

HOW MUSIC WORKS BY DAVID BYRNE

Chapter 7 of this book entitled “Business and Finances (distribution and survival options for music artists)” 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)

The mp3 – poorer sound quality but maybe it is better to value convenience over sound (pages 124-126)

“How Music Works” is published by Canongate (2012) and costs around €22 in bookshops. Make sure not to pay the list price which can be as high as €33. Better value is the online Kindle edition which costs UK£5 on Amazon.