



Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne

By James Gavin



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At long last, the first serious biography of entertainment legend Lena Horne -- the celebrated star of film, stage, and music who became one of the first African-American icons.

At the 2001 Academy Awards, Halle Berry thanked Lena Horne for paving the way for her to become the first black recipient of a Best Actress Oscar. Though limited, mostly to guest singing appearances in splashy Hollywood musicals, "the beautiful Lena Horne," as she was often called, became a pioneering star for African Americans in the 1940s and fifties. Now James Gavin, author of *Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker*, draws on a wealth of unmined material and hundreds of interviews -- one of them with Horne herself -- to give us the defining portrait of an American icon.

Gavin has gotten closer than any other writer to the celebrity who has lived in seclusion since 1998. Incorporating insights from the likes of Ruby Dee, Tony Bennett, Diahann Carroll, Arthur Laurents, and several of Horne's fellow chorines from Harlem's Cotton Club, *Stormy Weather* offers a fascinating portrait of a complex, even tragic Horne -- a stunning talent who inspired such giants of showbiz as Barbra Streisand, Eartha Kitt, and Aretha Franklin, but whose frustrations with racism, and with tumultuous, root-less childhood, left wounds too deep to heal. The woman who emerged was as angry as she was luminous.

From the Cotton Club's glory days and the back lots of Hollywood's biggest studios to the glitzy but bigoted hotels of Las Vegas's heyday, this behind-the-scenes look at an American icon is as much a story of the limits of the American dream as it is a masterful, ground-breaking biography.



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- Rank: #740514 in eBooks
- Published on: 2009-06-11
- Released on: 2009-06-23
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The clouds rarely lift in this grim, perceptive biography of Hollywood's first African-American screen siren. Gavin (*Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker*) makes clear that much of Horne's perpetual frustration stemmed from the racism black entertainers faced in the pre-civil rights era. MGM glamorized her as a darker version of its white starlets, but gave her small roles and singing cameos that Southern theaters could conveniently excise. As a cabaret chanteuse and Vegas headliner, she battled segregated nightclubs that let her sing to, but not drink with, white customers, and racial attitudes tainted her relationships with black audiences and with her white husband and lovers. Still, Horne's failures and heartaches seem largely determined by her talent and character. Her movie career, Gavin contends, fizzled more because of limited acting ability than studio perfidy, while a chaotic childhood left her a nasty woman ready to freeze people into oblivion. Indeed, her unhappiness shaped a successful stage persona—a cross between a cobra and a panther devouring her prey—that infused romantic lyrics with scornful irony. As Horne grows from joyless toddler to chilly, bitter diva, Gavin's clear-eyed account makes her the author of her life, and her pain. Photos. (June)

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Review

"EVENTFUL AND SUSPENSEFUL. . . A THOROUGH AND FLUENT BIOGRAPHY." —THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

"MAGNIFICENT, GRIPPING, MARVELOUSLY WRITTEN . . . [IT] MAY JUST BE ONE OF THE BEST BIOGRAPHIES ABOUT SHOW BUSINESS, RACE, LOVE, SEX, AND MUSIC EVER WRITTEN." —LIZ SMITH, VARIETY

"A FASCINATING STUDY OF A COMPLICATED WOMAN AND THE COMPLICATED TIMES THAT SHAPED HER." —USA TODAY

"IN GAVIN'S CAPABLE HANDS, LENA HORNE'S STORY IS BOTH UNIQUELY HER OWN AND AN INTEGRAL PART OF A LARGER CULTURAL JOURNEY." —SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"SYMPATHETIC AND TOUGH." —THE NEW YORKER

About the Author

James Gavin has written about some of the most significant black musical figures of our time, including Nina Simone, Harry Belafonte, and Miriam Makeba. His 300+ CD liner note essays include Grammy-nominated article for the box set Ella Fitzgerald - The Legendary Decca Recordings. He is the author of *Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker* and *Intimate Nights: The Golden Age of New York Cabaret*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Deborah Anderson:

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Brenda Rodriguez:

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