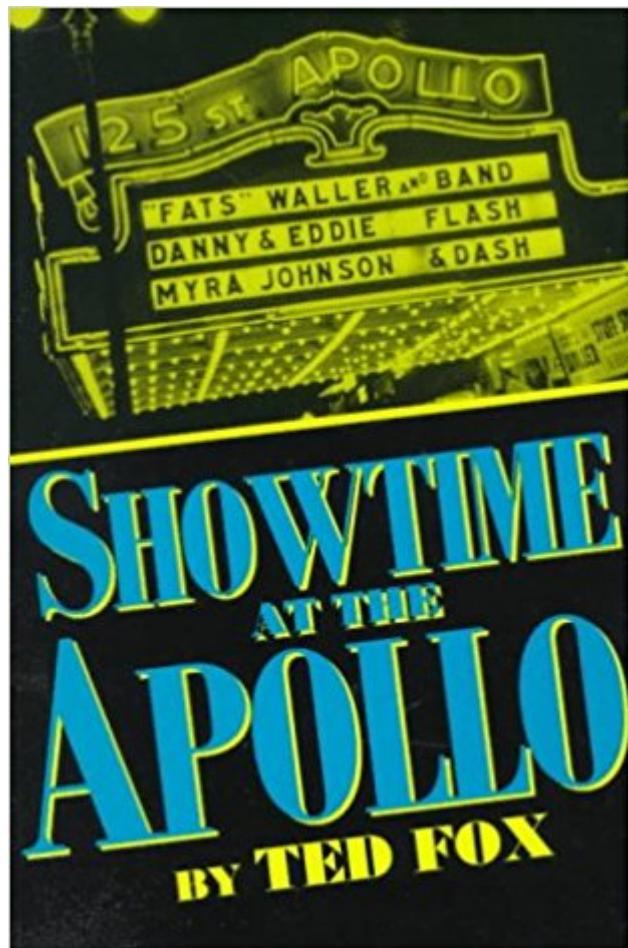


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Showtime At The Apollo



Synopsis

For close to 60 years the Apollo Theatre in the heart of Harlem has been one of America's foremost cultural institutions, a top showcase for black entertainers and a launching pad for some of the greatest talents of our time: Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Diana Ross, Dionne Warwick, Sarah Vaughan, and Richard Pryor are just a few. Ted Fox has written a history of the special combination of people and atmosphere at the Apollo; he lets the theatre's stars tell a large part of the story through personal anecdotes, augmented by a splendid array of rare pictures. The author also discusses the evolution of black cultural forms in music and comedy, and in so doing, preserves routines, Apollo trademarks, and backstage lore that might otherwise be lost.

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Customer Reviews

Recently the descriptive "legend" has been bestowed willy-nilly on recipients of ephemeral celebrity and of dubious merit and accomplishment. But the Apollo Theater in Harlem, N.Y. is a genuine legend, equal, and even superior to any music theater in the world. The Classical Revival style building at 253 West 125th street in Harlem was designed by George Keiser and built in 1913-14 as the Hurtig & Seamon's Burlesque Theater, which had a "Whites Only" policy that was rigorously enforced. By the early 1930s, the place fell into disrepair and closed. Sidney Cohen, who owned several theaters in Harlem, bought and renovated the theater, renaming it "Apollo Theater" that catered to the Black residents of the area. The "Apollo" faced stiff competition from other music halls,

especially Schiffman's "Lafayette" and Brecher's "Harlem Opera House" that booked dynamic acts, such as Bill 'Bogangles' Robinson and Louis Armstrong. After Cohen died, Schiffman and Brecher took over the "Apollo" and progressed from vaudeville acts to swing era big bands, comic acts, dance and variety shows. The theater became a gathering place for the neighborhood; men, women and children would flock to the Apollo, when it opened its doors at 10 AM, and some would stay all day through the night to watch the multiple shows offered. Cartoons and newsreel were usually followed by a full length feature film. .

I cannot express what an insightful and fully informative education I had on the Apollo Theatre! My knowledge about the famous theatre did not go past the rock and soul era of the Theatre. But, there is so much to learn on exactly how far this theatre goes back. I believe every aspect of the history is told. This theatre was where everybody who was anybody made their appearance at the Apollo. The names that are mentioned, dating back to the earliest days, covering all types of shows, jazz, big bands, gospel, blues, rock, dance, comics, and novelty acts. To many performers, it was home while also known as the "number one" theatre on the map. In the forties, the war years, where Big Band dominated and you can learn about the greats here, Charlie Parker, Earl Hines, Ink Spots, Dinah Washington, Pearl Bailey, Billie Holiday, Dizzy Gillespie, Wynonie Harris, and so many more mentioned. The fifties covered Eartha Kitt, Josephine Baker and her costumes, and Johnny Mathis and his fear of performing before black people, etc. What was insightful was the talk about Amateur Night. So many famous people began their career on Amateur Night. How this was in operation was very interesting. You will also hear about the novelty acts, comedians and the dancers. There was a time in the sixties when the focus was on the Disc Jockeys and their popularity. Equally telling was the Gospel era at the Apollo, gospel women, Big Mama Thornton, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, quartets such as The Dixie Hummingbirds, Soul Stirrers. Most well-known to me was the era of the sixties, James Brown, Ray Charles, Jackie Wilson, etc. The photo images are plentiful, great historic photos of the past.

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