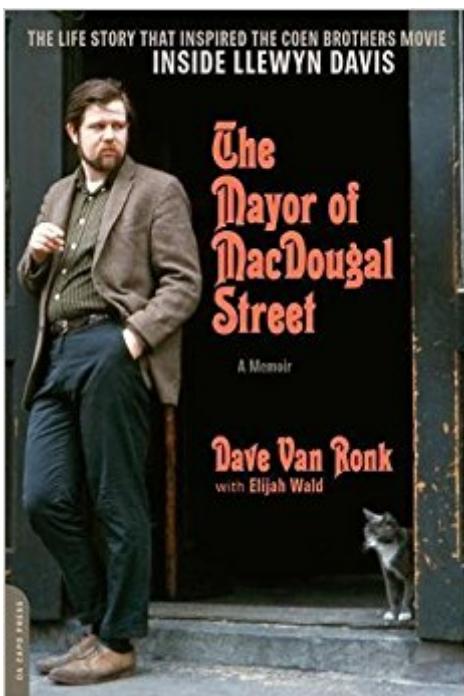


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# The Mayor Of MacDougal Street [2013 Edition]: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Dave Van Ronk (1936-2002) was one of the founding figures of the 1960s folk revival, but he was far more than that. A pioneer of modern acoustic blues, a fine songwriter and arranger, a powerful singer, and one of the most influential guitarists of the '60s, he was also a marvelous storyteller, a peerless musical historian, and one of the most quotable figures on the Village scene. Featuring encounters with young stars-to-be like Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street* is a vivid evocation of a singular time and place--a feast not only for fans of folk music and blues, but for anyone interested in the music, politics, and spirit of a revolutionary period in American culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

NewYorker.com, 9/30/13 "[A] wonderful memoir." "Slate, " 12/2/13 "Your best guide when it comes to Inside Llewyn Davis--apart from what follows, of course--is Van Ronk's posthumous memoir, "The Mayor of MacDougal Street". " "New York Times", 11/30/13 "[A] sharp cantankerous memoir." "NewYorker.com, 9/30/13 "[A] wonderful memoir." "Slate, " 12/2/13 "Your best guide when it comes to Inside Llewyn Davis--apart from what follows, of course--is Van Ronk's posthumous memoir, "The Mayor of MacDougal Street". " "New York Times", 11/30/13 "[A] sharp cantankerous memoir." " "New York Review of Books" blog, 12/16/2013 "The movie extensively mines Van Ronk's remarkable posthumous memoir "The Mayor of MacDougal Street" (seamlessly compiled from interviews by Elijah Wald; Da Capo, 2005) for scenes, anecdotes, and details of background, and its

protagonist, Llewyn Davis (played by Oscar Isaac) sings songs closely associated with Van Ronk." "Seattle Times, "12/15/2013"[A] delightful, keenly-observed, cantankerous autobiography...which, if you love 'Inside Llewyn Davis' you owe it to yourself to read." "Paste Magazine", 12/12/2013"[An] acclaimed and enjoyable memoir." "NewYorker.com, 1/22/2014""The Mayor of MacDougal Street" is one of the dozen best books ever written about a New York life and time: dense with wisdom, humor, judgment, and an amazingly vivid recreation of the rites and rituals and characters of a whole lost world and scene." "Praise for "The Mayor of MacDougal Street" "NewYorker.com, 9/30/13 [A] wonderful memoir. "Slate, " 12/2/13 Your best guide when it comes to Inside Llewyn Davis apart from what follows, of course is Van Ronk's posthumous memoir, "The Mayor of MacDougal Street." "New York Times," 11/30/13 [A] sharp cantankerous memoir. The Culture Trip, 4/1/16 Gives the play-by-play for a musical movement that was humble in origin, but huge in populous fervor. Woody Guthrie; Joan Baez; Pete Seeger; Richie Havens; Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary; plus dozens more, they all live and breathe within these pages. One of folk's unsung heroes, Van Ronk mixes poetry and revolution, rolled into a posthumously released autobiography as much a history of the Village, and the folk venues that made it famous, as the life story of its Mayor. "

