

Maximum Volume: The Life of Beatles Producer George Martin (The Early Years, 1926-2016)

Kenneth Womack

Chicago Review Press (Sep 1, 2017)

Hardcover \$30.00 (368pp)

978-1-61373-189-5

Maximum Volume has enormous appeal for Beatles fans, record collectors, social historians, music wonks, and indeed, anyone with ears.

Kenneth Womack's *Maximum Volume* is a lively and engaging biography of Beatles producer George Martin.

This is the first installment of a planned two-volume opus on Martin's life and work. It draws extensively from Martin's autobiographies but also taps into a wealth of other references and interviews, drawing from Womack's encyclopedic knowledge of popular music and the recording industry.

Martin, a classically trained musician with perfect pitch, got his big break as an "A&R man," leading artists through the technical process of making records with Britain's small Parlophone record label in the 1950s. He had some minor successes with jazz, pop, and comedy records but dreamed of finding a "beat music group" that he could groom into churning out hit records.

Womack evocatively describes the pivotal 1962 meeting between weedy-looking Liverpool lads with beat-up instruments and the patrician-looking Martin (he was actually from blue-collar North London), which hinged on a cheeky retort from one of the band members. Even though the world knows what happened next, this narrative succeeds at creating drama around the meeting. In successive recording sessions, Martin and his newfound hitmakers learned to trust each other's talents and took popular music inventiveness, artistry, and success to psychedelic new heights.

Womack's atmospheric descriptions of British popular culture and behind-the-scenes sound engineering peculiarities are key to understanding how the Beatles developed into such a phenomenal and enduring band. The work champions Martin's musicianship and "innate sense of studio artistry" as being a vital part of the early Beatles sound. It shows how the group wrestled with the limitations of existing sound equipment technology and the pressures of extremely limited recording sessions, particularly as they were shoehorned into a frenetic calendar of touring and promotional events—the norm for pop bands understood to have a short shelf life.

It's delightful to read about the inventive music scene of the 1960s as each of the mentioned Beatles tunes plays around in one's head. This book contains enough fresh information and informed insight about the group's early years to satisfy the most devout Beatlemaniac—like learning about the unholy mix of throat lozenges, cigarettes, and milk that sustained John Lennon through the arduous vocal takes of "Twist and Shout."

Womack digs out other absorbing nuggets, too—about Martin's rivalry with other record producers, the mob frenzy of audiences, Martin's work with other entertainers including Ella Fitzgerald and Shirley Bassey, and his schemes to finally crack open the huge American record market.

Maximum Volume has enormous appeal for Beatles fans, record collectors, social historians, music wonks, and indeed, anyone with ears, because of its huge familiarity with the Beatles songbook. While there's the extra layer of

nostalgia for those who remember the sixties, the book successfully evokes the shimmering creativity and energy of the era and the record producer who had quite a hand in its magical musical soundtrack.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (October 17, 2017)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.