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Soul Serenade: Rhythm, Blues & Coming of Age Through Vinyl

Rashod Ollison

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Soul Serenade: Rhythm, Blues & Coming of Age Through Vinyl Rashod Ollison
A coming-of-age memoir about a young boy in rural Arkansas who searches for himself and his distant father through soul music

Growing up in rural Arkansas, young Rashod Ollison turned to music to make sense of his life. The dysfunction, sadness, and steely resilience of his family and neighbors was reflected in the R&B songs that played on 45s in smoky rooms.

Steeped in the sounds, the smells, the salty language of rural Arkansas in the 1980s, *Soul Serenade* is the memoir of a pop music critic whose love for soul music was fostered by his father, Raymond. Drafted into the Vietnam War as a teenager, Raymond returned a changed man, “dead on the inside.” After his parents’ volatile marriage ended in divorce, Rashod was haunted by the memory of his itinerant father and his mama’s long forgotten “sunshine smile.” For six-year-old Rashod, his father’s record collection—the music of Aretha Franklin, Bobby Womack, Al Green, and others—provided solace, coherence, and escape.

Moving nine times during his childhood, Rashod constantly adjusted to new schools and homes with his two sisters, Dusa and Reagan, and his mother, Dianne. Resilient and tough, while also being distant and punitive, she worked multiple jobs, striving “to make ends wave at each other if they couldn’t meet.” He spent time with his acerbic mother’s mother, Mama Teacake, and her family’s living-out-loud ways, which clashed with his father’s family—religious, discreet, and appropriate—where Rashod gravitated to Big Mama and Paw Paw, his father’s parents.

Becoming aware of his same-sex attraction, Rashod felt further isolated and alone but was encouraged by mentors in the community who fostered his intelligence and talent. He became transformed through discovering the writing of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, and other literary greats, and these books, along with the soulful sounds of the 1970s and 80s, enabled him to thrive in spite of the instability and harshness of his childhood.

In textured and evocative language, and peppered with unexpected humor, *Soul Serenade* is an original and captivating coming-of-age story set to an original beat.

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