



Cowboys and Indies: The Epic History of the Record Industry

Gareth Murphy

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Cowboys and Indies is nothing less than the first definitive history of the recording industry on both sides of the Atlantic.

From the invention of the earliest known sound-recording device in 1850s Paris to the CD crash and digital boom today, author and industry insider Gareth Murphy takes readers on an immensely entertaining and encyclopedic ride through the many cataclysmic musical, cultural, and technological changes that shaped a century and a half of the industry.

This invaluable narrative focuses especially on the game changers---the label founders, talent scouts, and legendary A&R men. Murphy highlights:

- Otto Heinemann's pioneer label Okeh, which spread blues and jazz "race" records across America
- how one man, Henry Speir, discovered nearly all the Delta blues legends (Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, Son House, Tommy Johnson)
- Sam Phillips's seminal work with Chess and Sun Records
- John Hammond's discoveries (Billie Holiday, Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Bruce Springsteen)
- the behind-the-scenes players of the British Invasion
- Clive Davis, Ahmet Ertegun, David Geffen, and the corporate music machine
- the Machiavellian moves of punk impresario Malcolm McLaren (Sex Pistols)
- Chris Blackwell's triumphs for Island Records (Bob Marley, U2)
- Sylvia Robinson and Tom Silverman, the hip-hop explorers behind the Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa

...and much, much more. Murphy also offers a provocative look at the future through the ruminations of such vanguard figures as Martin Mills (4AD, XL Recordings, Matador, Rough Trade) and genre-busting producer Rick Rubin (Run-D.M.C., Red Hot Chili Peppers, Metallica, Johnny Cash).

Drawing from memoirs, archives, and more than one hundred exclusive interviews with the legends of the record industry, including the founders and CEOs of Atlantic, Chrysalis, Virgin, A&M, Sub Pop, and Sire, this book reveals the secret history behind the hit-making craft. Remarkable in scope and impressive in depth, *Cowboys and Indies* chronicles the pioneers who set the stylus on the most important labels and musical discoveries in history.

Cowboys and Indies: The Epic History of the Record Industry Details

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Gareth Murphy**

From Reader Review Cowboys and Indies: The Epic History of the Record Industry for online ebook

Violet says

Received Goodreads giveaway copy

This is an interesting, in depth look at the record industry. Definitely would recommend it to anyone interested in the record industry and its dramatic past. It sometimes gets a bit too inside baseball, but still has some really interesting facts and tidbits for even a casual reader.

Scottfoley says

An author could fill a multi-volume set with a detailed history of the record industry. Short of that, author Gareth Murphy has done an admirable job of highlighting just the key moments, from the very development of recorded sound to today's issues with downloading and digital file sharing. It's a very reasonable length for readers looking for a quick overview, and it won't leave you feeling you've missed out on anything. One of the best books of its kind.

Susan says

This is a book which tells the stories of the recording industry from the very beginning and takes us through to the present and, indeed, the future of the music industry. The story begins in Paris in 1853 with the idea for the first sound-recording device. Eventually, research led to the graphophone, which was marketed as a dictating machine. However, when Columbia began recording cylinders, it soon became clear that the talking machines future lay not in local government offices, but in entertainment...

This takes us from the founding fathers of the recording industry, through Edwardian times and into the roaring Twenties. If we imagine that the music industry is now threatened by the internet and downloading, we soon learn what any lovers of history of always aware of in great historical events – this is nothing new. Indeed, the 1920's saw the recording industry spiralling into depression with the advent of radio and it never really recovered throughout the inter-war years.

Of course, after the second world war, we enter a new era and the 1950's saw the advent of rock and roll. Before long we are thrown into an unfolding story of great music – Sun Records, Motown, Phil Spector, The Beatles and more... Much of this part of the book was known to me and, in a book which attempts to cover so much, you can obviously just touch on all of these figures. Still, anybody who is anybody, is covered here – from major record labels, to indie labels, from record producers to managers to artists. This also, as I said at the beginning of this review, looks at the future of recorded music and gives a good overview of its history. I found the whole book interesting; particularly those early years – and fascinating characters – which I knew little about. A good read for all music fans.

