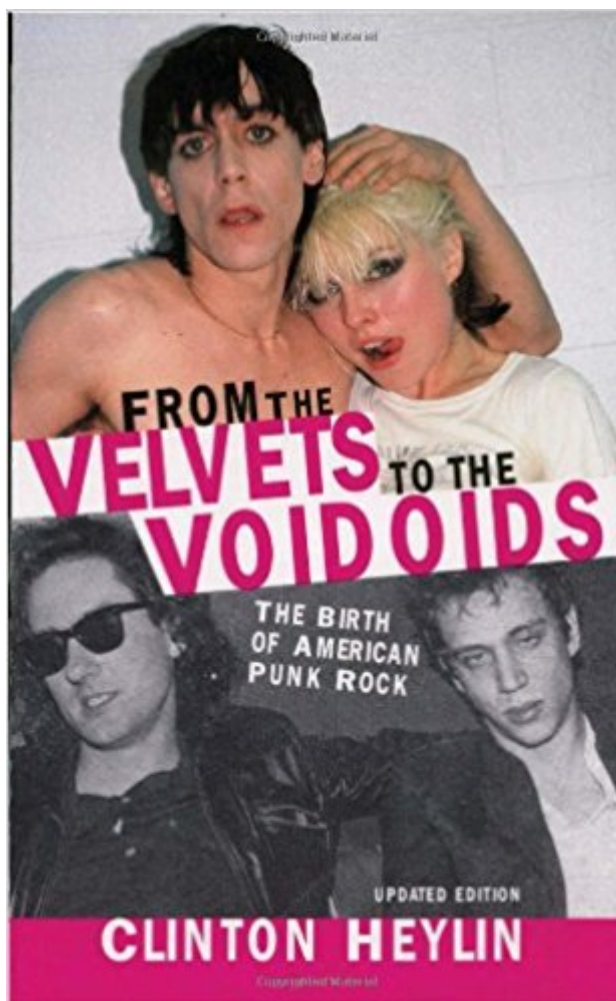


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From The Velvets To The Voidoids: The Birth Of American Punk Rock



Synopsis

Exhaustively researched and packed with unique insights, this history journeys from the punk scene's roots in the mid-1960s to the arrival of "new wave" in the early 1980s. With a cast that includes Patti Smith, Pere Ubu, Television, Blondie, the Ramones, the MC5, the Stooges, Talking Heads, and the Dead Boys, this account is the definitive story of early American punk rock. Extraordinarily balanced, it tells the story of the music's development largely through the artists' own words, while thoroughly analyzing and evaluating the music in a lucid and cogent manner. First published in 1993, this was the first book to tell the stories of these then-little-known bands; now, this edition has been updated with a new discography, including imports and bootlegs, and an afterword detailing the post-1970s history of these bands. Filled with insights from interviews with artists such as Lou Reed, Debbie Harry, David Byrne, Patti Smith, and Richard Hell, this book has long been considered one of the essential reads on rock rebellion.

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Customer Reviews

"One of the most detailed histories of New York's artsy punk scene." [Library Journal](#) "No other book...I've encountered succeeded so well in accurately bringing the period to life...lifted me back in time." [Richard Hell, Television and Richard Hell and the Voidoids](#) "To [answer] the question of...exactly what kind of music punk rock was, you have to resort to...[this book]."

[Robert Christgau, The New York Times](#) "This engaging & informative history tells you all you'll ever need to know about the birth of American Punk Rock." [Trakmarx.com](#) "[Heylin]

sorts the conflicts and conflagrations with a critic's eye and a fan's heart." —Lenny Kaye, guitarist and collaborator, Patti Smith Group

Clinton Heylin is the author of, among others, Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades Revisited, Bootleg: The Secret History of the Other Recording Industry, Can You Feel the Silence? Van Morrison: A New Biography, The Da Capo Book of Rock & Roll Writing, and Despite the System: Orson Welles Versus the Hollywood Studios.

