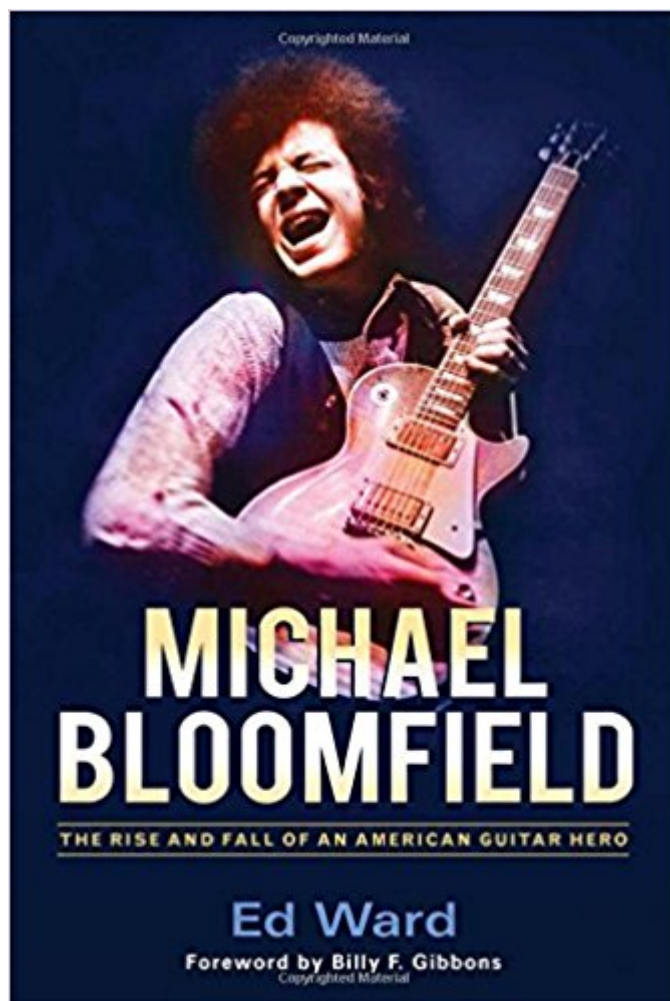


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Michael Bloomfield: The Rise And Fall Of An American Guitar Hero



Synopsis

This is the definitive biography of the legendary guitarist whom eminent figures like Muddy Waters and B. B. King held in high esteem, and who created the prototype for Clapton, Hendrix, Page, and everyone who followed. Bloomfield was one of the first popular music superstars of the 1960s to earn his reputation almost entirely on his instrumental prowess. He was a member of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, which inspired a generation of white blues players; he played with Bob Dylan in the mid-1960s, when his guitar was a central component of Dylan's new rock sound on "Like a Rolling Stone" and at his earthshaking 1965 Newport Folk Festival performance. He then founded the Electric Flag, recorded "Super Session" with Al Kooper, backed Janis Joplin, and released at least twenty other albums, despite debilitating substance abuse. He died of a mysterious drug overdose in 1981. A very limited edition of a book of this title was first published in 1983, but it has here been so thoroughly revised and expanded that it is essentially a brand-new publication. Based on extensive interviews with Bloomfield himself and with those who knew him best, and including an extensive discography and Bloomfield's memorable 1968 Rolling Stone interview, Michael Bloomfield is an intimate portrait of one of the pioneers of rock guitar.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Chicago Review Press (September 1, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1613733283

ISBN-13: 978-1613733288

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 44 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #85,387 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Rhythm & Blues #178 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Rock #619 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Actors & Entertainers

