

KEY MUSIC BOOKS YOU MUST READ

This selection of books is divided into two categories – essential reading for anyone wanting to commit to a career in the music industry; and entertaining reads which are informative and enjoyable but are essentially geared at all music enthusiasts.

ESSENTIAL READING FOR MUSIC STUDENTS

“How music works” by David Byrne

Chapter 7 of this book is entitled “Business and Finances (distribution and survival options for music artists)” and it is absolutely essential reading for any songwriter or musician.

David Byrne of legendary rock group Talking Heads explains the detailed financial ins and outs of one of his album releases. He outlines the various costs involved and who gets the various percentages. He uses colour-coded diagrams to convey how the money pie is shared. At the same time, he describes the complex financial mechanisms of the modern music business.

This is unmissable information. Few working musicians take the time to explain the money trail to newcomers who usually believe there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. What Byrne explains is how a musician who is willing to keep a lid on costs can make a modest living recording albums and touring.

The rest of the book has a lot of interesting material, some of it a bit academic, some of it needing effort to persevere. But Byrne's enthusiasm for music usually carries you along. I liked the following bits in particular: Music as social glue, as a self-empowering social agent (pages 291-293); the value of music education (pages 295-296); eight rules about how to create a music scene (pages 251-263); how recording technology is now incredibly accessible and cheap so there is no need for albums to be costly to record (pages 180-181); and the mp3 – poorer sound quality but maybe it is better to value convenience over sound (pages 124-126). [Summary by Seán Silke]

“Appetite for self-destruction” by Steve Knopper

What appears as a tale of the modern day record era actually dates back even further. Music writer Steve Knopper begins his treatise not in the post-digital era as one might imagine from the title, but from the post-Disco era, when the business was awash with money, excesses and a party atmosphere that pre-dates the decades long saviours of MTV and the CD era boom.

While much of what Knopper writes about has been covered extensively in other volumes (most notably Stan Cornyn's “Exploded: the History of Warner Music” and Fred Goldman's book “Mansion on the Hill” and his most recent “Fortune's Fool”) it is the arc of the book's coverage that pieces together the argument of just how the record companies lost their way.

Instead of citing individual incidents, Knopper shows how a decade's long confluence of events suddenly conspired to destroy the protective wall the labels enjoyed while pushing their product into the marketplace in a methodical and protected system. But from the time computer companies quietly got an exemption from copying restrictions in their devices (CD burners) - followed several years later by the advent of digital file sharing (Napster, Kazaa, etc.), it was too late for the record companies to put the genie back in the bottle. While labels were focused on creating and selling hits through a locked down retail structure, college kids were already fleecing the companies through illegal downloads, a development the labels never saw coming.

Knopper follows the myriad of episodes by which the business was transformed, with both historical reporting as well as interviews with many of the key players. He puts together a sufficiently detailed timeline of how the business lost its audience and sales clout through this not-so-random chain of events. Along the way, he profiles both the systems and the players who were in the middle of the maelstrom yet knew not where to turn to right their ship until an outsider, Apple's Steve Jobs, came along to move the business into his field of play.

Knopper, like everyone else in the business, fails to come up with a solution to the problem (other than the popular hindsight observation that the labels should have made a deal with the original Napster) and even concludes, as one interviewed exec states, that the answer may indeed be that "there is no answer." Valuable reading for a full understanding about what transpired over the last two decades, but not spelling out a path to the future. (Written by Blog on Books)

"How music got free" by Stephen Witt

What happens when an entire generation commits the same crime? *How Music Got Free* is a riveting story of obsession, music, crime, and money, featuring visionaries and criminals, moguls and tech-savvy teenagers. It's about the greatest pirate in history, the most powerful executive in the music business, a revolutionary invention and an illegal website four times the size of the iTunes Music Store.

Journalist Stephen Witt traces the secret history of digital music piracy, from the German audio engineers who invented the mp3, to a North Carolina compact-disc manufacturing plant where factory worker Dell Glover leaked nearly two thousand albums over the course of a decade, to the high-rises of midtown Manhattan where music executive Doug Morris cornered the global market on rap, and, finally, into the darkest recesses of the Internet.