From the Velvets to the Voidoids is a passionate, thorough and informative look at punk rock in America. Clinton Heylin has done exhaustive work tracing the history, membership, influences, and music of all the important bands in the movement. The tangled relationships and confusing contradictions from personal stories and interviews make creating a coherent history challenging - Heylin succeeds admirably and the result is unparalleled in understanding the hows and whys of U.S. punk. Sadly, Heylin's disdain for many of the participants and blatant disregard for most other forms of music colors the prose on almost every page. One expects some measure of criticism in a history of music, but the flippant tone and personal attacks make for tough reading. Even his favorites (and those are painfully obvious) get grilled, often in the same paragraphs that praise them. Rather than coming across as objective and balanced (which wouldn't be necessary in any case), it reads as jarring and snotty. One emerges feeling that Heylin just doesn't like people very much. The first 3/4 of the book is the original 1993 edition. This portion, while flawed, is highly recommended for anyone interested in rock music history. Tone aside, Heylin obviously cares and really knows his stuff. The coda, written for the 2005 edition is nearly unreadable. Angry, badly edited screeds about the degeneration of music and the failures of his idols dominate. Do yourself a favor and stop reading before this section. An added note for the kindle version: really bad quality control. Random punctuation and spelling errors abound, especially in the newer section. I presume this is not true of the print edition. The mistakes are very distracting and make Heylin's somewhat convoluted prose difficult to read.

Simply put, I just enjoyed learning more of the background and details surrounding some of the seminal punk bands. If you're a punk fan then this is a must read.

A++++++

Great

The long, first person quotes by people who took part in the New York and Cleveland scenes make the book worth reading, but Heylin's essays on the Meaning Of It All are tiresome. He makes a good case that the NYC and British scenes developed independently of each other, and I like how he tracks the evolution of bands' setlists as they led up to their recordings, but when he strays from reporting to his opinions it's best to skim to the next direct quote. (Of these quotes, It's unfortunate that with all the excellent descriptions we get from Jerry Harrison of his time with the Modern Lovers, we only get one paragraph from him about his tenure with Talking Heads.) Heylin swallowed whole the musicians' seemingly constant name-checking of Albert Ayler and reinforced this with constant references to jazz (Fred Smith's "jazz-oriented approach" on bass? huh?); using his ears more would have shown Heylin that Television's extended guitar-drums-bass jams on a D major chord have a lot more in common with the Grateful Dead than they do with the jazz of any era. It was particularly ironic that in Heylin's "sic"-filled Postlude screed about the factual failings of those who dared to write about the same subject before or after him he refers to the Ramones as "Brooklyn boys." Minor mistakes like referring to Archie Bell and the Drells as a doo-wop group in the section on the Dolls are forgivable, but the Ramones' Queens roots are such a basic part of their identity that you have to wonder what else Heylin misunderstood. I didn't bother to finish the Postlude.

This fascinating book would make an excellent companion volume to Roni Sarig's *The Secret History Of Rock* and *In The Fascist Bathroom* by Greil Marcus, especially since Marcus' book mostly ignores the New York history of punk rock. It details the origins of the US punk and art rock scene, like Patti Smith, Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell & The Ramones who were the originators of many stylistic and musical traits evident in later bands. It's an American punk Who's Who and a rock 'n roll What's What, a detailed history and a valuable reference work. Starting with the Velvet Underground, it also covers The Stooges, MC5, Modern Lovers, Electric Eels, Suicide, New York Dolls, Wayne County & The Electric Chairs, Blondie, The Heartbreakers, Talking Heads, Pere Ubu, Lydia Lunch and other seminal artists. This is done in the form of interviews with the artists concerned, so you hear about the times in their own words. The famous venues CBGB's & Max's Kansas City also get their due. The bibliography provides a cross-section of the most useful published sources on American punk and there's an extensive discography. Black & white photographs (some very rare, like a pic of Patti Smith's graduation) enliven the text. Highly recommended for fans of intelligent rock music.

This book presents a history of New York music, starting with the Velvet Underground and then skirting around bands like Blondie, the Ramones, the Jerry Harrison bands Modern Lovers and Talking Heads, the Richard Hell bands Neon Boys and Television and the Heartbreakers and the Voidoids, the Peter Laughner bands Rocket To The Tombs and Pere Ubu, Patty Smith, the New York Dolls, the Stooges, and many others. Not dealing with any of these players in a thorough manner, the book comes off feeling a bit scattered, as well as a bit fanboy-esque, considering that zines from the era are a main source of quotes and material. The doomed Laughner is given the most thorough coverage, and he comes off as the most thoroughly investigated character, although Hell is also given a pretty decent treatment. Great assortment of old pictures from the day.

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