

THE GOD GROOVE: A BLUES JOURNEY TO FAITH

By David Ritz

256 pp. Howard Books. 2019.

At seventy-five, David Ritz, a prolific, bestselling ghostwriter and author of over fifty books, penned his memoir as a tribute to his music legend subjects and their influence on his own slow blooming religious awakening. With chapters unnumbered but named—"Brother Ray [Charles]" and "The Queen [Aretha Franklin]," for example—*The God Groove* is a swift and sparkling, impressionistic read of bad-dad narratives and devout religiosity. Aretha spins a happy fairytale from her early traumas. Janet Jackson sees her father's many faults and a singular blessing. Marvin Gaye never escapes and is shot dead by his father. So how does this painfully common motif lead so many (and the author) to cleave to God? Why trade patriarchies and expect differently? Why pray more when we could parent better? Alongside his dedicated and creative career, Ritz stumbles through marital infidelities, habitual marijuana use, and Freudian therapy. Finally, he succeeds in twelve-step programs and rises anew in a home-based church led by Reverend Mable John, a former Raelette for Ray Charles. Baptized at sixty, Ritz finds in Jesus, as I see it, not a new patriarchy but an enduring matriarchal grace. He writes, "I loved the notion of grace: that we don't earn God's love; we are gifted God's love. I loved radical forgiveness. But mainly, I loved the name Jesus. I love Jesus" (229). The author loves Jesus, leaves Judaism, reconciles with his bully father, . . . and is a loving parent to his twin daughters. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 8 December 2019