Howard Bloom: “Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me”

Like a raging tsunami or a free spirit with a wild heart, author, scientist, former superstar music publicist Howard Bloom is an anomaly in many different realms. Most recently Bloom has released his newest book, “Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: A Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock and Roll.”

Bloom has been called “next in a lineage of seminal thinkers that includes Newton, Darwin, Einstein, and Freud” by Britain’s Channel 4 TV. He is often referred to as “the greatest press agent that rock and roll has ever known.” He founded the biggest PR firm in the music industry representing artists including Prince, Bob Marley, Peter Gabriel, Billy Joel, Aerosmith, Queen, Run DMC, ZZ Top, Billy Joel, Billy Idol, Joan Jett, Michael Jackson and over a hundred more, while he pursued something strange. He says he was “on a hunt for the gods inside of you and me.”

We had a remarkable and insightful conversation regarding his book, unveiled on April 15, 2020. You could learn more from Howard Bloom in one brief hour than in your entire career. Speaking like a mad profit or dazzling scientist Bloom’s description of his book, his career and his philosophies evoked deep emotion. Like an array of fireworks exploding in the night sky and shattering the darkness, Bloom is a modern day visionary…..

**Your newest book, “Einstein, Michael Jackson and Me: A Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock and Roll” has just come out. What have the responses been?**

Here are some of the quotes about the book: “It is amazing. The writing is revelatory. Isn’t the out-of-body experience man’s search for enlightenment? Call me Howard, I’d like to have a seven-hour conversation with you.” Freddy DeMann. That was from the manager of Michael Jackson, Madonna, and producer of 22 award-winning Broadway plays, including a play that received a Pulitzer.

“The author is Howard Bloom for whom great writer is an understatement. Howard is an outstanding, insanely skilled writer uniquely able to make words come alive creating word pictures that remain imprinted in the mind and the heart. I only wish I could write half as well or one tenth. The book is a page turner even for people who are music non-lovers like me.” -Giulio Prisco. This was the author of “Tales of the Turning Church.”

“It’s a fantastic tale. The publicist’s eye look at rock ‘n’ roll. This might be the darndest thing about the entertainment industry ever written.” -Carl F. Gauze from the magazine Ink 19

This one is very important: “Before picking up “Einstein, Michael Jackson and Me”, I thought of Michael Jackson as a plastic surgery addict, superstar, pedophile who’s done some awfully catchy songs. By the time I reached the end I was grieving with tears in my eyes. The tragic crucifixion of a wondrous luminous soul.” -Helen Zuman author of “Mating in Captivity.”

Here’s what Bloom himself has to say about the hero’s journey that brought him to a field he knew nothing about, rock and roll. The quest behind what he calls his “Voyage of the Beagle into the Galapagos Islands of popular culture.”

Helen Zuman’s radical re-perception of Michael Jackson t is a goal I’ve needed to achieve ever since I worked with Michael in 1983 and 1984. I’ve wanted to redeem him. I’ve wanted people to accurately see who he was, because he was the closest to a saint or an angel I have ever met on this earth. I am an atheist, but he was a human beyond the bounds of anything that we normally conceive as humanity.

Here’s another reason Michael was crucially important to me. Once upon a time there was a problem. In 1954 all of the physiologists said you could never run a mile faster than four minutes. A guy name Roger Bannister was an Oxford medical student and he and another medical student got together and analyzed every single move that Bannister made and they figured out how to get rid of the energy wasting moves and take advantage of every bit of energy he had. Bannister trained himself, and then he ran a mile in less than four minutes. If you look up the four-minute mile today it will tell you that, in Wikipedia’s words, the four-minute mile is now “the standard of all male professional middle distance runners.” So, what was impossible in 1954 became ordinary today. Michael Jackson had a quality of awe, wonder, surprise and commitment to his kids and fans that went beyond anything you will ever see in your lifetime. If people come to understand it, it will set a new standard, just as Roger Bannister set a new standard and it will expand the perceptual envelope of humanity. I felt the obligation to get across what Michael was and it’s in this book.

Michael was an amazing human being. He was a gift to all of us. He spent 50 years on this earth. For the first 25 years, he was becoming Michael Jackson. For the second 25 years of his life, he was dangling on a cross in pain And that should never, ever have happened to him. He deserved far, far better than that.