Customer Reviews

"A riveting tale of a restless spirit." —Rolling Stone "This amazing book by Ed Ward is an updated version of his original 1983 tome, but it feels brand new. The

breathtaking ride to the top and the crushing fall to the bottom of the musician's life is captured in full emotional detail. • The Morton Report "I thought I knew everything there was to know about Michael Bloomfield. I was wrong. I devoured this book and, in so doing, learned so much about the man I admired as a teenager." • Classicalite "...a necessary tribute to the influential blues-rock musician." • LivingBlues "In this chronicle of a life found and lost, Ed Ward writes with deep empathy, and also with a hard-boiled patience that burns off all sentiment. It is the perfect tone for a story Ward never tries to make bigger than it is, so that finally it makes terrible and final sense." • Greil Marcus, author of *The History of Rock & Roll in Ten Songs* and *Mystery Train* "Michael Bloomfield was brilliant, troubled, flawed, charming, and dauntingly influential, and Ed Ward adeptly balances his strengths and weaknesses, creating a picture of a man who was all too in tune with a complicated time." • Elijah Wald, author of *Dylan Goes Electric!* and *Escaping the Delta* "With all due respect to Eric Clapton, B.B. King, Albert King, Buddy Guy, Johnny Winter, and so many others who are in the pantheon of blues greats, in this white Jew's opinion, Michael Bloomfield was simply the best blues guitarist I've ever heard." • Rob Reiner, filmmaker and actor "Michael Bloomfield was such a unique and mercurial character it was like handling hot coals in your mind. You should get to know him because the people that knew him, loved him. His guitar playing was beautiful. His heart and soul were as big as it gets. This remembrance brings to life the amazing story of a young Jewish kid from Chicago's North Side whose unique style of improvisational guitar led the world into the modern age of blues and rock. Hey, folks, he was historic." • Nick Gravenites, singer and songwriter "A brilliant biography of the ethereal Chicago blues guitar giant who shook the walls down in the '60s and '70s with his soaring art. There is a mother lode of fresh rock & roll history in these pages. The discography alone is worth the price of admission. Highly recommended!" • Douglas Brinkley, author of *A Rightful Heritage* and *The Wilderness Warrior* "[A] terrific book, which charts the course of Bloomfield's life and career with style, detail and insight." • Chicago Tribune "As a biographer, Ward successfully conveys the complex story of a troubled Jew, who could shake a string like no one else." • Tablet Magazine "Ed Ward tells Bloomfield's story in compelling fashion, often pointing to the great tracks people may not know about." • Counter Punch

Ed Ward has been the "rock & roll historian" for Terry Gross and *Fresh Air* since that show's inception, and has contributed over 500 stories to it. He is also a

founding director of the South by Southwest Music and Media Conference; wrote one-third of *Rock of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock & Roll*, in 1986; was the Central European cultural correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* for seven years; and was on one of the early staffs at *Rolling Stone*. He lives in Austin, Texas. Billy F. Gibbons is the guitarist and lead vocalist of ZZ Top. He lives in Los Angeles.

This is a pretty short and succinct biography of Michael Bloomfield, a 1960s guitar hero I loved then and today. I knew some of the broad outlines of his story - growing up in Chicago; playing with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Bob Dylan, and The Electric Flag; and his early death due to alcoholism and/or drug use in 1981. Bloomfield was devoted to the blues; he grew up in Chicago and became entrenched in the black blues clubs in his teens. I especially enjoyed reading how the musicians of the day discovered and worked with one another as an extended club. As Bloomfield worked at Big John's "he noticed that Paul Butterfield, a musician he didn't particularly care for, was coming in to sit in more and more. Despite their personal antipathy, they sounded good playing music together." [p 42] A little later "Butterfield joined Bloomfield onstage to jam on a Freddie King instrumental. 'Paul and I exchanged looks,' [Joe] Boyd wrote later. 'This was the magic dialectic, Butterfield and Bloomfield. It sounded like a firm of accountants, but we were convinced it was the key to fame and fortune for the band and for us.'" [p 47] The resulting album, *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band*, was one of the first albums I remember buying. Bloomfield's guitar playing is sublime. Just listen to "Blues With a Feeling" to get an idea of Bloomfield's style - at turns laid back and driving it is still one of my favorite songs. On their follow-up album, *East West*, Bloomfield again lights up the world with his work on "I've Got A Mind to Give Up Livin" Around the same time Bloomfield found his way into Bob Dylan's orbit for the *Highway 61 Revisited* album. "Dylan confronted Bloomfield with only one rule: 'I don't want any of that B.B. King [\$#!+]', he said"... "Bloomfield sat listening to Dylan reel off song after song, trying to figure out guitar lines that weren't too bluesy to go along with them." [p 55] I think he succeeded. Just listen to his work on the subtlety of "It Takes A Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry" and his strong front work on "Like A Rolling Stone". Later Bloomfield claimed to not like the album. "'The session was very chaotic,' Bloomfield told Tom Yates and Kate Hays. 'Bob had the vaguest sound ... I could probably have put a more formal rock 'n' roll sound to it or at least my idea of one, but I was too intimidated by that company.'" [p 56] Ed Ward may be stretching a bit when he says "'Like a Rolling Stone' went beyond all previous essays into folk-rock. It made history as a pop record that pushed Beatles-era rock 'n' roll music into the experimental, long-for directions that would characterize the late 1960's" [p 57]

