

Dizzy & Jimmy: My Life with James Dean: A Love Story

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A long time ago, when I was a young dancer in
New York City, I fell in love with Jimmy Dean
and he fell in love with me.

So begins this beguiling memoir of Liz "Dizzy" Sheridan's passionate yet ill-fated romance with the young, magnetic, soon-to-be-supernova James Dean. The year was 1951. Dean had recently arrived in Manhattan in search of Broadway stardom. Sheridan was a tall, graceful aspiring dancer. They met one rainy afternoon in the parlor of the Rehearsal Club, a chaperoned boardinghouse for young actresses -- and before long Dizzy and Jimmy were inseparable. Together they hunted for jobs, haunted all-night bars and diners, and gloried in the innocent rebellion of early-'50s bohemian New York. Dizzy Sheridan and James Dean were lovers; they lived together; as even ardent Dean fans may be surprised to learn, they were engaged to be married. But when Dean began to find success on the Broadway stage and then was lured to Hollywood, the couple parted amid tears and broken dreams -- dreams that would be dashed forever when Dean died in a car crash in 1955, not long after seeing Dizzy for the last time.

Dizzy & Jimmy marks the first time Liz Sheridan has written about this joyous yet ill-starred romance. She brings us closer than we have ever been to the vibrant young actor before he became a Hollywood icon, capturing his unstudied charm, his complicated psyche, the spontaneous delight he took from the world around him, and the passion he invested in his work and life. It is a journey that takes in many locales, from Dean's boyhood home in Fairmount, Indiana, to Sheridan's recuperative travels through the Caribbean after their breakup. But at its heart Dizzy & Jimmy is the story of a love affair with Manhattan -- of nights spent stealing kisses in Times Square, sharing a walkup in the Hargrave Hotel, dancing after hours beneath the stars in Grand Central Station. And in Sheridan's bittersweet, embraceable telling, it becomes a story no reader, Dean fan or otherwise, will soon forget.

Liz Sheridan is perhaps best known today for her role as Jerry Seinfeld's mother, Helen, on the landmark television series Seinfeld, and as the eccentric neighbor Mrs. Ochmonek on Alf. She is a veteran stage actress with featured roles in eight Broadway shows. Married to jazz musician Dale Wales, Sheridan lives in Studio City, California. Sheridan, best known as Jerry Seinfeld's TV mother, reveals her love affair with James Dean in a brief book replete with moony dialogue, prescient remarks about Dean's driving habits and a 1950s New York setting. The effervescent Sheridan, known as Dizzy, was a dancer living in a theater district residence hall for aspiring actresses when she met the 21-year-old Dean, an Indiana farm boy who had come to New York via Hollywood. Their instant attraction was soon consummated. Sheridan portrays Dean as a sometimes corny romantic, who immediately began talking about being "together forever" and who needed "always to touch and be touched." While Dizzy managed to work, dancing in nightclubs all over New York or in summer stock musicals, Jimmy was either more unlucky or more choosy, and brooded over his disappointments. Though she touches on Dean's moody episodes and regular,

unexplained disappearances, as well as his disclosure of a homosexual liaison with a California producer helpful to his career, Sheridan doesn't claim that her memoir is a complete account of Dean's New York years. (For example, there's no mention of his acceptance into the Actors Studio in November 1951.) When Dean was cast in a bound-for-Broadway production, he moved easily away from Sheridan. Dean got enthusiastic notices in *See the Jaguar*, although the play closed in a few days, and the affair never rekindled. Sheridan's feelings for Dean, her pain upon their separation and on his untimely death a few years later, are sweetly rendered and seem genuine, although the details are filtered through a romanticized lens. B&w photos not seen by PW. (Sept.)

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You Can't Steal a Gift. *You Can't Steal a Gift* is about the impact of American racism on America's greatest gift to the world of music—jazz. In a work that combines memoir, oral history, and commentary, Gene Lees has crafted minibiographies of four great black musicians whom he knew well—Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry, Milt Hinton, and Nat “King” Cole. Lees writes of them, “All are men who had every reason to embrace bitterness . . . and didn't.” When Lees left Montreal to become the music and drama critic of the *Louisville Times* in 1955, he was shocked by the racism and segregation he found in the United States. In jazz he found a community of like-minded souls who freely shared their gifts with all lovers of music, regardless of race and condition.

“ . . . *You Can't Steal a Gift* is about the impact of American racism on America's greatest gift to the world of music—jazz.”