

Don't Suck, Don't Die: Giving Up Vic Chesnutt (American Music)

Kristin Hersh

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"Friend, asshole, angel, mutant," singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt "came along and made us gross and broken people seem . . . I dunno, cooler, I guess." A quadriplegic who could play only simple chords on his guitar, Chesnutt recorded seventeen critically acclaimed albums before his death in 2009, including *About to Choke*, *North Star Deserter*, and *At the Cut*. In 2006, NPR placed him in the top five of the ten best living songwriters, along with Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, Paul McCartney, and Bruce Springsteen. Chesnutt's songs have also been covered by many prominent artists, including Madonna, the Smashing Pumpkins, R.E.M., Sparklehorse, Fugazi, and Neutral Milk Hotel.

Kristin Hersh toured with Chesnutt for nearly a decade and they became close friends, bonding over a love of songwriting and mutual struggles with mental health. In *Don't Suck, Don't Die*, she describes many seemingly small moments they shared, their free-ranging conversations, and his tragic death. More memoir than biography, Hersh's book plumbs the sources of Chesnutt's pain and creativity more deeply than any conventional account of his life and recordings ever could. Chesnutt was difficult to understand and frequently difficult to be with, but, as Hersh reveals him, he was also wickedly funny and painfully perceptive. This intimate memoir is essential reading for anyone interested in the music or the artist.



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