Tom Donaghey says

In his first book, Irish writer Gareth Murphy has tried to do the impossible and almost succeeded. COWBOYS AND INDIES tries to tell the entire story of the recording industry, from the inventions of A. G. Bell and T. Edison, through the onset of a thousand small companies selling recordings and through into today's major labels, and for a book that comes in at 400 pages, does a remarkable job.

There is a lot of information here about the early days of sound recording, and how important litigation was almost from the very beginning of the business. The music recording industry has always struck me as being about the money with little regard to the actual music itself and this book did nothing to sway my opinion. What it did do is collect many of the behind-the-scenes stories of the industry insiders and their relationships with the artists, both good and bad. There are stories about Sam Phillips and Elvis, the Beatles and the Stones, and how Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones almost single-handedly saved the entire industry with 'Thriller'.

A very enjoyable read which none-the-less gives a very comprehensive overview into an industry that has touched every person to some degree. It would be difficult to compact 130 years of a history along with countless thousands of contributing individuals into a smarter, more palatable read than this. This is just the thing to give an insight to an outsider such as myself.

I won this book through Goodreads.

Michael Ritchie says

Uninspiring, underresearched book about the record industry. For the most part, the author only includes material about people and companies that have already had books written about them (Columbia, Elektra, Island, Warner, Asylum) and virtually ignores other major labels like RCA, Decca/MCA, and even Reprise which was started by Frank Sinatra and included Joni Mitchell, Frank Zappa and Neil Young on its roster). Granted, I've read a few books about the music industry, but the only new material in here that I found interesting was about Herb Alpert's label A&M, and a couple of gossipy tidbits about cocaine use at Casablanca Records. Not recommended unless you know absolutely nothing about pop/rock music of the past 50 years.

John Raso says

There are several other books that overlap the companies and stories here, but the author is well aware of this and stays away from going into too much detail. As a result, this is an excellent companion piece to Hit Men and spends much more time and depth on the areas not covered by that excellent book. In particular, there is detailed history of the competitive businesses that developed the record player (or "Talking Machine" as they were originally marketed). These were the companies that became the first major labels including RCA and Columbia.

He then cruises through the well documented history up until the late 60s when the modern record industry really blossoms but focusing on the independent labels like A&M, Atlantic, Island and Virgin. Best of all, he goes deep on the indies that developed out of the British punk scene. One short coming is that with the exception of Subpop, he doesn't discuss the US indies. I assume this is primarily because it was the only US indie label that had a massive mainstream hit with Nirvana. Indies like SST and Matador don't have a gold record in their catalog with the exception of Interpol.

He's appropriately tough on the major label executives in the 90s giving them little to no credit for their

successes which were primarily driven by reselling their predecessor's catalogs on CD.
Highly recommended

Joshua May says

Gareth Murphy's poetic telling of the magnificent history of the record industry is a gem waiting to be discovered by historians and summer beach readers alike. A work of art in its own right, *Cowboys and Indies* preserves the emotion and splendor in the events of its telling with effortless prose. If you are on the fence about this one, don't be. Murphy circles the wagons of truth, while still managing to excite and delight with a compelling narrative of some overlooked warriors of industry.

Brett says

An insightful look at the recording industry from its inception through (almost) present-day. From Thomas Edison to David Geffen and beyond, meet the rogues, swindlers, and ne'er-do-wells who've offered us recorded music for over a century.

Peter Gladue says

As a person who worked in Music Retail for most of his life, I found this book to be a very complete historical roadmap of the Record Industry. To understand the present state of Music industry we must follow and try to understand the past. There are Heroes and Villains, some are known and some are unknown. Each chapter breaths a life on their own, almost like a short-story collection. I have read the book from start to finish, but now I leave it nearby my bed, to spot up the book anywhere to read a few pages. I think that this book would also work well as a college textbook for a business course on the music industry.

Gordon says

pretty good overview of the recorded music industry from a us/uk/european perspective. covered most of the bases, although the last chapters lost some momentum trying to cover the newer indie labels: Sub>Pop, 4AD, Beggar's okay but what about Epitaph, Dischord, Merge and Touch & Go?

i do love reading about the "record men" of the 60s and 70s and there's plenty of sordid stories here. when you retrace the steps, you realize it's not enough to be good, you have to be damned lucky.

