

David Looseley, *Édith Piaf: A Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015). Hardback, 254 pages, no illustrations. RRP £25.

The publication of this book coincided with the anniversary of the centenary of Édith Piaf's birth in 1915, in Belleville, Paris. Although retaining Piaf as an iconic figure on the French stage, and the Parisian one in particular, David Looseley expands her influence and demonstrates her role as a 'passeur' on the international stage and a cultural phenomenon.

The husky voice and songs of Piaf are well known. Looseley argues that she was largely a product of her own invention and of others, and an artificial construction in a black dress. But the author seeks to rehabilitate Piaf as a composer of about 90 songs and argues forcefully for her recognition as an *auteur-compositeur-interprète*.

The Fourth Republic was the backcloth to Piaf's life – she died in 1963 at the age of 48 – yet the 'whole epic passed [her] by: she was too busy with her energetic love life, regular tours of America and elsewhere, and declining health'. The memorialisation of Piaf, voted France's favourite female singer in 2015 and whose song 'Non, je ne regrette rien' was chosen as one of Ed Miliband's desert island discs in 2013, is the subject of part 3, 'Afterlives'.

Looseley's enthusiasm for Piaf pervades this book based to some extent on the large collection of her works belonging to the late David Whale. This cultural study is written with scrupulous attention to detail and accuracy and has a comprehensive chronology, notes and index.

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