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The evil step child of Stranded (Knopf's original book of rock criticism), Kill Your Idols is a collection of 35 essays about allegedly great rock albums that this new generation of critics loathe.

Kill Your Idols: A New Generation of Rock Writers Reconsiders the Classics Details

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From Reader Review Kill Your Idols: A New Generation of Rock Writers Reconsiders the Classics for online ebook

Stanton says

A good read even when I disagreed with the authors at times. Rock music criticism has been in the grips of boomers for too long and it was refreshing to witness the slaughtering of so many sacred cows.

RandomAnthony says

Kind of uneven but still interesting. I loved the chapter criticizing The Doors. You'll either enjoy the slamming of the musical icons and/or wonder why he chose to slam your favorite on the list. Some of the writing is a bit smug, but I'd expect that from rock journalists, to be fair. They're not exactly an evolved species.

Chris says

Good gimmick - younger critics throw stones at classic rock's holy grail albums. Most of the reviews reach a little too hard and leave the reader unconvinced as to the album's overrated-ness, although a few of them are well-thought-out and solidly presented. One or two dispense with the traditional criticism altogether and just use the album as a springboard for a rant against the band - most effectively in the piece which outlines the writer's fantasy about sniping each member of Fleetwood Mac during a performance.

The nice thing about this book is that if you find one review boring, you can just move on to the next one. Worth a look if you need something to read in small chunks of time.

Stephen says

I guess by "reconsider" they mean "make unsupported and snarky comments". Many of the reviews in this book seem to have been clearly written with the editorial agenda in mind first and a real look at the musical and cultural impact of the album in question a distant second. There are some fair points made but they are overwhelmed by the obvious intent of the review and ongoing artist and industry bashing. So you don't like Rolling Stone, I get it! Using a good review by Rolling Stone as a reason that an album must have been bad is specious at best. And I don't like Rolling Stone either! Perhaps the most amusing aspect of the book is that the contributors list their top ten favorite albums and almost invariably there are albums on those list that had just been ripped to shreds in the body of the book. Exile on Main Street and Blood on the Tracks, two of the albums ripped the hardest actually appear on a third of the lists!

Matt Schario says

Collection of essays by rock writers commissioned to tear down albums that belong in the Holy Canon of great rock music. Artists receiving the smack-down range from Led Zeppelin and the Beatles to Wilco and Public Enemy. If you love rock music, and like to argue about it, then this is the book for you.

Mark says

For rock fans, especially anyone overdosed on “classic rock radio” or just sick of hearing about the monument/milestone/megacanonical status of “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” or “The Dark Side of the Moon.” Not that there’s anything wrong with them...just that it’s hard to disagree with the crotchety, disgruntled critics in “Kill Your Idols” that Rolling Stone Mag and VH1 and all the other “Top 100 Albums of All Time” nazis should just shut the f*#%k up about how transcendent these LPs are. I mean, does anyone understand the lyrics of “Tommy” or really want to take the Eagles’ “Desperado” with them to a desert island? Does anyone really think there was anything original or profound about "Never Mind the Bollocks...Here's the Sex Pistols"? Are you with me, temperamentally, so far? OK, you might enjoy this collection of short rants against 34 of the supposedly greatest rock albums in history. It’s uneven—when the criticism is most effective, it mocks the mainstream critics and the artists for taking themselves way too seriously; when it is least convincing, it obsesses about stuff like incomprehensible or pompous lyrics (do we really expect poetry?) or music that’s more complex than the three-chord three-minute thrashes that some of the “iconoclastic” critics think are “pure” rock. But there’s lots of hilarious, irritating, and weird stuff in this book (like one guy who still blames Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven” for his embarrassing over-excitement at a high school dance with a too-touchyfeely girl...you can imagine the details if you like). How about one jaded critic who, instead of bothering to do a track-by-track debunking of the album (Fleetwood Mac’s “Rumors”), creates a fantasy of smuggling a sniper’s rifle into a reunion concert and shooting the entire band on stage. I can sympathize (especially now in an election year when we're bound to hear "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow" yet again in someone's campaign...).

Kevin Summers says

I can't write that some of the critics' arguments in this book are incorrect, but I can write that too many of the critics try so hard to ridicule some albums that aren't nearly as bad as many of these writers would like to think. The negativity in this book just gets old.

