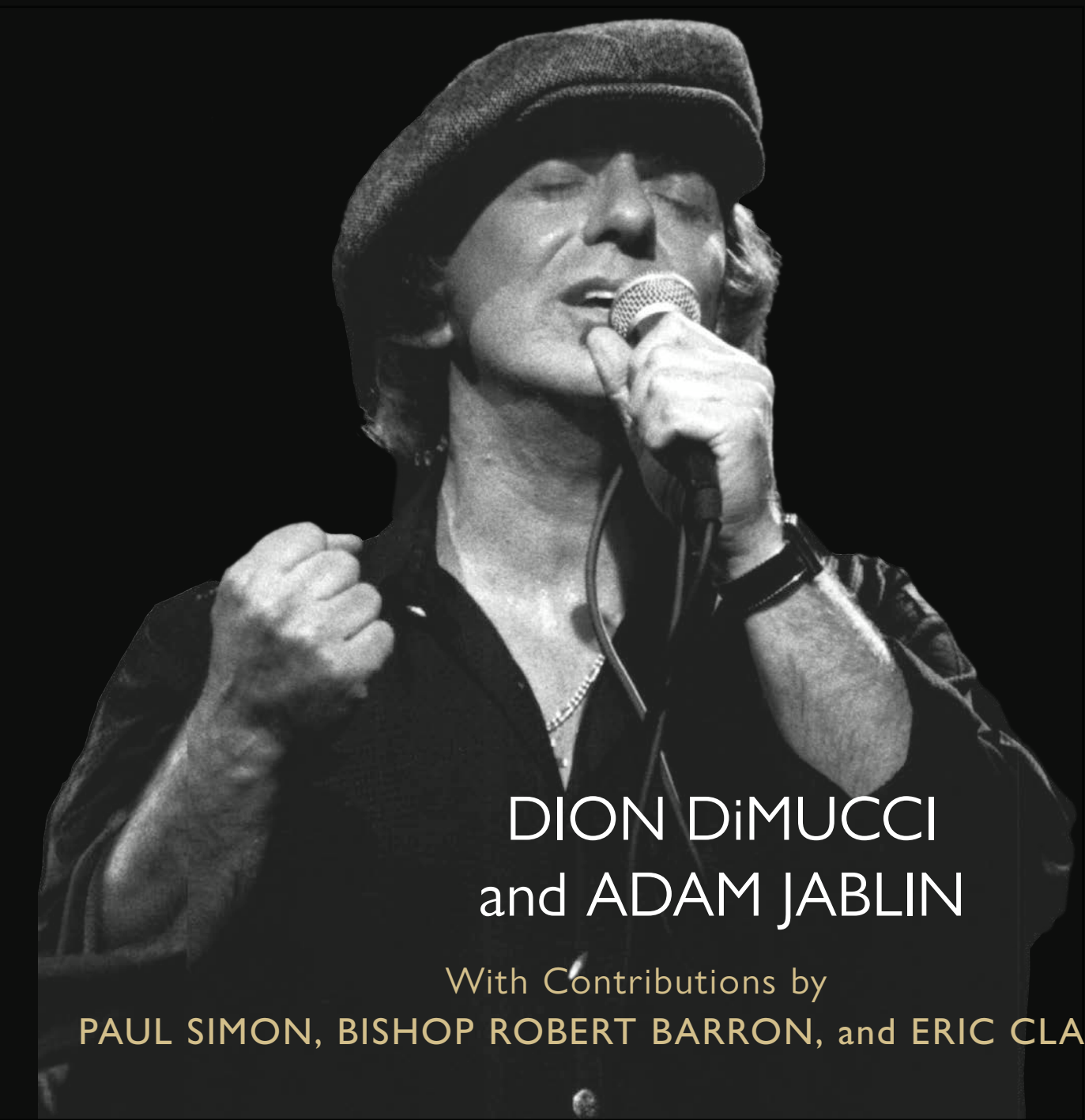
DION

THE ROCK 'N' ROLL PHILOSOPHER

Conversations on Life, Recovery, Faith, and Music



DION DiMUCCI
and ADAM JABLIN

With Contributions by
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Foreword

Dion DiMucci and I have been friends for a long time; the reasons are easy to understand. First, there's that accent. His Bronx sonority is a bit different from my Queens pronunciation, but I doubt listeners in Dubuque, Mobile, or Fort Worth could tell us apart. It's New York. Of course, there's our shared musical heritage. Dion is the voice of Bronx soul with a dash of Hank Williams stirred in, and I'm more Cleftones and Everly Brothers, but we both know the same obscure R&B records and can say which B side was better than the hit.

