

The Boston Globe

Judy Collins: Singer and book addict

May 20, 2012

As Judy Collins says, she was “born productive.” That personality trait has translated into more than 40 albums, seven books, and her own record label. At 73, she still performs roughly 100 times a year. The most recent fruit of her seemingly inexhaustible labor is “When You Wish Upon A Star,” a 2011 children’s book that comes with a CD of Collins singing . . . you guessed it.

BOOKS: What are you reading currently?

COLLINS: “Winter King” by Thomas Penn about Henry VII. It’s one of the best books I’ve read on the Tudors. I’m a great fan of them. I’ve read everything Antonia Fraser has written about them, starting with “Mary Queen of Scots.” I’ve read all of Philippa Gregory’s historical novels about the Tudors too.

BOOKS: What started your interest in the Tudors?

COLLINS: “Mary Queen of Scots,” but I’ve always been interested in English history in general. I’ve always been a fan of Winston Churchill’s books. You get spoiled when you read his books. **I just picked up the new book about Great Britain's role in the American Civil War, “A World on Fire” by Amanda Foreman.** My reading is pretty extensive and expansive, but I do savor great history and good mysteries.

BOOKS: Which mystery writers do you like?

COLLINS: I’m very particular about the kind of writers I read. I’ll read Michael Connelly any day because he’s a beautiful writer. Some of these Swedish writers are great. I like Henning Mankell and his “The Troubled Man.” Josephine Tey will grab a historic moment and write up a storm about it. Robert Wilson does that too. His “A Small Death in Lisbon” is a magnificent book.

BOOKS: Have you always read a lot, even early in your career?

COLLINS: Always. I’m an addict, a complete addict. Some of the most exciting reading I do I have to do in the morning. I have to do it just a couple of pages at a

time so I can really concentrate and I underline as I go. That's one reason why I prefer a book. If I am desperate I might order something on my phone. I've read Connelly on my phone.

BOOKS: Back in the '60s did you find fellow musicians, such as Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan, to be readers?

COLLINS: When I first got to know Bob Dylan he was sleeping in friends' apartments around Greenwich Village. They all had tons of books. He would spend his free nights in these homes reading Plato and philosophical treatises. He credits that period with stimulating a lot of songs.

BOOKS: In the past you've struggled with depression and alcoholism. Did reading help at all?

COLLINS: I've always read, depressed or not. Thanks to being an addict to reading I've learned things that helped my physical and mental health. For example, I learned if I would get an exercise program into my life I wouldn't be depressed. Then I read about addictions and found the writings of Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. Then when my son Clark killed himself, I came across Edwin Shneidman, a founder of the suicide prevention movement in this country. He was a brilliant, brilliant man who wrote many books, such as "The Suicidal Mind."

BOOKS: Was there any book in particular that was a comfort?

COLLINS: Iris Bolton's "My Son . . . My Son . . ." Her son killed himself a couple of years before Clark's death. She's a therapist in Atlanta. But I devoured everything I could get my hands on about suicide. I have shelves of books that have to do with it.

BOOKS: Any books you avoided?

COLLINS: "The Savage God" by A. Alvarez. I don't want to go there. It talks a lot about the drama of Sylvia Plath but not how she could have been helped. If I'd had 15 minutes with her I could have straightened her out.

Got suggestions for future Bibliophiles? Find us on Facebook or follow us @GlobeBiblio on Twitter.