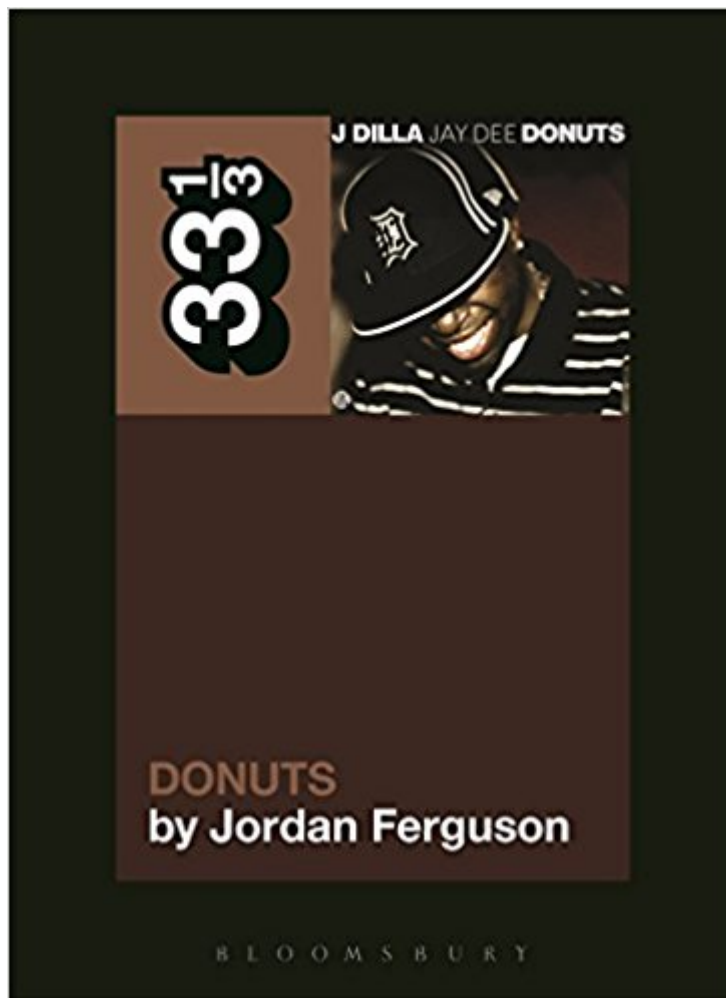


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J Dilla's Donuts (33 1/3)



Synopsis

From a Los Angeles hospital bed, equipped with little more than a laptop and a stack of records, James "J Dilla" Yancey crafted a set of tracks that would forever change the way beatmakers viewed their artform. The songs on *Donuts* are not hip hop music as "hip hop music" is typically defined; they careen and crash into each other, in one moment noisy and abrasive, gorgeous and heartbreaking the next. The samples and melodies tell the story of a man coming to terms with his declining health, a final love letter to the family and friends he was leaving behind. As a prolific producer with a voracious appetite for the history and mechanics of the music he loved, J Dilla knew the records that went into constructing *Donuts* inside and out. He could have taken them all and made a much different, more accessible album. If the widely accepted view is that his final work is a record about dying, the question becomes why did he make this record about dying? Drawing from philosophy, critical theory and musicology, as well as Dilla's own musical catalogue, Jordan Ferguson shows that the contradictory, irascible and confrontational music found on *Donuts* is as much a result of an artist's declining health as it is an example of what scholars call "late style," placing the album in a musical tradition that stretches back centuries.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The book is at once a worthy biography of Dilla's early life, a lush blueprint of *Donuts*'s sample sources and a moving personal essay on what the record might actually be about...Ferguson has