**Eileen Shapiro: I have a friend named Rickey Rebel who visited him often and said the same thing you are saying. I’ve always felt a kind of sadness for him.**

One of the sentences in Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me says that If you love Michael Jackson then you understood him better than any of the critics whoever wrote about him, and you may even have understood him better than the people who he put to work around him. I always had this feeling that I was the only one who understood Michael Jackson. My rational brain said “no that can’t possibly be true.” Michael surrounded himself with some very talented people, David Geffen, Quincy Jones, and many others. I spoke last week to the Michael Jackson book club and it was on Zoom and it went all over the world. Michael Jackson fans follow Michael obsessively. They know every single character in his life. They said to me “you are the first one to really understand Michael Jackson, and we thank you for redeeming him.” That’s my fucking job on this planet. To watch out for the human species and all species as much as I possibly can as an individual. So, Michael was a mission that I had to fulfill.

**How are you spending your lock-down time?**

I’m able to advance my work right now. I’m putting together David Paterson, the former Governor of New York State, with Newt Gingrich. Can you believe that? I run a little team that organized to advance a 2 billion dollar moon program, otherwise known as the “2 Billion Dollar Moon Prize.” On August 31st, as I was having a honeymoon with the love of my life, our two billion dollar moon program hit Time Magazine, Newsweek, CBS, NBC, FOX, Politico, and more. The team involves a 3 star general and Newt Gingrich, and a former congressman named Robert Walker. All of these people are Republicans. I was wondering how we could get our message to Democrats. I am a Democrat and a liberal. I tried to rouse interest in space in Ron Kim who is in the New York State Assembly and I didn’t get as far as I would have liked. Then David Paterson called me one day when I was out on one of my two daily walks in Prospect Park, walks I use as work time, listening to books on kindle and having phone meetings. David and I had been on a radio talk show together. He had bowled me over with his knowledge and his insights. When he got me on my cellphone, he explained that he had been hearing me on Coast to Coast, the highest-rated syndicated overnight talk radio show in North America, for years. So David Paterson is a fan of mine. Do you believe this, the former Governor is calling you while you’re walking through the greenery of Prospect Park? And he’s a fan? I told David about one of the space programs I’ve worked on for over fifteen years with partners like Buzz Aldrin and the eleventh president of India, and how it could be the Green New Deal. It’s harvesting solar power in space and transmitting it to earth using the kind of harmless microwaves that your cell phone uses. With solar power harvested in space, we could totally end man-made carbon emissions, We could totally end the use of fossil fuels for energy production. And, according to my late partner in this, Dr. APJ Kalam, the eleventh president of India, we could lift 2 billion people out of poverty. David got excited about space solar power. I told him that the only way I could think of following up with it with him was to bring him into our Moon Prize team which includes Newt Gingrich. David got excited about this because like me he wants to make effective things happen. And to do it, he sees the necessity of working across the aisle. So that’s the kind of thing I’m doing in my spare time, along with promoting Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: a Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock & Roll.. Then I have to write my next 2 books.

So that’s my life. “Einstein, Michael Jackson and Me” is the story of my rock ‘n’ roll adventures and includes the stories of how I learned in the most powerful way imaginable just who Michael Jackson really was.

To show how I got into the business of hunting for the gods inside of superstars, let’s go back to the beginning. When I was 10 years old nobody in my home town—Buffalo, New York–wanted to have anything to do with me. The other kids chased me around the block, they took my hat off my head and threw it back-and-forth to humiliate me, and then in one case they actually beat me up. My parents were not excited about me. When I was born my father had just been drafted and was at the Treasure Island naval base in San Francisco. My mom had to take care of the family store. So for the first three years of my life, I had no parents and no friends. When my dad got back from the navy and my mom no longer had to take care of the store, my parents continued to be obsessed with the stuff that interested them and did not seem to get the least bit of joy out of me. Then when I was ten, a book appeared in my lap that I had never seen before. It said the first two rules of science are these: “The truth at any price including the price of your life”, and gave the example of Galileo. It said Galileo would’ve been willing to go to the state to defend his truth. It took me 30 years to discover that that wasn’t true. Galileo compromised with his old friend the Pope and said everything that he had ever written was wrong in exchange for house arrest. But I didn’t know that and the wrong story about Galileo, the heroic story, would be extremely important to me. Rule number two of science, according to the book, is “look at things right under your nose as if you’ve never seen them before and then proceed from there.” Look at the things that everybody around you takes for granted and that are invisible to you and bring them into visibility. The book gave the example of Anton van Leeuwenhoek who was considered the Father of Microbiology. He invented the microscope and discovered paramecia and all kinds of tiny microscopic animals. Van Leeuwenhoek became my second hero. These two people couldn’t do what my mother and father and all the kids in school had done…..they couldn’t reject me. They couldn’t turn their backs on me because they were dead.