In the course of his forty-year career, Dave Van Ronk recorded more than two dozen albums, toured on four continents, was nominated for two Grammys, and received an ASCAP Lifetime Achievement Award. Coauthor Elijah Wald wrote the acclaimed study of the myth, music, and life of blues legend Robert Johnson, "Escaping the Delta." He also wrote the biography "Josh White: Society Blues" as well as "Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas." A musician and journalist, he lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I knew that I would be interested in Van Ronk's memoir just because of its subject matter: the folk music revival and the Greenwich Village scene that produced Bob Dylan and other famous musicians. What I didn't expect was that Dave Van Ronk and his co-author would write a book that is both witty and deep in its analysis of both musical and social trends of the 1950s and 1960s. Van Ronk's views on the folk music scene and American society deserve serious attention, and some of his escapades such as going to California in a drive-away car had me laughing out loud. Van Ronk did not become a star like the people who he wrote about but, in the end, he was more than satisfied with having been able to live his life as a professional musician, and I was more than satisfied with reading his entertaining account.

This is the best book on the Greenwich Village folk music scene. Van Ronk embodies the personality of the village, and he gives you a thorough account of the development of the scene from the early 50's to the late 60's. There's tons of little tidbits of history and stories about the scene. Van Ronk was at the center of it all-- he helped introduce Bob Dylan into NYC and led the folk revival into what it was. He tells this story like nobody else could, and he remembers how politics both separated and joined the music community. I discovered a ton of musicians by reading this book. Many of these people don't come up on a google search. You have to search hard to find them. This is a fantastic book not only because it is the best account of the village scene, but because Van Ronk's wit is the perfect one for narrating this story. He had such a full and deep life. I organized a concert in honor of Van Ronk's 80th birthday last summer and had the pleasure of meeting Elijah Wald (the co-writer), Van Ronk's widow, and a bunch of the other cats that are mentioned in the book. Keep honoring this man and read the book!

Dave Van Ronk was one of the main musicians behind the emergence of the Folk explosion in Greenwich village in the early 1960's. However, this book brings you back to his childhood and his first entrance into the music scene as a jazz player. His movement from blues and then onto folk music is an interesting and educational story, giving deep insight into the movers and shakers who ran the various coffee shops and concert halls during that period. There are some wonderful anecdotes on the young Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, Tom Paxton and other musicians who went on to become household names. Dave comes across as a likeable character who is that little bit off the mark when it comes to hitting the big time. Due to Dave's untimely death whilst researching and writing this book, the reader is left with a longing to find out more about the era from one who was at its very centre. A must read for anyone interested in the ending of the beat era and the emergence of the Folk movement in New York.

Being a folkie (I used to play in coffee houses in Asbury Park in the 60s), I was eager to read Dave Van Ronk's story. With the help of a co-author who had to work with extra sources at Dave's untimely death, we have an incomplete but nonetheless outstanding semi-autobiography. Dave knew everyone (hence his nickname) in the Village, and tells lots of great stories about them, especially his love/hate relationship with Dylan. On his personal life, he tells of his growing up, but there's next to nothing about his two marriages. I would've thought his collaborator might have spoken with them to fill in some details. Nonetheless, you get a very well-written inside look at the

folk scene. We can only imagine how much more might have been included if Dave hung around longer. And by the way, the Llewyn Davis is hardly Dave Van Ronk. What a depressing movie! The soundtrack's good, but there's nothing likable about the titular singer. They took a few anecdotes from this book and fabricated a story that some people will think is about Dave, and it's decidedly not.

Van Ronk's "autobiography" is everything that "Inside Llewyn Davis" isn't. It's an affectionate look back at the music scene, primarily folk, in Greenwich Village in the '50s and '60s. Not much score-settling here. Instead, his love for the music is what comes through most strongly, as it did not in the Coen brothers' film. Much as I enjoyed the film, I'm enjoying the book more for different reasons.

So far, this is the most accurate and all-inclusive retrospective on the folk revival in Greenwich Village, NY and what led up to it that I've read so far. Van Ronk was there for all of it; and he took good notes. The book is readable, enjoyable, and captures the spirit as well as the history of the music, the politics, and the colorful social and cultural life of that time. For most musicians and fans who participated in the folk revival, what Van Ronk tells is the story they remember. There is another, darker tale that he, like most others who were there, recognizes, but does not dwell much on. The music itself is the focus of his book. The weaponization of music and what that leads to in different eras of history is a bigger story, perhaps still to be told by some other author.

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