Here's a sample quote that shows how some of these critics are just as full of themselves as the critics that they repeatedly denigrate throughout the book: "The recording [Paul McCartney's *Ram*] that should have rectified your weaknesses only magnified them, bringing up the question that would haunt your entire post-Beatles career: Are you a true artist, or simply a clever craftsman?"

Really!?! This critic wants to figure out if Paul McCartney, a rock musician, is a "true artist" or "simply a clever craftsman." Ugh.

By the way, I didn't read all chapters of this book. I read the album reviews that most interested me. I ended up reading about 3/4 of the book.

Geoff says

Brilliant idea! Some of my own sacred cows were slaughtered here and I enjoyed it none the less. Skip the Jim Walsh chapter unless you want to know how awesome Mr. Walsh envisions himself.

Dustin Wells says

Funny book. Rock writers write about why classic albums from the Eagles and Beach Boys and the Sex Pistols suck . Lots of inside dirt on bands from the weirdos obsessed with bands. A light fun book I can't put down.

Patrick says

Pretty great concept, a host of rock critics each take a stab at convincing you why some of the most widely heralded "great" rock albums actually suck. It was fun reading the trashing of shitty "important" classic rock bands I've always hated, like Fleetwood Mac and Led Zeppelin, but if you dis Smashing Pumpkins you can just shut the fuck up.

Ted Burke says

Kill Your Idols seemed like a good idea when I bought the book, offering up the chance for a younger set of rock critics to give a counter argument to the well made assertions of the essayists from the early Rolling Stone/Crawdaddy/Village Voice days who's finely tuned critiques gave us what we consider now to be the Rock Canon. The problem, though, is that editor Jim Derogatis didn't have that in mind when he gathered up this assortment of Angry Young Critics and changed them with disassembling the likes of Pink Floyd, The Beatles, the MC5; countering a well phrased and keenly argued position requires an equally well phrased alternative view and one may go so far as to suggest the fresher view point needs to be keener, finer, sharper. Derogatis, pop and rock music critic for the Chicago Sun Times, author of the estimable Lester Bangs biography *Let It Blurt*, had worked years ago as record review editor of Rolling Stone and found himself getting fired when he couldn't abide by publisher Jan Wenner's policy of not giving unfavorable reviews to his favorite musicians.

His resentment toward Wenner and Rolling Stone's institutional claims of being a power broker as far as rock band reputations were concerned is understandable, but his motivation is more payback than substantial refutation of conventional wisdom. The Angry Young Critics were too fast out of the starting gate and in a collective haste to bring down the walls of the Rock Establishment wind up being less the Buckley or the Vidal piercing pomposity and pretension than , say, a pack of small yapping dogs barking at anything passing by the back yard fence. The likes of Christgau, Marcus and Marsh provoke you easily enough to formulate responses of your own, but none of the reviews have the makings of being set aside as a classic of a landmark debunking; there is not a choice paragraph or phrase one comes away with.

Even on albums that I think are over-rated, such as John Lennon's Double Fantasy, you think they're hedging their bets; a writer wanting to bring Lennon's post-Beatles reputation down a notch would have selected the iconic primal scream album Plastic Ono Band (to slice and dice. But the writers here never bite off more than they can chew; sarcasm, confessions of boredom and flagging attempts at devil's advocacy make this a noisy, nit picky book who's conceit at offering another view of Rock and Roll legacy contains the sort of hubris these guys and gals claim sickens them. This is collection of useless nastiness, a knee jerk contrarianism of the sort that one over hears in bookstores between knuckle dragging dilettantes who cannot stand being alive if they can't hear themselves bray. Yes, "Kill Your Idols" is that annoying, an irritation made worse but what could have been a fine project.