**So you chose dead heroes?**

They became my pals. Those two rules of science became my absolute laws of life. My religion. When I met Michael Jackson I didn’t expect anything special. But Michael Jackson was those two laws incarnate. It was absolutely astonishing. So, in Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me, those two laws of science play a crucial role. Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: a Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock & Roll. role is the story of a quest, a safari, a scientific expedition. What am I hunting down? The most seemingly unscientific thing of all: the ecstatic experience. When I was 12 years old, I realized I was an atheist. I didn’t admit to being an atheist until after my bar mitzvah because I didn’t want to lose out on the presents. Then I spent two months writing thank you cards to all the people that had given me gifts. My bar mitzvah was in June and by the time I finished writing all those thank you cards it was August. And guess what comes after August? The Jewish high holidays. My parents were not observant, They only went to temple when there was a wedding or a bar mitzvah. But the high holidays were of profound importance to them. So, they got me into a suit, I don’t know how because I hate suits. They got me into their blue, four-door Fraser automobile. They got me all the way to Richmond Avenue in Buffalo New York which was where the synagogue was. Then I refused to leave the car. So, there I was hanging onto the door frame of the car with my two hands and my parents were literally tugging at my ankles trying to drag me out of the car. And I had a revelation. I’m an atheist, so there are no gods under the earth and there are no gods in the sky, But there are gods in this scene. Where are the Gods? They are in the intense passion of my parents as they try to drag me out of their car. And if they are in my parents, then they are in me.

Look, Galileo’s triumph came from taking a new device with lenses that had been invented to see an enemy army coming up over the horizon. His big move was to take that device designed for horizontal viewing and to aim it in a radically different direction– towards the sky. Thus turning the military spy glass into a telescope. And Anton van Leeuwenhoek’s breakthrough had come from taking a lens he used to check the weave of the fabric he sold as a draper and turning that lens in a new direction, down. Down to look at pond water and at human sperm. My obligation I realized in that struggle with my parents was to turn the lens inwards and try to find the gods inside. The ecstatic experiences that are possible to humanity. That became my job. Many years later, I would discover the lands where the gods were.

**Where?**

In Rock and Roll. In popular music. In people like John Mellencamp. Like Prince. Like Bob Marley. Like Joan Jett. Like Billy Idol. It was an amazing voyage for a guy with an analytic mind who was intent on using science to find the gods inside of us, the ecstatic experience, the soul that moves us in ways that we can’t define. Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me is all stories. The way I write, if I want to get a concept across to you, I have to find a story that embodies that concept. By the time you’re finished reading the story you will understand the idea I’m talking about.

**You mentioned Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records and how he went to England and sold reggae out of the back of his Cooper. From him you were introduced to Bob Marley?**

Chris came to me with a problem regarding his biggest client, Bob Marley. He said, “Bob has a problem. He can sell out 120,000-seat soccer stadiums anywhere in the world, anytime he wants, but in New York City, in the United States in general he can sell at most 30,000 tickets. Can you help us expand his audience?” I told him that Bob’s problem was two-fold. First of all, his original publicists had done an incredible job of selling Bob to white college kids. That was his audience in North America. But his natural audience was the African-American community. And here, there was a problem. Bob was an Island black and Island blacks and African-Americans do not get along.

**Right.**

I felt that I could cross him over to African-Americans, thus expanding his audience.

