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## Entertainment : Books : Reviews

### Life With My Sister Madonna

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The latest tell-all book to be released about **Madonna** has a unique selling point: it is written by her own brother, a man with more insight and understanding of the star than almost anyone, having grown up with her and acted as her back-up dancer, personal assistant, dresser, decorator, art director, tour director and confidante through most of her career.

Indeed, Christopher Ciccone's *Life With My Sister Madonna* (read an extract) is described as "the full-scale, riveting untold story behind Madonna's carefully constructed mythology, and the real woman behind the glittering façade" – the tale that "only Christopher can tell". I guess three main questions are raised that you hope the book is going to answer. What's it like to be Madonna's brother? Why did he write it? And what can it tell us about the superstar that we didn't already know?

Let's start with the why. Now estranged from his sister, Christopher Ciccone – or CC – indirectly defends himself against any accusations that his motives may be purely mercenary, or that he is out for revenge, by explaining that he was originally driven to write the book as "a way for me to define myself and separate from my sister at last". Hmm. I'm not sure if writing a book *about her* was the best way of going about that, CC. But he admits that the memoir ended up being primarily a catharsis, his way of "getting some perspective on our story" and to "finally understand and accept that one aspect of my life will never change: I was born by mother's son, but I will die my sister's brother".

And here we begin to get an insight as to what it's like to be Madonna's brother. Well, to be Christopher Ciccone, anyway. From the night back in 1977 when Madonna takes him to a gay club called The Rubaiyat and he realises that he is gay – a night described by CC as one where "my sister has shown me a reflection of my sexuality and I can no longer hide it – at least, not from myself. She has opened my eyes" – it is clear that CC associates Madonna very closely with how he defines and identifies himself from there on out. Recalling the journey to visit Madonna on that fateful night, he states, "Thanks to Madonna, over the next six hours my destiny – both sexual and professional – will become set in stone".

As such, CC spends most of his time preoccupied with how Madonna sees him and their relationship, which – as you may have guessed – causes much contention, disappointment and angst on his part. Moments of elation at Madonna's side – notably when he is directing her 1993 *Girlie Show* tour – are countered by frequent moments when he feels underappreciated, underpaid and betrayed by her. He cites instances where she publicly outs him in a magazine interview, uses their mother's grave site as a film location for the documentary *Truth or Dare*, and fails to adequately compensate him for his work redecorating her houses over the years. Such disappointment seems inevitable given that a large part of his identity hinges so heavily on a woman who, we are told, can be self-centred, demanding, cheap and stand-offish.

This brings us to the insights CC provides about the woman herself. We are given endless examples of how difficult and rude she can be, which are in themselves quite entertaining, though frankly, they are hardly surprising. We all know Madonna is a diva. His declarations that Madonna "always has to be the best" and "from her perspective, she is the only person in the universe", seem blatantly obvious.

So we know she's demanding and self-centred. What else can you tell us, Christopher? One of the big claims in this book is that Guy Ritchie is homophobic and has slowly but surely encouraged Madonna to turn her back on the gay people in her life – her gay audience and her brother included. CC justifies his claim by citing instances where Ritchie is extremely rude to him and Madonna acts indifferent, but this evidence is purely circumstantial. It seems hard to believe that Madonna, who did so much work for AIDS awareness and who inspired so many of her gay fans to be themselves, would turn against them. Besides, there are plenty of other factors having a negative effect on his relationship to his sister, not just the mutual dislike between him and Ritchie.

What we do find out about Madonna that we may not already know is that she is an insomniac, her favourite candies are Hot Tamales, her favourite drink is a lemon drop, she loves the colour white and Gardenia Passion Perfume, and she used to hate England. In terms of any juicy insider gossip or myth busting, the book is a disappointment. Even long-standing rumours about any lesbian affairs she may have had remain just that. CC tells us what we already know about her relationship with Ingrid Casares – that they are close – and then offers his opinion: "It wouldn't have surprised me at all if my sister and Ingrid were having intimate relations". Well, were they, Christopher? Nor does he do much to confirm or deny rumours that Madonna had an affair with Sandra Bernhard, except to say that he "believes it isn't true". Come on, Chris, surely you've got *something explosive* that you can lift the lid off?

Ultimately, *Life With My Sister Madonna* is mostly a cataloguing of episodes and CC's reaction to them, in keeping with his explanation that writing the book turned out to be more of a cathartic exercise than anything else. His frequent descriptions of how unreasonable Madonna can be and what a mediocre singer and terrible actress she is will keep you turning the pages, but the book isn't the "juicy" read that its jacket cover makes it out to be. Even those expecting some sort of dishy insider gossip about Madonna and Kabbalah won't get it here, with CC simply remarking that he hopes Madonna learns "Kabbalah's lesson that she is not the centre of the universe".

Disappointing, Christopher – we know this book may have been therapeutic for you, but we want dirt! Gritty, shocking, can't rub-off dirt... I guess we'll have to wait for the next "tell-all" Madonna book to come out.

Read an extract from *Life With My Sister Madonna*.



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