Our friendship grew from more than just New York roots. We've come to know and understand each other, with a respect for the values we share, many of which are spoken of in this book. Dion and I don't see each other very often but we do speak on the phone, and these conversations, which can go on for an hour, usually drift into a discussion of the spiritual. His deep understanding and hard-earned insights come, in part, from his Catholic upbringing and his experience with AA. Neither of those sources of wisdom are in my background, but we often find ourselves in agreement on these matters. Dion has a special kindness and generosity, as well as the plain-spoken common sense that make knowing him a privilege. We've been friends a long time.



—Paul Simon

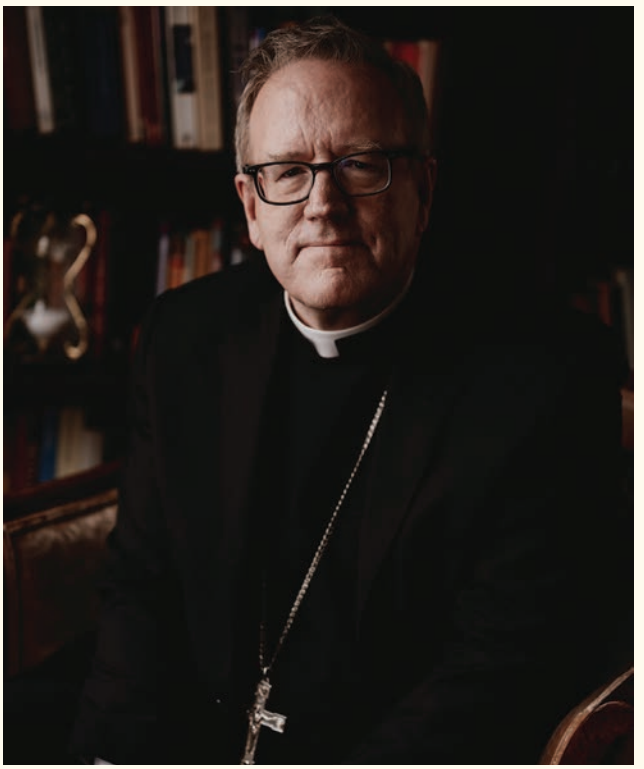
Preface

Dion DiMucci has one of the most beautiful and distinctive voices in popular music. As Bruce Springsteen himself observes, Dion's vocal style provides a link between the Big Band period and Rock 'n' Roll. Bob Dylan construes him as a "bluesman from another Delta," and Lou Reed considers it a privilege to be able to sing backup for him. Among his many musical friends are Paul Simon, Stevie Van Zandt, Van Morrison, and Pete Townshend. Heck, the Beatles even put him on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper.* He has produced memorable and groundbreaking music for the past sixty years.

But how many people realize that Dion is also a man of enormous spiritual depth and insight? How many know that he fought his way through a debilitating addiction and experienced the breakthrough of divine grace? How many understand that, even for many of his musical peers, he is a source of wisdom? The book you are about to read—Dion, the Rock 'n' Roll Philosopher—amply explores both the music and the mysticism, both sides of this extraordinary man.

I want to share just a few of the spiritual gems that I discovered scattered throughout these conversations with Dion. A first one, delivered with the poetic understatement typical of his songwriting: "Humility is the healer of pain." When we see, he explains, that we are punished, not so much for our sins as by our sins, we are already on the road to redemption. He writes, "God loves us unconditionally; he doesn't punish us! He loves us. We are punished by the act, not for it." I don't think St. John of the Cross could have said it better. Another is his brilliant connection between John Lennon's "Help" and his later composition "Watching the Wheels." In that first song, we hear the almost desperate cry of a man who was at the height of his fame, power, and

wealth: Help! I need somebody. Help! Not just anybody. Help! And in the second song, written just before Lennon's tragic death, we hear someone who has found the center, no longer riding on the merry go round. Dion places great stress upon the four principal temptations that the spiritual masters have identified as substitutes for God: wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. And he teaches us detachment from them so that we might attach ourselves to God alone.