**You worked with Percy Sutton and the leading black magazines?**

I suggested that instead of Madison Square Garden Bob Marley play the Beacon Theater which holds 3000 people. We had a big enough audience to sell it out for ten nights. That is a history making event. We had the luxury of selling the Beacon Theater out for 10 nights and leaving people hungry. You always have to leave people hungry if you’re going to build an audience. You always need the word of mouth, you need people will spreading the word among their friends about how they were not able to get a Bob Marley ticket.

**Similar to Pearl Jam today.**

So that’s what we did. Everybody thought that was brilliant. Well, we were six months into our campaign with Bob Marley with the black community in the United States. I had become the leading black publicist in North America which is a little bit strange when you realize I’m a white boy from Buffalo, NY, and Jewish. I had hired a black publicist to work with me. At that time, I had a tiny little office with two desks. I put her on one desk and I was at the other and I watched everything that she did. I adopted every technique that she had. It all boiled down one trick. There were black weekly newspapers in every major city in North America and nobody paid any attention to them in the music industry. So, I paid a lot of attention. We were six months into this and doing well, and then I got a call. “Bob has terminal cancer. He’s in Switzerland right now in a chalet near an alternative doctor. Nobody’s supposed to know he’s in Switzerland. And you have to know something else. Every morning Bob leaves his bedroom on the second-story of the chalet and goes down to breakfast. Around his breakfast plate he has newspapers from all over the world. If none of those newspapers say Bob Marley is dying from cancer. he eats his breakfast, goes out into the sunshine and he and his gang play soccer. But if Bob sees a single headline that says Bob Marley is dying of cancer, Bob doesn’t eat his breakfast, shoves back his chair, leaves the table, goes up to his bedroom and sits there with the light out all day long.”

That made it very obvious what my job was. My job was this: we are all born with a terminal illness. It’s called life. No matter what life you were given, it ends in death. So we have the choice of perceiving every day of our life as living or dying. My job was to make sure that Bob perceived every day as living. So that’s what we did for the next year. Then I got a call saying “Bob doesn’t need you anymore.” I weep even when I tell you this: it meant that Bob had given up. It meant that I was losing Bob. I was never close to Bob. We were not close at all, we didn’t understand each other. Yes, I spent time with him trying to understand him, but we literally didn’t speak the same language. He spoke Jamaican patois which I couldn’t understand. But look how close I became to him. Why? We didn’t talk. I simply tried to make sure he had every hour of living he could possibly get, and that those hours were as rich as they possibly could be. Yet we were so close that I can’t talk about it without crying. Years later Virgin Records signed Ziggy Marley. Virgin never worked with me, for reasons I’ve never figured out. But Rita Marley told Virgin they would have to hire the Marley family’s publicist. And who was that publicist? Me. Even though Rita and I had never even met. Yes, Rita regarded me as the family publicist. Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: a Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock and Roll is filled with stories of this kind.

My job was to look for the gods inside of my clients. What does that mean? When you are a rock star and you sit down at two o’clock in the afternoon in front of a blank computer screen, and you’re supposed to write a lyric…..you know you can’t possibly write a lyric. You have no idea of how you have ever written any lyrics in your life. And on a good day, by 4 o’clock in the afternoon there is a lyric in front of you. Once or twice in your life that lyric is so perfect it feels like it wrote itself through you. My job was to find the soul inside of you, the god inside of you. The selves below the floorboards of the self that wrote those lyrics for you. When you go on stage and it’s a really good night and you see the faces of the audience melting, you see their pupils dilating, you see their eyes widening, focusing on you with all of their attention, you feel the energy of the audience coalescing into one big amoebic blob. That blob of energy reaches a pseudopod out to you, a tunnel, and channels its energy into you as if you were an empty pipe. That energy goes through you and reaches somewhere around your head, where it’s utterly transmogrified and then rushes through you back out to the audience, where it makes faces melt and eyes widen even farther. It’s a continuous feedback loop. And you have an out of body experience. Your normal identity is somewhere on the ceiling watching all of this happening. Watching you as you are danced like a marionette by a force that that is much, much bigger than you are. And when you leave the stage, it takes you an hour to come back to your normal self. My job is to find the gods inside of you that danced you on that stage. Look, music is not about exchanges pieces of plastic, it’s not about an exchange of downloads, it is not about an exchange of money. It is an exchange of human soul. My job is to find the gods inside of you so that you can offer your audience that exchange of soul.