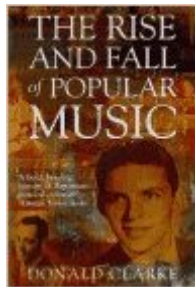




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The Rise And Fall Of Popular Music: A Narrative History From The Renaissance To Rock 'n' Roll



Synopsis

Popular music--a melding of folk and commercial music with its roots in Renaissance Europe--has reached both zenith and nadir in this century. So argues music critic and historian Donald Clarke in his broad and vibrant history. Navigating the many streams that flow into the river of pop, his chronicle matches authoritative perspective with controversial and convincing commentary.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A long but detailed read, chock full of information. It demands the readers attention, and if one is truly interested in the subject, gets it. While much pop music is casual, transient and doesn't keep your attention for long, this is a serious book, not in that same vein at all.

I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of American music, especially jazz and blues. It's fascinating, well written and researched and a good read.

Having been a big band leader and professional musician until recently, I must applaud this book, because a lot of rock writers seem to want to revise history and try to tell us that there was nothing worthwhile before the Beatles, or even before Elvis. Oh, come on! Mr. Clarke rightly points out the things leading to the "fall" and it didn't start with Mitch Miller. The post war disinterest on the part of the general public in Bop, probably set the stage for an increase in Novelty tunes, and don't forget the explosion in Broadway Cast albums on LP. shortly thereafter. But the music on singles became

increasingly banal around the mid-50's while adults seemed to go more for LP packages and singles continued a downward slide. (musically) as a vehicle for teen-age hits. By the 60's with guitar groups and such things got worse and as jazz writer Stanley Dance put it in the mid 60's "The amateur musician with his unkempt voice and clumsy rhythm has found a remarkably remunerative position in a do-it-yourself culture" How right that was, and, as someone put it, where did that lead to? Just tune in a top 40 radio station and hear for yourself !

If you want to read a book of music history regarding American popular music, do NOT buy this book! It is one of the worst "popular music" history books I've ever read. He loves jazz music and takes up for it roundly, but jazz is NOT popular music. Jazz is JAZZ! Popular music has the following items: R & B, Soul, Pop, Rockabilly, Rock and Roll, Hard Rock, New Wave, etc. Clarke shows a complete snobbish "let them eat cake" attitude toward any kind of music outside of jazz music. Don't get me wrong, I love jazz, too. But, I love many other forms of music, and British writer Clarke should not have written anything outside of classic jazz. He hates, Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, The Kinks, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, et. al. PLEASE save your money if you're looking for a book about music history! This is by far the worst excuse for it ever written (even worse than Nick Tosches).

This is not a bad overview of American popular music. Mr. Clarke is clearly a jazz fan who regards the days of Lester Young, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, et al. as the high point from which we have declined, and sees the present state of commercial popular music as a "culture of musical impoverishment." The career of A&R man Mitch Miller, the evil genius whose venality and lack of taste was a landmark in adult pop's precipitous decline in the 1950s, is touchingly portrayed. I think Clarke's conclusions are correct; however, this is a matter of taste to some degree. Many will think differently, no doubt. Read it anyway, along with Will Friedwald's history of Jazz Singing.

I particularly liked the start of this book that gave the origins of popular music from Europe. The author dwells a bit too much on the details of Jazz but his premise is well taken and he shows how and why pop music has become grunge, rap and muzak. He recognizes the originality in performers like the early Elvis and Hank Williams even though he regrets the decline of the real learned Jazz musicians. He shows how the corporate entities and listener surveys have destroyed a promising genre if it can be called that. Interesting that the Internet seems to be allowing real musicians to connect with the public directly without needing the middle corporate ground.

The premise of this book was largely in editorial fashion. I accept this as his prerogative however his views were often weakly supported and as a result unfounded. For example he launches into a discussion about the racial struggles in the music industry. At the end of this section on rap music the reader only comes away with the taste of prejudice in her mouth (and I don't even advocate gangster rap music). The two stars I gave in the rating above were for the presentation of a comprehensive history which I respect. This book is required for a class of mine at the University of Toronto but the material is much too slanted for use as an introduction to the history of popular music. Therefore if you already have a good knowledge in this area and are interested in new perspectives then this would be the book for you. Otherwise, I would recommend you read something else first.

This is a fascinating book going back to the origins of popular music forms, going through jazz and blues and getting to today's pop music. A main theme of the book appears to be that the further the music gets away from its roots, the less musical value it has. And then today too much music has just become product to sell with little musical value. Sometimes a bit too opinionated, but mainly an excellent analysis of the fall of pop music.

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