aced his listening homework (and done the extra credit)." - Scott Heins, "OKPlayer.com" "Early on in the book, just as he begins to make his case, Ferguson offers up a rather exemplary articulation of why Donuts deserves a book, why its myth is manicured so delicately, and why we love it so."-Nicholas Miriello, "Los Angeles Review of Books" "J Dilla would hate this book," Ferguson writes, as he posits how he believes Dilla would react to people delving so adamantly into his work to extract deeper meanings, as Ferguson does in this portrait of an album. Donuts, released four days before Dilla's death, was created during the last moments of the artist's life, and thus carries a much more substantial weight in comparison to other Dilla productions--whether he would have it that way or not. Thus enters this book, included in the 33 1/3 series, which combines a historical perspective of the album and the context in which it was released, along with a prominent first-person narrative in which Ferguson theorizes on the influences used in the album and how they translated into the larger hip-hop community in which Dilla worked. It feels pretty meta to be criticizing the work of a critic, and while Ferguson spends what I felt was an unnecessarily long time coming to terms with the role of writing as a critic himself, he writes in a way that ultimately succeeds in expressing the significance of Donuts when contemplating Dilla's life. -Brinley Froelich, "SLUG Magazine" "Jordan Ferguson's book on Donuts provides a trove of information about what was clearly one of the albums of the last decade of any genre [...] Ferguson offers a cogent reading of the album. Others have speculated that Jay Dee buried "secret messages" within the tracks. I don't know how secret they are but it is clear that there were major preoccupations, life-death-relationships and, of course, music. What he produced was a brilliant, multi-layered, sonically exhilarating work and Ferguson has done the album justice with this slim volume." -Robert Iannapallo, "ARSC Journal" "The book is at once a worthy biography of Dilla's early life, a lush blueprint of Donuts's sample sources and a moving personal essay on what the record might actually be about Ferguson has aced his listening homework (and done the extra credit)." - Scott Heins, OKPlayer.com "Early on in the book, just as he begins to make his case, Ferguson offers up a rather exemplary articulation of why Donuts deserves a book, why its myth is manicured so delicately, and why we love it so."-Nicholas Miriello, Los Angeles Review of Books "Early on in the book, just as he begins to make his case, Ferguson offers up a rather exemplary articulation of why Donuts deserves a book, why its myth is manicured so delicately, and why we love it so."-Nicholas Miriello "Los Angeles Review of Books "

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This is not the book I expected. Though, honestly, I don't quite know what I expected. My favorite part about the 33 1/3 series is that each one is so drastically different that it's hard to get a "bead" on how the series will work. This one focuses quite a bit on the general context and history of the artist J Dilla, aka Jay Dee. That, of course, wraps up much of it with the history of modern hip hop, which was perfect for me. (I recently finished HIP-HOP EVOLUTION on Netflix and wished it had carried into more modern times. This book seemed to pick up, in many ways, where that series left off.) I didn't know much about Dilla or this album. I'd tracked it down and listened to it a few times prior to reading this book, but nothing struck me as "amazing" or particularly noteworthy. However, Fergusson provided the appropriate context and discussed the life of this artist, which truly gave weight to the album itself. That being said, there isn't much about the album itself. There are a few references here, and one of the last chapters does a nice job analyzing the mood and style of the various tracks in comparison with Dilla's life. So, if there is one complaint, it's that it really is more about the artist than the album. Those looking for a huge focus on DONUTS will be disappointed. For those like me, though, who didn't know much about J Dilla--or, honestly, much about hip-hop's recent history--this makes for a great read about an extremely talented artist whose life was cut too short.

This Book Is Informative Of Dilla's Producing Process and Chronicles How He Got His Demo To Tip. It Is Somewhat Depressing As Well As The Author Contemplates Dilla's Mindstate In His Final Days. Good Reading Over All. Very Well Written.

Great book. It gave me insight on my favorite producer, and gave me knowledge on what he was going through and how dedicated he was when working on his craft.

I have pretty much been drinking this book voraciously since I got it. It came on time and is just small enough to fit my back pocket and be something I can carry with me all the time.

Great bio! Good background on Dilla and gave a good discussion on what his last album could have meant to the listeners

I've been a 33 1/3 fan from the very first Velvet underground and Nico book i snagged from the library, and i've been collecting them ever since, simply b/c I love music and writings about the

"classics". I was thrilled when i found out that Donuts will be getting the treatment that many great albums have gotten before. Donuts is one of my desert islands records, an album that continues to captivate and mystify me with its quirks and deeply melancholic and bluesy approach and will be with me ti'll my dying days. Donuts has continued to gain popularity and has continued to amass a cult following as people slowly recognize the genius behind this record, and the genius of this record. To my pleasant surprise, this book offered a lot of previously unknown insight and interpretation on an artist whose luminous career and life were cut horribly short. As a MAJOR Dilla fan, I would highly recommend this book for its off-kilter and unexpected insights into the life and music of a low-key legend, that certainly left us too soon, and this being his last album, will forever leave us wondering what could have been next.

New and interesting insights into a classic record. A must read for any Dilla heads or people just getting into his music. RIP Dilla Dawg

Pretty short, but a quick read that's definitely insightful. Recommended to anyone who enjoys this amazing record. Get live with it!

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