Anyone interested in music and pop culture will find lots to enjoy in this book. The narratives, the conversations, the pictures of Dion with practically every major figure in rock music—all of it is delightful. But anyone looking for meaning, anyone hungry and thirsty for God, anyone who wants peace of soul, will also find a great deal to savor in these pages. I for one am very glad that the Wanderer—"with his two fists of iron and going nowhere"—finally found what he was looking for and that he has shared his spiritual joy with the rest of us.

—Bishop Robert Barron

Prologue

I began listening to music, and through music, when I was very small, listening to everything I could, but always sifting through, unconsciously searching—yearning I suppose—but for what I did not know.

I think I do now.

There was so much music on the radio in the early fifties: jazz, bebop, dance band, and classical music. Popular music was what we listened to mostly as a family, a lot of it spilling over from the war.

Then, in the middle of it all, I heard "That'll Be the Day" by Buddy Holly and the Crickets,

Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, then Big Bill Broonzy, then Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed, then Howling Wolf! They all shone through, in a very deep way, and I was spellbound.

Then came Freddy King, and for me the die was cast.

This is what I had been looking for all the time, something that actually came out of the music, all the way out of the speakers, and put its arms around me.

And from that revelation and the absorption of all the other stuff I was discovering, I began to fantasize. I had a dream—not a night-time dream, but a walking, wide-awake dream.

I was going to be one of these guys, or a little bit of all of them.

Then Robert Johnson stopped me in my tracks, and I realized that music was not a fantasy. It was real, and sometimes it was born out of great pain, definitely not about popularity. It was a deadly serious affair.

I've been around a long time now, but I still "listen through" for that elusive ingredient . . .

Soul is what it is, heart and soul, and I still hear it from time to time, but it's up to me to be able to hear it. I have to keep my mind open. For me, when I reflect, the music of the fifties and early sixties contained that ingredient in a magnificent quantity. It was everywhere.

Most of the music I was listening to and discovering back then was made by Black guys, but there was also a large squad of young white men, who were holding their own—Eddie Cochran, Jerry

Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, the Everlys—a lot of them coming from country music, but some were from the urban districts too, and they were clearly listening to the Black guys as well.

So that's where we're going now, back to the fifties, and the Bronx. Not many people grew out of that era and survived. There were many, many casualties, alongside others who had found their ground, and happily retired.

And there are a few that shone bright then, made it to the top, and shine on still. This man I'm talking about is one of those, one of a kind, unparalleled in his achievement and stature. He is a genius singer, writer, musician, and healer. He is also awake and full-grown into himself. He is the perfect example of how you can do what you love to do and still be available to the lives of others.



I've been listening to him all my life. He is a friend and a colleague of all the musicians I looked up to, and followed. He also has that essential ingredient: Soul. Buckets of it. And that sense of Soul is what this book is all about.

I heard it in him then, and I hear it in him still.

Dion DiMucci.

—Eric Clapton



Dion at the Texas Fairgrounds, 1996.

1.

Introduction

A Journey into the Life of the Mind

It was a beautiful day in Boca Raton, Florida. The temperature was hovering in the low seventies, with surprisingly low humidity, and not a cloud in the sky. Dion and I strolled into the Grand Lux Café in Town Center Mall for lunch and to discuss this book you're reading right now. They seated us, and we looked over the menu.

"Yo, what looks good?" Dion asked. We both scanned the specials.

Our waiter came over with two waters and told us, "The Avocado-Chipotle Cheeseburger is my personal favorite." I looked at Dion, nodded, and winked. He ordered for us.

"Yeah, two of those, please—medium. Hold the buns, and we'd like grilled vegetables instead of French fries, please."

I smiled.

"Yes, sir. And, *Go Yankees!*" the waiter said.

Dion was wearing his black-on-black New York Yankees baseball cap, a black cotton T-shirt under a black jacket, with black jeans. He had a razor-sharp, salt-and-pepper goatee, and cool rock 'n' roll glasses.

"Adam, I want to bring people into our reality. *A Higher Reality.* How God directs all our thoughts and all our decisions."

I nodded.

"That's why I'm not squeamish. If you were to unzip my mind and look inside, you'd see it's very organized. My thoughts are not scattered. My mind is sound. I have the fullness of my faith. I live by spiritual principles, and I have great peace. I feel we are living the privileged way of life."

I nodded my head in agreement and rubbed my chin.

"D, my mission statement as a man and as a life coach is simple: I want to bring people into our conversations. I want us to produce a book that shows how we talk and how you taught me to live my life."

"Produce?" Dion said, shaking his head. "No—I'm an artist, an expressionist. That's what I do with my voice."