but not by much. The Newport Folk festival of 1965 is famous for Bob Dylan's going electric - he was booed heavily by the crowd who expected acoustic. Ed Ward tries to make the argument that the problem wasn't Dylan going electric; it's that the stage and amplifier configuration was the problem. I don't agree with that. In Marc Maron's WTF podcast #781 Robbie Robertson talks about this whole era when The Band was backing Dylan on tour. The people weren't getting what they wanted. Regardless, they were getting history. When Dylan came out to play with members of the Butterfield Blues Band, "the next five minutes would mark a turning point in the history of electric guitar. His performance on 'Maggie's Farm' was a radical move... what Bloomfield gave them on the evening of July 25, 1965, was the future of rock guitar." [p 66] For an idea of Bloomfield's epic guitar playing, search for 'Maggie's Farm Bob Dylan Live at Newport Folk Festival'. The lighting is terrible and you only see Bloomfield for a few seconds but you can sure hear him sit "so hard on top of the beat that it screams, and what he plays amounts to a sardonic running commentary of Dylan's song." [p 66] Michael Bloomfield then formed The Electric Flag with his pals Nick Gravenites and Mark Naftalin. The band was good but Bloomfield's troubles took their toll on the band. A short - less than one minute - gem from this era is "Easy Rider." A sweet guitar riff that he must have played between other parts of rehearsal. Bloomfield was an insomniac and seemed to have stage fright. He famously missed the second day of recording of the "Super Session" recording because he just didn't want to play. That is why we hear Stephen Stills on side two of the album. Bloomfield would frequently just walk away in the middle of a project if he wasn't pleased. He was a purist and if a project was commercially successful it was just evidence that it was no good. He played off and on through the 70's but dropped out of sight for a good part of the time. He died too young in early 1981. This is a good biography on Bloomfield's music and is a good read about the music scene of the mid 60s but Ed Ward doesn't really dive into the personal matters of alcoholism and drug abuse. If you are a fan of Michael Bloomfield and/or the music of his time this is a nice quick read.

Mike Bloomfield was a one of a kind guitar player, hugely influential and to this day, no one else really sounds like him. That said, his story seems to be less than the sum of it's parts. If you grew up with this music and wonder what happened to Bloomfield after Super Session and Electric Flag, the answer seems to be, not much from a story point of view. He made a lot of great recordings but I think it's better to listen to what he did than try to stretch out the story arc. The book is a quick read with a few revelations. The rest is a long interview with Rolling Stone(d) and praise from people who knew Mike Bloomfield. You already know how the story ends, so this book is for those who are either unfamiliar with Bloomfield or who are curious as to what happened when he dropped off the

radar.

This book was a good read. There was an interview that Jann Wenner did with Michael Bloomfield in the back of the back. Otherwise the majority of the material was recollections from his brother, contemporaries, and many musicians of Michael Bloomfield. It was interesting and the author included a discography and the interview. I like the book and would recommend it to any Michael Bloomfield fan.

I've been aware of Bloomfield since the first Paul Butterfield LP came out. I've listened to his stuff ever since. That's why I bought this book. This book is so well written. It's deep and informative about the times and Bloomfield's personal journey. I loved it.

A sort of redo-update on the first one. Not as many pictures. But more to read.

If you like Bloomfield's music you should enjoy this book.

Great book for Michael Bloomfield fans. I am one.

Good biography, nice bits of music history.

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