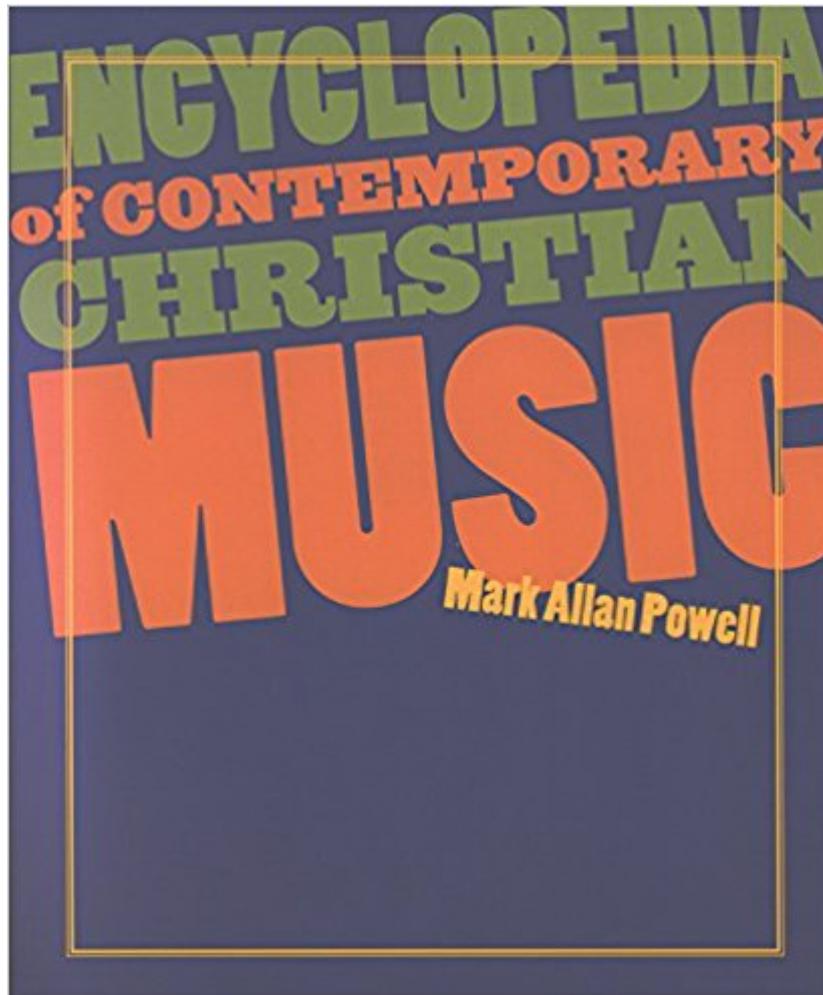


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Encyclopedia Of Contemporary Christian Music [With CDROM] (Recent Releases)



Synopsis

Running to over 1,000-pages, and with over 1,900-entries, this is truly the definitive encyclopedia in its field. This fabulous book provides alphabetical listings of artists - both Christian and secular - associated with contemporary Christian music. They're all here! You'll read about miracles and scandals, about sacrifices and exploitation. You can trace the early gospel influences on some of rock and roll's biggest stars, find out what's happened to the 'has-beens', and much more.

Book Information

Series: Recent Releases

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Customer Reviews

From the sleepy title, I expected "Amy Grant" to be the hardest rocking entry, but a majority of the 1900 plus artists profiled are justifiably termed "rock": Stryper? Sam Phillips? Mortal? Deliverance? P.O.D.? MXPX? Yup. They're all here. Powell's original title was much more telling: "Parallel Universe: A Critical Guide to Popular Christian Music." Powell is nothing if not critical. "Opinionated" was the word the store clerk used. So are all the great rock writers; so are all the great rock books, and despite its encyclopedic format, this is a great rock book. Surprisingly, the author is Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary; not surprisingly, therefore, he argues with the theology in some songs. For instance, he doesn't agree with the idea of "the rapture" popularized by Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and the "Left Behind" series, and prevalent in numerous Jesus Movement-era songs. Most significantly, he takes these artists and their music seriously. This gives the whole genre of gospel rock more significance than it is often felt to warrant,

