Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time by Phyllis Rose

There Is More To Baker Than Banana Skirt!

Josephine Baker's fascinating life encompassed stardom in the Paris of the 1920s, a career in the French Resistance, and civil rights activism in the 50s and 60s. Rose brings Baker to life as a performer, as a cultural icon, and as a black woman in a white world. 16 page of photos.

My Personal Review:
I honestly must admit I was surprised - shocked in fact - with seriousness, love and depth this author approached a subject which would many consider lightweight. As a difference from many other celebrated biographers who are basically just listing recording dates, Rose goes into describing the atmosphere around Paris in 1920's, what a half nude black woman on the stage meant to European audience at the time, all of a sudden we have discussion about Picasso, Hitler, De Gaulle and the whole book is just simply fascinating. On many occasions there were clever observations about life - I find myself seriously thinking about my own life while reading a book about a person who doesn't have anything in common with me - its almost a biblical saga about a strong individual, a fighter and survivor in a world that objects to anybody who stands above the crowd. Baker could have just used her sex appeal to get rich and built herself from the poverty, instead she changed the world around her and used all her energy to spread humanity wherever she went (it made me think about Lennon lyrics: "you may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one"). Rose doesn't just idolise Baker, there is a understanding that such a strong personality was as powerful to audience as overwhelming to people close to her in private life, which seems to be a destiny of anybody with a big influence.

Instead of another entertainer-biography I stumbled upon serious and deep analysis of fascinating character, brave and honest, sensitive woman. Bravo!

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