In the page-turning tradition of writers like Michael Lewis and Lawrence Wright, Witt's deeply-reported first book introduces the unforgettable characters—inventors, executives, factory workers, and smugglers—who revolutionized an entire artform, and reveals for the first time the secret underworld of media pirates that transformed our digital lives. *How Music Got Free* isn't just a story of the music industry—it's a must-read history of the Internet itself. [Summary from www.goodreads.com]

“The song machine: inside the hit factory” by John Seabrook

From Ace of Base through Backstreet Boys to Rihanna and Katy Perry, The Song Machine chronicles the story of how a bunch of Swedish DJs and musicians conquered the American and world charts for 20 years. It's an utterly compelling and fascinating read that opens the door and shines a spotlight upon how hits are written and the anonymous people who write them.

The music industry is a strange beast. Not only is it fickle and flighty, but it has changed dramatically from even twenty years ago. Gone are the A&R men finding that individual with the perfect voice that they can sign and promote with the hope of getting the hits. Now we have a machine that can almost produce hits to order, almost being the key word... There are producers out there who have the ability to write songs that have what they describe as 'hooks', those little parts of a track that are so catchy, so addictive, that they stick in your head. These men, and it still is almost exclusively men, are still rare, but that ability to turn a song from one that would have only sold thousands to one that sells millions makes them worth a fortune.

Seabrook has written an interesting book, smearing away some of the gloss and glamour from the music industry, to reveal details of its inner workings. He describes just how these talented individuals pull together a song, finding those hooks that make people want to listen more and the bridge moment when they divert from the original melody and rhythm and slot something else in. I have known that they manufactured music in the same way that they create groups, for ages, but I didn't realise quite how strong the Swedish influence was in the global music industry. There are some interesting chapters on how Napster wreaked havoc with the business model of the music industry, how streaming has changed how they operate, how they use topliners and that the only way that a star can now make any money is to be continually touring.

“All you need to know about the music business” by Donald S. Passman

“The industry bible” (Los Angeles Times) is essential reading for anyone in the music business - musicians, songwriters, lawyers, agents, promoters, publishers, executives, and managers - trying to navigate the rapid transformation of the industry. For more than twenty years, All You Need to Know About the Music Business has been regarded as the definitive guide to the music industry. Now in its ninth edition, the book leads novices and experts alike through up-to-the-minute information on the industry's major changes in response to rapid technological advances and an uncertain economy.

Donald Passman offers timely, authoritative information on how to select and hire a winning team of advisors and structure their commissions and fees; navigate the ins and outs of record deals, songwriting, publishing, and copyrights; maximise concert, touring, and merchandising deals; understand digital streaming services; and how to understand the rapidly transforming landscape of the music business as a whole. As Adam Levine, lead singer and guitarist of Maroon 5, says, “If you want to be in music, you have to read this book.”

GOOD READS FOR MUSIC ENTHUSIASTS

All reviews are from www.goodreads.com unless otherwise stated.

“Bedsit disco queen: How I grew up and tried to be a pop star” by Tracy Thorn

A frank and funny pop culture memoir in the vein of Caitlin Moran's *How to be a Woman*, this is the story of Tracey Thorn, one half of the internationally successful group Everything But the Girl, collaborator with such artists as Paul Weller, Massive Attack, and dance legend Todd Terry. Tracey was only 16 when she bought an electric guitar and joined a band. A year later, she formed an all-girl band called the Marine Girls, played gigs, signed to an indie label, and started releasing records.

Then, for 18 years, between 1982 and 2000, she was one half of Everything But the Girl. They released nine albums and sold nine million records, went on countless tours, had hits and flops, and were reviewed and interviewed to within an inch of their lives. Tracey has been in the charts, out of them, back in.

She's seen herself described as an indie darling, a middle-of-the-road nobody, and a disco diva. As she explains here, she hasn't always fit in, a fact that's helped her to face up to the realities of a pop career. She discusses her realisations—that there are thrills and wonders to be experienced, but also moments of doubt, mistakes, and violent lifestyle changes from luxury to squalor and back again, sometimes within minutes. This is the funny, perceptive, and candid story of her 30-year pop career.

“Creation Stories: Riots, Raves and Running A Label” by Alan McGee

Alan McGee's role in shaping British culture over the past thirty years is hard to overstate. As the founder of Creation Records he brought us the music that defined an era. A charismatic Glaswegian who partied just as hard as any of the bands on his notoriously dissolute label, he became a star himself. In *Creation Stories* he tells his story in depth for the first time, from leaving school at sixteen to setting up the Living Room club in London, which showcased many emerging indie bands, from managing the Jesus and Mary Chain to co-founding Creation when he was only twenty-three.