and certainly more than the tag "ccm" suggests. If rock rings true, it's because it's about real life. CCM, on the other hand, often sounds phony, stressing the ideal over the real, and marketing over the music. This has left many artists confused, angry and disenchanting. Powell deftly captures the undercurrent of alienation, and the love/hate relationships many artists have with their labels. He also graphs the rise of independent labels like Tooth'n'Nail, and the backlash against business-as-usual "corporate rock." The result is that many artists emerge as "survivors"--ground up and spit out of the music machine, but still standing; Powell's underlying conviction is that it doesn't have to be that way. Accordingly, he doesn't sidestep the divorces and drugs, lies and lawsuits that attend real history; rather than tarnish these artists, the effect is to increase their street credibility: they emerge as real people instead of cardboard cutouts. By even greater magic of his pen, Powell makes us see all that out-of-print vinyl as a significant part of music history--far too important to relegate to the dustbin of "cookie-cutter" ccm. Some of the short entries are too short, and many are incomplete, understandable given the mammoth scope of the project. Powell wisely chose to include brief entries when information was unavailable, rather than leave artists out. Some of the long pieces, however, are truly outstanding; the ten page Bob Dylan bio ranks among the best bits on that artist I have read. Again and again I looked up obscure artists I was sure would not be among those present: Larry Norman; After the Fire; Malcom and Alwyn; the Lead; Andy Pratt; Robin Lane; Cliff Richard--each time I was amazed to find that Powell had already been there and done that. The hefty retail price tag may have kept the ECCM off most fan's light reading list, but its low price makes it a great gift for music lovers. Powell includes a searchable CD Rom disc and websites for bands to pump up the value, and at 1,088 pages, it's really more reading than three Harry Potter books. Professor Powell has done music fans a great service with this ground-breaking book, unearthing more than forty years of virtually unknown history--yet for all that, it's a very enjoyable read.

Believe it or not, it isn't necessary to spew adjectives to give an honest critique of this work. The book is almost exhaustive (not quite) and includes a number of unexpected names. The volume of information is tediously fascinating - something that would appeal to anyone seeking such a book. That is the great strength of the work, Powell obviously went to great lengths to collect and present an encyclopedia's worth of information on a topic with narrow appeal. It is surprising, however, that there isn't more negative feedback (among other reviewers) regarding Powell's inclusion of personal opinion along with the facts. In that sense, this isn't an encyclopedia at all, but a series of artist reviews with an inordinate amount of fact and trivia included. No matter what the reader's theological

persuasion, it soon becomes irritating to see, time and again, Powell chide musicians for taking a particular theological stance with which he disagrees. Dismissive at times, and occasionally insulting, Powell tarnishes his own wonderful work by castigating those who do not fall in line with his theology. His strong theological opinion is not completely surprising, since Powell is a Theologian, but it is unwarranted and unwanted in such a work. It begs the question - what might this encyclopedia have been like if the labor had been shared and a team of writers had combined their effort? The trivial minutia keeps me interested, but the repeated intrusion of castigating annotations forces me to skip sections until I get past them and return to the nuts and bolts. I certainly have no regrets that I purchased this book, but unfortunately it isn't the masterwork it could have been and will remain a good first effort. If we are fortunate it will be followed by better works to come.

If you are a fan of CCM, get lots of sleep before cracking this book. From Transformation Crusade to Tourniquet to Twila, they're all here. I was hard pressed to find a single act not given a mention here. Powell does a good job of devoting the right amount of space to acts depending on the impact and longevity. Drawbacks: Every now and then, Powell allows more of his commentary to come through than one would expect in an "Encyclopedia." In my opinion he was unfair to certain artists (especially Petra). He loves to throw in comparisons to certain bands, especially U2. Comparisons are vital in such a tome and this is fine regarding say, DC Talk's "The Hardway," but seeing it with bands such as East West gets, as he would put it, tiresome. The thorough and well-crafted writing more than makes up for these minor drawbacks, and ECCM gets an easy 5 stars for effort. Another plus, the CD Rom is a keystone of genius. Entries are linked with official web sites, and cross references are linked to their own entries. The huge variety of the artists contained in this book is a testimony to the diversity within the body of Christ.

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