

That's Music: The First Century of Great Recorded Music

Hal Bird

That's Music

(362pp)

978-1-73357-820-2

A fun celebration of music's reach and importance, That's Music is a handy reference guide to twentieth-century American artists and tunes.

Hal Bird's reference book *That's Music* chronicles the rise of popular music in the United States.

Though noting that even ancient humans loved music, this book reflects the fact that people only developed the capacity to record music for posterity about a century ago. Since then, new personalities, trends, and technologies continued to change the face of popular music, and at a faster and faster rate. Thus, this first entry in a planned trilogy chronicles the development of different musical genres, showing how they contributed to the larger fabric of American musical culture.

Because the book covers a wide array of topics in a limited space, it provides only surface-level introductions to each subject. It is organized roughly by genre, with foci including jazz, country, rock and roll, and gospel; connections between genres that developed from or influenced each other are also noted, such as that rock and roll was made possible through the innovations of Black Southern blues musicians. Each section of the book analyzes the musical styles and contributions of artists from the start of the twentieth century to its end, including Johnny Mercer, Carlos Santana, Billie Holiday, and Dolly Parton. A plethora of photographs show these artists at the heights of their careers.

The book expresses appreciation for the fact that creating music that audiences love is a gargantuan task whose rewards are huge: here, music is exalted for its power to transcend barriers and create common grounds for fans of different backgrounds. Bird argues that this is what allows popular music to endure. His book is a fun celebration of music's reach and importance.

But the chapters are arranged in no particular order, and both the prose and the organization of the content are choppy. A chapter on ballad rock switches its focus partway through, for example, introducing a lengthy discussion of pre-rock composers. And the content within individual paragraphs also skips between topics to distracting effect. Still, with its light tone and expansive range of topics, this coffee table book is appealing for its reminiscences on old favorites—and its musical trivia. Each section includes numerous song recommendations, and films about some of the icons profiled are also discussed. And in addition to spotlighting American artists, the book mentions British groups that had a notable influence on American music, too, or who were influenced by American sounds.

Written with clear love for American music, *That's Music* is a broad historical overview of the people, places, and innovations that defined music in the twentieth century.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May 31, 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher 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 publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.