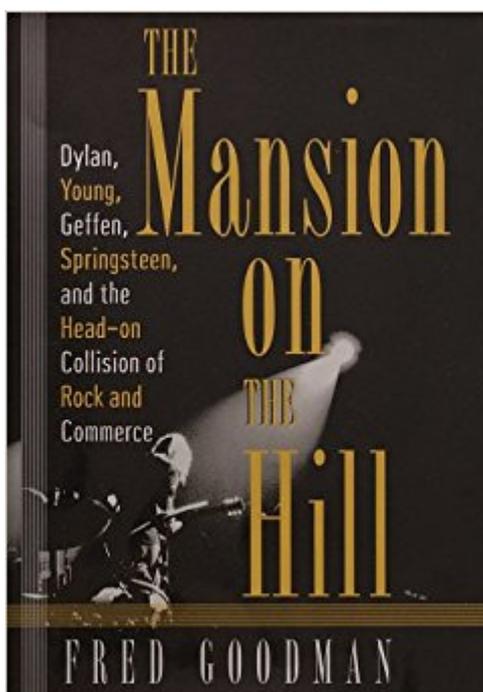


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The Mansion On The Hill: Dylan, Young, Geffen, And Springsteen And The Head-on Collision Of Rock And Commerce



Synopsis

In 1964, on the brink of the British Invasion, the music business in America shunned rock and roll. There was no rock press, no such thing as artist management -- literally no rock-and-roll business. Today the industry will gross over \$20 billion. How did this change happen? From the moment Pete Seeger tried to cut the power at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival debut of Bob Dylan's electric band, rock's cultural influence and business potential have been grasped by a rare assortment of ambitious and farsighted musicians and businessmen. Jon Landau took calls from legendary producer Jerry Wexler in his Brandeis dorm room and went on to orchestrate Bruce Springsteen's career. Albert Grossman's cold-eyed assessment of the financial power at his clients' fingertips made him the first rock manager to blaze the trail that David Geffen transformed into a superhighway. Dylan's uncanny ability to keep his manipulation of the business separate from his art and reputation prefigured the savvy -- and increasingly cynical -- professionalism of groups like the Eagles. Fred Goodman, a longtime rock critic and journalist, digs into the contradictions and ambiguities of a generation that spurned and sought success with equal fervor. *The Mansion on the Hill*, named after a song title used by Hank Williams, Neil Young, and Bruce Springsteen, breaks new ground in our understanding of the people and forces that have shaped the music.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book because I was mildly interested but before long I was sucked into the tale about how the money talked louder than any musician's ability. This is story of how several clever people took the talent-driven music of the mid to late sixties and gradually turned this into a money-driven

enterprise where all the artist needed to do was keep the gullible public into believing that "it's all about the music, man!" The book covers some of the major players like Bruce Springsteen's manager, Jon Landau, and record mogul David Geffen, along with the artists they were involved with like Dylan, Neil Young, the Eagles, and plenty more. The book shows how the industry evolved from Warner Brothers execs (in WB blazers) signing the Grateful Dead (and being scared to death of being given LSD) - to the CBS policy of the mid-eighties of taking acts that the company wanted to succeed and have them make a few low-selling albums and play live gigs so they would have more credibility with record buyers. The execs were every bit as exotic as the artists they represented, and thought nothing about double-dipping their clients' earnings even though they were already assured of millions. I was astounded to learn that at the height of the Eagles' success they went out on tour and got NINETY-SEVEN AND A HALF PERCENT of the receipts, leaving the venue with just two and half percent. Essential reading for anyone interested in the music industry, especially people trying to break into the scene. Check your integrity at the door, because it will just be an impediment otherwise.

You don't have to be a raving fire 'n brimstone type to lament the passing of the "good old days" of rock. You just have to switch on your radio now and hear songs that were once anthems being used to hawk jeans, beer, bank cards, etc. and if that doesn't make you even a little indignant, you're either too young to remember or too embalmed to give a damn. Fred Goodman's book is a good accounting of some of the other nails in rock's coffin, the forces of the entertainment business who saw gold in them thar hills. Yeah, I know, I know---how foolish, how naive to think that rock could be anything BUT a commodity, as with any other form of popular entertainment. Perhaps so, but naivete is what started rock off in the first place, the idea that boundaries were made to be broken and that not all rebels join the herd in the end. I'm still playing my Dylan albums, though, and if the lustre has worn off the man's image somewhat as time has gone by, it doesn't change the fact that Dylan---and Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen and Joni Mitchell and even Glenn Frey and Don Henley---still made a large body of music that mattered then and matters now. But the old image of rock as "music of the people" or whatever, that's gone the way of all flesh.

I found Goodman's book eminently readable, and at times difficult to put down...yet, when I took a step back at the end, there was less there than it seemed. One big problem...from reading the Notes, it becomes clear that none of the "main" characters in this book...that is, Geffen, Landau, Springsteen, Dylan, Grossman, or Young, actually spoke to Goodman. Which means that our

insights into them are being filtered, not only by Goodman, but by the people Goodman did talk to...many of whom carry some grudges. Yes, it's likely that these grudges are well earned, and believe me, I have no sympathy for Jon Landau or David Geffen, and yes, there is a printed trail that follows them, but the book suffers from the absence of their voices is a problem. In the case of Springsteen, it's less than fair (and I'm not a fan). Goodman also jumps around too much, and leaves several threads dangling...the LA performers all disappear as soon as they split with Geffen. And, he buries one of the most compelling stories in the book...the meteoric rise and fall of Peter Frampton.

If you have ever winced at the rapid co-opting of 60's and early 70's rock music by big business and/or mercenary musicians, if you have ever gritted your teeth at paying \$15+ for a CD and then wondered who gets your money, if you ever hoped that there was once something culturally meaningful in the rock scene and wondered what happened, then this book will provide many answers. Two things made this book difficult for me: 1) Goodman lays out details and names names with such frequency I could have used a glossary listing of the major players cynically manipulating the burgeoning cultural shifts of the "summer of love" from radio to underground newspapers to rock venues 2) the machinations of many of the artists and most of their managers illustrate such a sad, greedy side of humanity. Everyone who gets rich--really, really, really rich--does it by successfully, often ruthlessly, exploiting consumer willingness to pay for rock and roll product. The organist of Springsteen's E Street band, Danny Federici, sums up one of their mega-tours this way: "We started out as a band, which turned into a super, giant corporate money-making machine." And that about sums up the last 40 years of rock and roll. My advice: read this book, then seek out all of the really great musicians (and CD labels) out there who haven't been sucked up into mega-marketing campaigns, corporate sponsored tours, and manufacturing soundtracks for multinational companies.

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