I got. If you want the real in-depth look at Phil Hartman, maybe that biography will come out some day, but this one is still good, and very readable.

Michelle says

"You Might Remember Me.." (Troy McClure: "The Simpsons") this very long awaited biography authored by Mike Thomas, that the fans of the late comic genius Phil Hartman (1948-1998) will appreciate! Thomas portrays this brilliant funny man from a journalistic angle, through research, interview, and quotes of family, friends, colleagues. Thomas noticeably avoids judgment or personal opinion of Hartman's life so

overshadowed by his tragic death.

From Brantford, Ontario, Canada his faithful Catholic parents moved their large family (eight children) to the US (1957) when Phil was eight, eventually settling in Westchester, Maine. Attention from his hardworking parents was scarce, Phil thrived imitating the famous John Wayne, and LBJ. He was popular, known and loved as a class clown, also "Mr. Personality". Phil loved cars, his father encouraged him to learn the reliable trade of autobody work. After HS graduation in 1966, he enrolled in Santa Monica City College as an art major. Phil was draft eligible, and opposed the War in Vietnam, which he felt was motivated by corporate greed, the propaganda involving the fear of communism seemed irrational and senseless.

After achieving much success as a graphic designer (working for his brother at Hartmann and Goodman), he joined the Groundlings acting troupe in 1975, craving the chance to entertain on stage as a social creative outlet. Phil highly charged, costumed, portraying "Lightman" or "Chick Hazzard" (1978), he also enjoyed success achieving small parts in various movies.

Phil played a large part in the creation/success of Pee Wee Herman/Playhouse (1985). Insiders (including Howard Stern) were puzzled over Phil's inaction (for reasons unknown) to file a legal suit for damages and loss of rightful income. In 1991 when Ruben was involved in a huge public scandal, Phil distanced, did offer public comment.

In (1986-1994) Phil's career took off when he joined SNL, and he continued to appear in several movies. Phil could do the voice impersonating any character, (Frank Sinatra, Ed McMahon, Bill Clinton) his popularity increased to having millions of fans. In 1990 he joined the Fox "Simpsons" doing the voices for many colorful characters.

"This prime-time life has made me a multimillionaire, I have a great career going!" Phil said when interviewed. He was starring on the NBC series "NewsRadio" (1995-1999) earning \$50,000 per episode. Phil loved acting, more committed to his work than ever, doing multiple projects including one for HBO, he planned to write a screenplay.

Phil married his beautiful third wife Brynn Omadahl, ten years his junior, in 1986. By then, Phil had an established pattern of remaining distant, parts of himself closed off and inaccessible, needing time for solitude, perhaps to recharge and maintain his creativity. The fact that Phil eventually lost interest in his wives was telling, unusual, and confirmed, as were the conflicts and public fights with Brynn, which seemed as dramatic as the characters he portrayed. Substance abuse combined with Brynn's fragile emotional state that may have involved mental illness, combined with accessibility to a firearm was lethal and deadly for Phil and Brynn Hartman. Phil will be missed and remembered by thousands of fans. There are pages of excellent photos included.

Mike Thomas is an arts and entertainment staff writer for the Chicago Sun-Times, he has interviewed numerous famous celebrities, this is his second book. He lives in Chicago with his wife and family.

Andrew Hicks says

For a perfect example of Phil Hartman's genius on "Saturday Night Live," look no further than the 105-second 1989 commercial parody **Colon Blow** . As the off-screen announcer tells him about the insanely high-fiber cereal, Hartman reacts with several dozen facial expressions, all of them effective, none of them overwrought.

Hartman, for my money, was one of the three best cast members in SNL history, a man of a thousand voices and characters. He made mediocre material look good, and he made great material instantly classic. If you watch any sketch from 1986-90 that doesn't have Hartman in it, and the sketch is dying, I can almost guarantee you Hartman will show up at the three-minute mark to save it.

It wasn't until I read *You Might Remember Me* , though, that I realized Hartman felt insecure and underappreciated while at SNL. He longed for a breakout marquee character that could launch a \$200 million movie like *Wayne's World* . He was such a good mimic, he could disappear so deeply into a character, and he had such strong utility skills in the service of any given scene, that his star power was deceptively muted.

Viewers felt as if they didn't exactly know Phil. Many of Hartman's friends and family felt the same way, including an ex-wife or two. Hartman was distant and always somewhat in character. There was a mysterious dark side, etc., but he still came off like such a decent guy.

In May 1998, at age 49, while sleeping, Hartman was murdered by his third wife, Brynn, who shortly after turned the gun on herself. *You Might Remember Me* devotes its final act to an extensively recreated play-by-play of the hours surrounding the murder itself.

Author Mike Thomas has done extensive legwork to put together a detailed time-frame and a list of possible rationales and words spoken by both parties. The fact remains, though, and it dominates - both participants have been dead for 17 years now. This book's stories can only be told from the outside. The best you'll get from any chapter is detailed speculation.