He then discovered dance and acid house, decamping to Manchester and hanging out at the Hacienda, and took Creation into the big time with Primal Scream's *Screamadelica*. His drug-induced breakdown, when it came was dramatic. But as he climbed back to sobriety, he signed Oasis, becoming one of the figureheads of Britpop. He sold the label to Sony to stave off bankruptcy and eventually left in 1999 but has continued to be an influential figure in the music industry.

“Factory: the story of the record label” by Mick Middles

Factory Records' fame and fortune were based on two bands - Joy Division and New Order - and one personality - that of its director, Tony Wilson. At the height of the label's success in the late 1980s, it ran its own club, the legendary Hacienda, had a string of international hit records, and was admired and emulated around the world.

But by the 1990s the story had changed. The back catalogue was sold off, top bands New Order and Happy Mondays were in disarray, and the Hacienda was shut down by the police.

Critically acclaimed on its original publication in 1996, this book tells the complete story of Factory Records' spectacular history, from the label's birth in 1970s Manchester, through its '80s heyday and '90s demise. Now updated to include new material on the re-emergence of Joy Division, the death of Tony Wilson and the legacy of Factory Records, it draws on exclusive interviews with the major players to give a fascinating insight into the unique personalities and chaotic reality behind one of the UK's most influential and successful independent record labels.

“Chronicles: Volume One” by Bob Dylan

"I'd come from a long ways off and had started a long ways down. But now destiny was about to manifest itself. I felt like it was looking right at me and nobody else." So writes Bob Dylan in *Chronicles: Volume One*, his remarkable book exploring critical junctures in his life and career.

Through Dylan's eyes and open mind, we see Greenwich Village, circa 1961, when he first arrives in Manhattan. Dylan's New York is a magical city of possibilities -- smoky, nightlong parties; literary awakenings; transient loves and unbreakable friendships. Elegiac observations are punctuated by jabs of memories, penetrating and tough. With the book's side trips to New Orleans, Woodstock, Minnesota and points west, *Chronicles: Volume One* is an intimate and intensely personal recollection of extraordinary times.

By turns revealing, poetical, passionate and witty, *Chronicles: Volume One* is a mesmerizing window on Bob Dylan's thoughts and influences. Dylan's voice is distinctively American: generous of spirit, engaged, fanciful and rhythmic. Utilizing his unparalleled gifts of storytelling and the exquisite expressiveness that are the hallmarks of his music, Bob Dylan turns *Chronicles: Volume One* into a poignant reflection on life, and the people and places that helped shape the man and the art.

“Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom” by Nik Cohn

Written in 1968 and revised in 1972, *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom* was the first book to celebrate the language and the primal essence of rock 'n' roll. But it was much more than that. It was a cogent history of an unruly era, from the rise of Bill Haley to the death of Jimi Hendrix. And while telling outrageous tales, vividly describing the music, and cutting through the hype, Nik Cohn would engender a new literary form: rock criticism. In his book's wake, rock criticism has turned into a veritable industry, and the world of music has never been the same. Now this seminal history of rock 'n' roll's evolution is available once more -- as riotous a spree as any in rock writing.

(from a review in *The Guardian*) Cohn wrote in fast, short sentences; the book read like a series of 7in singles, with no room for deviation, no long solos, no flab at all.

Among the the reasons Cohn's book has remained such a thrilling, inspirational read are its total confidence and absolute sense of finality. By 1969, Cohn considered John Lennon "self-pitying", thought the Who were "going through the same old stunts", and dismissed Pink Floyd as "very solemn, most artistic, boring almost beyond belief". The book prefers the underworld grit, diamond-studded teeth and overflowing dresses in Cohn's imagination to the glamour, the ostentation, the ruthlessness and grubbiness of the pop business.

This fantastical approach to the real story of pop, cut down people Cohn thought were likely to diminish the music's sense of fun and fast-moving disposability (Bob Dylan, the Doors, even the Beach Boys), and to praise outsiders, troublemakers, short-lived stars whose one major hit (Del Shannon's "Runaway", for instance) he considered to be worth as much as Van Morrison's entire career.

