

Book Notes

GENERAL NONFICTION

***Love Is a Mix Tape: Life and Loss, One Song at a Time*, by Rob Sheffield. Crown, January 2007. \$22.95**

Before he became a successful music journalist, a contributing editor at *Rolling Stone*, and a talking head on MTV and VH1, Rob Sheffield was a “shy, skinny, Irish Catholic geek from Boston” attending graduate school in Charlottesville, Virginia. There he met and married Renée Crist, a “cool hell-raising Appalachian punk-rock girl” working on an MFA in fiction. They had nothing in common except their love of music. But there was a lot of music. It was the nineties: “The boundaries of American culture were exploding, and music was leading the way.” He and Renée freelanced as rock critics; they deejayed at the college radio station; they went to hear every band that came to town; they made hundreds of mix tapes. After Renée died suddenly at thirty-one of a pulmonary embolism, it was music that helped him hold on to her, mourn her, and finally start living without her. In this memoir of a short but happy marriage, Sheffield writes with energy and humor about his lifelong relationship with music, about the art of the mix tape, about grief and loss, and about the “bizarre ways that music brings people together.” In the end, Sheffield’s nostalgia for nineties pop culture is not merely personal. He argues for that decade as a feminist high point the country has fallen away from, a time when women were “making noise in public ways that seem distant now.”

—*Ellen Barber*

Virginia Quarterly Review, vol. 83, no. 2 (Spring 2007)