



Bootleg: The Secret History of the Other Recording Industry

Clinton Heylin

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In *Bootleg: The Secret History of the Other Recording Industry*, Clinton Heylin examines the entire modern history of this underground culture: from what defines a bootleg and its complex and protean legal status, to a full history of bootlegs' production and distribution, to what's contained on some of the most notorious bootlegs and how to find them. Along with many illustrations of the creative packages, this is the whole story of the \$250 million industry that sustains itself on the great figures of rock music and their biggest admirers.

Bootleg: The Secret History of the Other Recording Industry Details

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SL says

Pretty great for a book that is now basically obsolete. Made me get out Peter Gabriel Live at the Roxy and all my Siouxsie and the Banshees boots! Pretty funny that now, basically, everyone is a bootlegger...!

John Lyman says

Very enlightening book. I have a new perspective of the history of music bootlegs (and other bootlegs as well). I had never thought of the huge contribution bootleggers have made to the history of rock music since the late 60s. They may be reviled by the recording industry, but without their efforts many, many valuable and wonderful recordings could have been lost forever, and certainly some were, but they gave life to things that often were not meant to be heard by "the common man". The chapter "perfectsoundforever" was a blemish on the book because it seemed to be a narrative guide of bootlegs in the era it was discussing, early 90s, I believe. Also, some vocabulary (punters?) was confusing.

I came away with a very different perspective, or at least appreciation for, the massive amounts of music that I have diligently downloaded (legally) for the past 3 years, or so. We are pretty damn lucky to have access to music found anywhere in the world in anyone's collection who is willing to share.

Rob says

drier than a box of pistachio shells, but where else you gonna go?

Joe says

This book got me hot on the trail of one of the best vinyl scores: "Elvis' Greatest Shits."

Steve Miller says

Excellent account, goes up to 1994 - the last three chapters do a terrific job of tying the whole story together with a succinct and accurate take on the greed of the corporate music industry - author had no way to see how it all shook out, but we now know the good guys, the artists, won -

Paul says

A good chronicle of the development of the bootleg market, with enough direct quotations from 'interested

parties' to be consistently interesting and informative. In addition, the book provides the author's informed and unvarnished opinions of the actions taken by record companies, industry groups, recording artists, and governments to combat bootlegs.

His comments on the merits of various bootlegs aren't quite as compelling and are sometimes downright wearying (OK, we get it: Led Zeppelin sucked, Page noodled endlessly and aimlessly on stage, and bootlegs of the band are generally worse than anal fistulae). I actually wish he'd provided more detail about the contents of various boots, but that would've threatened a loss of focus in the book, so I understand the restraint.

The most glaring omission is truly surprising. There is almost nothing in the book about how bootlegs are generated, particularly studio bootlegs. Sure, live tapes came from audience members, but the really good ones usually came from soundboards -- was there a general practice of paying off the mixers? Were some venues notoriously lax about taping by the soundboard people? Were there special relationships of some bootleggers with some sound mixers? How much was a mixer paid for a tape and what determined the rate?

As for studio boots (outtakes, alt. mixes, etc.), who stole these? Were they disgruntled lower-level clerks at big labels? Disgruntled A&R guys? Naming names isn't the point, but surely by now one could say *something* about how the Basement Tapes saw the light of day, or the big Beatles collections. Why wasn't everything by The Beatles in locked vaults at Capitol? If they were locked, who got in and why?

Overall, a good book that could've been excellent.

Bob says

A staggeringly-detailed history of rock bootlegs from the first (a Bob Dylan title) until the CD explosion of the 1990s. Lots of personal anecdotes and some wild stories, though the sheer volume of information can get a bit overwhelming at times. You'd have to be a big fan of Beatles, Stones and Dylan to give this 5 stars. But as a general overview of the illicit genre, this is very well done. You strictly rok types may be a bit bored, as there are only brief mentions of Sex Pistols, Clash, Buzzcocks, etc and a single mention of the Misfits.

Butch Lazorchak says

Sadly not as good as I wanted. Confusing characters, jumps around too much, probably too long... Admittedly, I probably am looking for some sort of bootleg guide, but he moves too quickly past the historic first era of vinyl bootlegs and gets too deep into the legal aspects.

Adam Selzer says

Heylin generally presents himself as a snivelling little jerk with an infalted opinion of his own "expertise" on the subject of Bob Dylan. And there's some of that here, too, but the good parts are GREAT.

Mark A Logan says

While the book does provide a decent overview of the history of bootlegs, his over-reliance on one source means that a good deal of the story is skewed and some areas frankly just plain wrong.

Jesse says

I read this when it was published in 1994 and find myself equally bummed upon rereading. To me, it misses the most interesting parts of the story -- who was recording the shows, the taping/trading networks, and how the bootleggers distributed their wares. Some of this is probably due to Heylin's persistent anti-hippie bent (which serves him fine in his excellent punk history book, "From the Velvets to the Voidoids") but gets in the way here, missing out on the fact that bootleg LPs are inherently square, and that cassettes and fan-to-fan exchanges were the true underground recording industry.

M. Milner says

This book - which I'm pretty sure is a UK edition of *Bootleg: The Secret History of the Other Recording Industry* - is exactly what it promises: a history of bootlegs, those unauthorized records you sometimes come across in used CD stores, pawn shops and record fairs. It's highly researched, at times compelling and very opinionated.

Heylin starts his history well before the dawn of recorded music, with the original bootlegs: pirated copies of Shakespeare plays, transcribed by people in attendance, much like tapers at a concert! Eventually - there's more history to bootleg recording than you'd think - he gets to the first rock bootleg: Great White Wonder, a collection of unreleased Bob Dylan. GWW sparked a flood of hand-stamped covers, underground labels and legal battles, their story the backbone of this book.

When Heylin is recounting the history of bootlegs, it makes for great reading: enterprising people sneaking intentionally-mislabelled tapes into mastering studios, running truckloads of illicit LPs around at night to shady figures and trying to keep one or two steps ahead of the FBI and RIAA. It's a little like reading about Robin Hood, or at least someone who swindled a bunch of rich people and got away with it.

But the largest part of the book is devoted to copyright laws and various ways major record labels - especially Columbia - have tried to cut out unauthorized recordings, from bootleg LPs to home taping. There's a good selection of history and information here, but there's little casual fans would be interested in, especially 20 years after the fact (this was pre-CDR, let alone Napster). Still, it's interesting to see how little the RIAA has changed over the years: the way they treat people for downloading MP3s isn't all that new.

So the history sections of this book are good, but the portions where Heylin gets on a soapbox aren't. He presents something of a Marxist view of music: it doesn't belong to the performer or record labels, it belongs to those who hear it. He's not only supportive of bootlegs, he dismisses claims about where the money they make goes (organized crime, for example). He even goes as far as saying artists shouldn't be allowed to control what gets released! This line of thought kept me at arm's length of the point Heylin seemed to be making: big corporations are killing music! Suffice to say, he never mentions acts on small, indie labels getting bootlegged (The Minutemen, for instance).

Still, there's enough here to recommend it to music fans, especially those with an interest in classic rock. The stories are worth it and the past decade has proved Heylin right in some respects. It's a mixed read, sure, but I thought the war stories are worth it.

Alan says

Recommended for both the casual and serious record collector.

I liked this Book!

Josh says

Oh, how the teenage me got into this one...still trying to track down some of these records.