Trouser-tearing PJ Proby's profile was elevated monstrously – with all of three top 10 hits to his name, Proby was given a whole chapter in *Awopbopaloo* on the strength of his outsized ego and chaotic potential. Pop music needs writers like Nik Cohn to kick up trouble, to give albums anything other than four-star reviews, and that way maybe the musicians will also rise to the challenge.

"Feel like going home" by Peter Guralnick

This vivid celebration of blues and early rock 'n' roll includes some of the first and most illuminating profiles of such blues masters as Muddy Waters, Skip James, and Howlin' Wolf; excursions into the blues-based Memphis rock 'n' roll of Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, and the Sun record label; and a brilliant depiction of the bustling Chicago blues scene and the legendary Chess record label in its final days. With unique insight and unparalleled access, Peter Guralnick brings to life the people, the songs, and the performance that forever changed not only the American music scene but America itself.

"Irish folk, trad and blues – a secret history" by Colin Harper/Trevor Hodgett

This fascinating history charts the struggles and triumphs of Irish folk, trad, and blues musicians before the Irish music industry, and acts like U2, existed. Forgotten heroes and latter-day legends intertwine with honorary visitors who took a bit of Ireland with them, like Bob Dylan and Arlo Guthrie. The main focus of the book, however, is on the influence of homegrown pioneers, from Sweeney's Men in the 1960s to Horslips, De Danann, Anne Briggs, Rory Gallagher, and current groundbreakers like Martin Hayes. Anyone who owns even one Irish record will appreciate this book; anyone who owns a lot of Irish records will no doubt treasure it.

"Mystery train" by Greil Marcus

When it was first published, critic after critic called this brilliant study of rock 'n' roll and American culture the best book on the subject. He discusses enthusiastically the music of Harmonica Frank and Robert Johnson (the Ancestors), and The Band, Sly Stone, Randy Newman and Elvis (The Inheritors). This is half the book. The other half is Notes and Discographies (updated in 2015).

Marcus combines (or better to say assimilates) varying traditions and social forces within American history and popular culture, beginning with an artist, a moment, a tone, a mood, an instance and expands it outward into larger and more elegant circles of reference and obscure historical connections until we get a sort of x-ray of the American consciousness.

“Send ‘em home sweatin’” by Vincent Power

The story of Irish music and its influence at home and overseas. Nuala O'Connor provides a superb account of the history of Irish music, from its origins in rural Irish communities to reinvention in America. The author explores the Irish showbands, the ballrooms of romance, the Royal, the Miami, the Melody Aces, the Clipper Carlton and the Cadets. The book opens a window on a remarkable period in Irish life and also provides a social history of the period when the showbands were in their heyday.

“The rough guide to Bob Dylan” by Nigel Williamson

In his seventh decade and still going strong, Bob Dylan is the ultimate singer-songwriter - hugely revered, bafflingly idiosyncratic, an enigma and a music legend responsible for a staggering number of classic songs. Now in its second edition, the Rough Guide clarifies the mysteries surrounding the man and the music, looking at the lyrics, the influences, the legends and the musicians he worked with. Features include: The Life - from Minnesota to Manchester, from the Albert Hall to the Never Ending Tour, The Music - 50 essential Dylan songs and the stories behind them and Dylanology - the movies, the sayings, books and websites.

“Making tracks” by Charlie Gillett

In a business full of books that don't really get under the surface and simply tell the story from a "fan's" point of view, Charlie got under the skin and told the story, about as well as an "outsider" could. One of the definitive books about the history of Atlantic Records, told by a youngster who was given nearly unfettered access.....

“Out of his head” by Richard Williams

"One of the best books to come out of the Rock Scene," was Publishers' Weekly's assessment of Williams' brilliant portrait of Phil Spector, originally published in 1972, and now updated to include Spector's work over the following three decades and the bizarre circumstances surrounding the shooting of Lana Clarkson at Spector's L.A. mansion on February 3, 2003.

“Nowhere to run” by Gerri Hirshey

Nowhere to Run is a unique oral history. Here are the recollections of many of the giants of soul—Smokey Robinson, Diana Ross, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, James Brown, Mary Wilson, Marvin Gaye, Screaming Jay Hawkins, and Wilson Pickett. These and other interviews, many of them exclusive, add up to a brilliant anecdotal portrait of the music and the life.

“World Music: 100 essential CDs – the rough guide” by Simon Broughton

Solid and enthusiastic overview of the world music scene, designed to point the uninitiated in the right direction.