Jon Chaisson says

An amazing (and amazingly thorough) book that covers all the way from the first competing Bell and Edison inventions, all the way up to the slow and painful demise of numerous dinosaur major distributors. While there tends to be a primary focus on rock music from about halfway through onwards, it still reminds us of all the other genres out there and how they've fared over the decades. Highly suggested if you're a music nerd

like me.

sculptcha says

For what it is, this book is packed full of interesting music and recording related tidbits and little-known facts that will probably surprise a lot of readers like myself who love music but do not particularly pay attention to the seedy underbelly of the The Record Industry. It's accessible, well written, and entertaining throughout.

It was very interesting to read that the industry had experienced and almost fatal blow once, and recovered stronger than ever, which means there is hope for the current state of the today's precarious and unpredictable industry.

Overall, a satisfying and informative read that I would recommend to anyone interested in the music business.

I won this book through Goodreads.

Neil says

A somewhat choppy but entertaining overview of the history of the music-selling business. Starts with Alexander Graham Bell and ends with the current homogenization of dozens of former influential indies by the international conglomerates that swallowed them up. The industry has always seen boom and bust times. Makes you wonder if there'll be another boom.

Nooilforpacifists says

Brilliant in places; hilarious elsewhere, choppy mostly. Damned interesting. But the flaw is that it's two different works stapled together: the first, a history of phonograph and radio TECHNOLOGY; the second, a history of record companies, recording artists and agents. I'm nerdy enough to enjoy the first part (which in some ways reminded me of "The Victorian Internet"), and was in the business enough to enjoy the second. But think few would enjoy both. And one would need flow-chart diagrams to keep up with the changing corporate names and Presidents/A & R heads.

Best moment of second half: Dylan introduces the original sin of pot to the Beatles. Worst moments: David Geffen--doesn't matter how wealthy he is, he seems like a Grade A fool. Thought the book did a great job explaining how "the summer of love" turned into a 70s and early 80s of coke that destroyed or even killed the industry. And the book proved its premise: the moguls were more interesting than the musicians.

Hardy says

It seems like other Goodreaders did not appreciate this book as much as I did.

All knowledge starts with an individual asking a question. What a person wants to know depends on their

background and prior experiences.

I have no intelligence for music. I come from a conservative family; Gregorian chants were our theme song. The Beatles were as modern as our parents would tolerate. In school I was taught to sing, play the recorder and clarinet, and later the guitar. However, I was not curious about any of these instruments. I was constantly disrupting the class. My teacher (Mr Marlez) promised he would teach me any instrument if I cooperated. I told him I wanted to learn the bagpipes, but there were no rentals available.

As I grew older, I realized that my lack of musical intelligence was a defect rather than a virtue. Fortunately I discovered this fountain of knowledge in a used bookstore (\$12). Thank you Gareth for constructing such a thoughtful manuscript.

What I really wanted was to learn how the music and the artists evolved over time. Mr Marlez was always babbling about the "theory of music" so I was hoping that there would be some poetic answer to the questions: when was popular music the best? Why is Justin Bieber so much worse than John Lennon? How does this reflect Western culture?

What this book offers is a perspective on the technological, economic, institutional, and cultural influences on popular music.

The first few chapters cover the history of "talking machines", beginning in Paris 1853. The Industrial Revolution (1820-1840) was the spark of almost every modern industry.

After WW1, young Americans shifted away from classical music and towards the homegrown street culture of Jazz and flappers in the 'Roaring 20s'. The 1920s was also the time when Americans embraced radio technology, which created the record industry. Previously, the music business had been vertically integrated (hardware technology companies had exclusive contracts with artists). But now tastes began to fragment in a horizontal manner, shooting off in all directions, and eventually establishing the wide range of genres and styles we have today.

This book is a good place to start for someone that is new to music. It introduced me new artists, and the personalities behind them. I would have liked to learn about the evolution music in cultures around the world, but this book focuses on the recording industry in the US and England.
