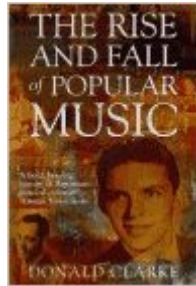


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The Rise And Fall Of Popular Music: A Narrative History From The Renaissance To Rock 'n' Roll



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

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.

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.

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).

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.

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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