“Singer-Songwriters” by Dave Dimartino

Some of the most distinctive and successful artists in popular music are those who use pop songwriting to communicate their unique artistic vision. Part of the Billboard Hitmakers series, this book focuses on singer-songwriters who have been active across the spectrum of pop music styles, from the polished folk-pop of James Taylor, the progressive L.A. sounds of Joni Mitchell, and the sophisticated multicultural blends of Paul Simon, to the New York-tinged ironies of Lou Reed, the rock and roll classics of Carole King, and the gutbucket rock of John Hiatt. More than 200 artists are profiled here. Using chart-topping song hits as a point of departure, each profile highlights the artist's accomplishments, traces his career path, and measures his impact. An additional section explores the "Unsung Heroes" who were influential despite a lack of chart hits. Dozens of photos add to the appeal of this authoritative look at some of the world's favourite musicians. (Amazon summary)

“Country music: the rough guide” by Kurt Wolff

Covering every phase of the music, from western swing and bluegrass to the "alternative country" sound of the 1990s, this ultimate handbook is both a record buyer's guide and an encyclopedia, weaving the careers of individual artists into the bigger story of the genre's development as a whole. Covering every phase of the music, from western swing and bluegrass to the "alternative country" sound of the 1990s, this ultimate handbook is both a record buyer's guide and an encyclopedia, weaving the careers of individual artists into the bigger story of the genre's development as a whole. (Google summary)

“Sinatra: Night and Day – the man and the music” by Fred Dellar and Mal Peachey

Respected music journalists Fred Dellar and Mal Peachey offer an account of Frank Sinatra's life and music, taking the reader through his recordings, and looking at the emotions that fired them. A coffee-table book with a handsome layout filled with great photographs, and a fine year-by-year chronological narrative, the book is undermined by the self-conscious writing style.

“Written in my soul” by Bill Flanagan

First published in 1986, this is a snapshot of some of rock & roll's most iconic artists. Bill Flanagan, who went on to create VH1 Storytellers, spoke about songwriting and creativity with Bob Dylan, Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, Joni Mitchell, Mick Jagger, Paul Simon, Van Morrison, Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Bono and nineteen more music legends. This is a look at rock & roll history from inside the heads of the people who made it. (Amazon summary)

“Guinness Book of British Hit Singles & Albums Volume 18”

British Hit Singles & Albums was a music reference book originally published in the United Kingdom by the publishing arm of the Guinness breweries, Guinness Superlatives. It listed all the singles and albums featured in the Top 75 pop charts in the UK. The series ended publication in 2008. The first ten editions were compiled by Paul Gambaccini, Mike Read and brothers Tim Rice and Jonathan "Jo" Rice. Read left the team in the mid-1980s and the other editors resigned in 1996. The last edition (Volume 18) is a superb reference book. (info from Wikipedia)

“Motown” by David Morse

Written in 1970, when Motown was barely a decade old, this book is simply about the music. Morse is a fan but is not afraid to be critical. He spends some time talking about the rise of rock and roll music and discusses such non-Motown artists as Ray Charles and their influence on Motown and popular music in general. He also has some interesting thoughts on the influence of Gospel music on Motown. His writing style can be a little heavy at times, but it is always intelligent. He makes interesting comparisons between Motown and Stax. He also gives some good insights into the Beatles and how their rise to fame actually helped Motown. (Amazon review)

“The Encyclopaedia of Pop, Rock & Soul” by Irwin Stambler

The first edition of this huge, informative book established itself in the '70s as the definitive guide to the popular music field. Now it is bigger and better than ever with more than 600 entries. Concise entries which nonetheless capture the mood, style and legacy of the artist. (Amazon summary)

“The Sound of Philadelphia” by Tony Cummings

A rare book written in 1975 by Tony Cummings, former Black Music magazine features writer. A fascinating insight into the musical history of Philadelphia starting with a detailed look at the roots of The Philly Sound, this authentic account comes direct from interviews with the producers, singers and writers involved.

“Soul: 100 essential CDs – the rough guide” by Peter Shapiro

Each title in The Rough Guide 100 Essential CD series is a blueprint for a great record collection. Containing detailed reviews of 100 recordings from acknowledged classics to those that deserve to be, and brief bios of the artists responsible, these little books are condensed histories of the musical genres they explore. (Google summary)