With the last third focusing on Hartman's murder, and the first third devoted to his pretty-normal childhood and pre-acting career (he designed album covers for Poco and Santana, among others), the middle third for me was where the meat was. And, really, the stuff that interested me most was the kind of stuff you hear on DVD audio commentaries.

Like, I knew Hartman co-wrote *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (one of the few movies I can quote practically from start to finish), but I didn't know Reubens and Hartman had a falling out after Reubens became famous and ditched the entire ensemble that helped him create the character.

And, back to Colon Blow, I'd always wondered how the special effects were created for the shot that has Hartman sitting atop two-and-a-half million bowls of cereal. Now I know... actually, I've already forgotten, but for a second, I knew, and it was pretty fascinating stuff.

Author Thompson assembles a fairly exhaustive representation of castmates and producers from "The Simpsons," where Hartman did seven seasons of utility guest-cast voice work, and "Newsradio," which was three seasons old at the time of Hartman's death.

He was a crackerjack ensemble guy, but Hartman's career adds up to a lot of wandering and a lot of

unrealized potential. Toward the end of the book, I started both to empathize with Hartman's frustration, and remember the sadness I felt in realizing his best work would've still been yet to come. I mean, Hartman was the best thing about *Small Soldiers*, *Jingle All the Way* and *Houseguest*, but they were all shitty movies, so what does that really even amount to?

Likewise, what does it amount to when you read a dozen interviews with people from a dozen movies and TV shows, all telling you Hartman was great but unknowable? The point of me reading the book is, I *wanna* know, y'know? There were some sparkling pieces in the puzzle that was Phil Hartman, but so many pieces will always be missing, and *You Might Remember Me* feels much the same.

Brian Butts says

I feel like this book was written specifically for me. Hartman's death in 1998 was the first time I can remember being really saddened by the death of someone I'd never met. This book tries to paint a full picture of Hartman, flaws and all, as told through his careers and three marriages and overall succeeds in doing so. A little disappointed at the surface level overviews of his time at SNL, Simpsons, and News Radio (it focuses much more on his personal life). I could have read 5,000 pages of stories from those three gigs. That said, it was nice to revisit Phil. I'm glad I read it.

Mary says

Other readers have mentioned that they felt like Thomas didn't really capture the essence of Phil Hartman despite great research. I think Thomas got every nuance Hartman was willing to share. So often great comedians are unknowable ciphers when you get past the laughter. Hartman was a genius, not an open book.

Matt Lohr says

Mike Thomas's "You Might Remember Me" is a book I wanted to enjoy a lot more than I actually did. Phil Hartman is one of my all-time favorite "Saturday Night Live" cast members; I might put his "The Sinatra Group" in my top ten favorite sketches ever from that show. I am also an enormous fan of "Pee-wee's Big Adventure," which I believe many people probably forget he co-wrote. Thomas's book, which is admittedly snappily written and extremely fast-paced, does touch on all of these works, but it never does quite enough to delve into the real nature of Hartman's creative contributions to these works. It pays a lot of lip service to his comic acting skills, but never says quite enough to make it clear WHY he was a creative comedy giant.

Part of this is because the book, for all its obvious affection for and appreciation of its subject matter, never quite transcends the feeling that the only reason for the book's existence is the sad 1998 murder-suicide that took the life of Hartman and his wife Brynn. Virtually the last quarter of the book is devoted to this incident and its aftermath, and though it is indeed a dramatic and tragic ending to his story, it feels like his life deserves to be remembered beyond the simple, sordid reality of the way it ended. (That said, I do give credit to Thomas for not simply excoriating Brynn as a substance abuser and mental case, and being willing to call Hartman on his aloof distance and inattentiveness to her unhappiness, factors which may have led her down her ultimately fatal road.)

I would recommend reading "You Might Remember Me" simply because it's likely the only life of Hartman

we're ever going to get. But for bios of fallen "SNL" greats, "The Chris Farley Show" is a superior volume.

Scott says

Phil Hartman has always been a big part of my pop culture consumption; I watched SNL faithfully while he was on the show, and NewsRadio is one of the best sitcoms of the last two decades. Pee-Wee's Big Adventure (which he helped write) is one of my all-time favorite movies. In my opinion, SNL has never recovered since he left it.

I also vividly remember where I was when I heard that he died. I was 16 and I was in my high school library. I was in shock and didn't recover for some time. It seemed unimaginable that his wife would kill him.

I'm glad that someone finally wrote a book about Phil. I've had this irrational fear in the last few years that he would just slip through the cracks somehow, that people would forget about him. I hope that this book helps bring him back into the public memory.

The book is good. It could benefit from more interviews, I think. There were a few distracting typos, too. I appreciated Julia Sweeney's voice in it, though her statements are bound to be controversial. She clearly tries to provide a counter-narrative about Brynn toward all of the clamoring voices who hate Phil's wife (and murderer), Brynn. It was nice to hear another side of the story. However, I think her efforts to rehabilitate Brynn's image go a bit too far in this book.

It was nice to hear from Jan Hooks here, just a year or so before she passed on.

RIP Phil.