Lauren says

having read so much rock journalism in the past praising many of the albums dissected in this book, it was nice to read critics presenting the opposing viewpoint, especially when confirming my opinions on albums sold to the masses as classics, such as radiohead's "ok computer" (i think "the bends" is radiohead's best album and david menconi agrees) and the sex pistols' "never mind the bollocks ...here's the sex pistols" (while it was undeniably influential to the punk scene, musically it's nothing special, a sentiment echoed by jim testa).

i wanted to give this four stars, but two things stopped me. the first was jim walsh's chapter on fleetwood mac's "rumours". walsh devotes the equivalent of one paragraph in seven pages laying out his reasons for disliking the album while spending the rest of the time devoted to a fantasy better suited for fiction.

and the second is the utter waste of 16 pages given to coeditor carmel carrillo's "my greatest exes". it doesn't deconstruct a classic. it's basically a poor ripoff of "high fidelity", interspersing songs she associates with exes, many by classic artists but only maybe three or four that are really considered classic songs. the music was basically used as a structure to talk about her own life, with randomly-appearing song lyrics often being the only reminder that it's in a book about rock criticism. it doesn't fit in with the rest of the essays and would be better suited to a personal essay collection. if she hadn't been a coeditor, i doubt this would have even made it in the book at all because it was so wildly off-topic.

so in conclusion, skip jim walsh and carmel carrillo's chapters and you'll enjoy this book a lot more.

Todd says

Before Reading: A book of snarky essays about why the writers hate something much beloved? Yes, Please!

After: These guys are way too concerned with being taken seriously. I expected a bit more tongue in cheek or humor in the essays. There are a few moments of wit. One essay is a fictional account of an assassination of one of the bands. Not something I'll ever read again and quite frankly a little sad that I read it this time.

Evan says

A neat idea with conspicuous flaws: new-school rock critics writing essays about why they don't like a

particular record that old-school rock critics have enshrined as "classic." Editor and critic Jim DeRogatis, who was famously fired from "Rolling Stone" for trashing the then-current Hootie and the Blowfish record, acknowledges that the book was conceived as a retort to RS' cash-cow "500 Greatest Albums" issue (and now coffee-table book, etc.)... but it comes off as just that - a retort - instead of a counterbalance. At least its flaws are consistent across the essays: for example, there's a lot of "this album sucks/this other album does it better" without defending the second half of the argument, which turns what could have been an interesting point/counterpoint concept into a hipster pissing contest. Few of the essays manage to make their points coherently, which I think is kind of ironic since the entire first chunk of the book is devoted to knocking classic-rock concept albums for their incoherence ("Sgt. Pepper," "Tommy," et al). Along the same lines, for as much time as the contributors spend criticizing old-school rock critics for linking albums' greatness to positive memories of their youth, many of them commit the same sin in reverse, writing at sometimes mind-numbing length about their traumatic memories associated with those records. In general there's way too much personal mythology and not enough objective analysis, especially for a book that purports to be a debunker. So rather than reasoned critiques, a lot of this comes off as alternately childish, reactionary, contrary for its own sake, or ostentatiously hipper-than-thou - sometimes all four at once. (And then there's the puzzling, banal, and frankly embarrassing essay by co-editor - and DeRogatis' wife - Carmel Carrillo, about songs that remind her of her failed relationships. It's not even a particularly well-written example of the mixtape-memory genre, and it doesn't belong here in any event.)

Highlights: a short story that envisions assassinating Fleetwood Mac as penance for "Rumours"; an Alabama native's take on the first Lynyrd Skynyrd record (the essay that best does what it was supposed to do); the review of the Dead Kennedys' "Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables" that begins by asking the reader whether s/he hasn't ever wanted to beat the shit out of Jello Biafra. (Great throwaway line: Jello "sounds like he's giving head to a kazoo.")

Lowlight: a staggeringly ignorant review of Public Enemy's "It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" that knocks them for not being the Coasters (!) and seems to accuse gangsta rappers of complicity in the quasi-lynching of James Byrd.

Biggest regret: This could have made a hell of a magazine piece, since each essay contains at least the seed of a great, valid point, however sloppily made. But what magazine would run it? As it is, it comes off as a dress rehearsal for something like Vanity Fair's "Rock Snob Dictionary," a none-too-subtle attempt to create an alternate top-whatever list without actually doing it.

Crowning irony: the contributor bios at the end list each critic's top ten albums, and - surprise! - there's a lot of overlap between the albums that appear there and the albums trashed in the book.

Jacob Jones-Goldstein says

Hit and Miss collection of album and band reviews done to re-examine 'The classics'.

This is the perfect book for the kind of folks who are willing to listen to all of 'Metal Machine Music' but will trip all over themselves to change the station as fast as possible if 'Brass in Pocket' comes on.

Lots of bitter fun.
