



Rock and the Pop Narcotic: Testament for the Electric Church

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Joe Carducci was an integral member of the SST Records family when it was at its peak. This experience gave Carducci a unique perspective on music and "Rock And The Pop Narcotic" is perhaps the only book of popular music criticism that attempts to achieve a genuine aesthetic of rock music. The content runs the gamut of music, touching on everything from the Allman Brothers to Husker Du to Black Flag.

Rock and the Pop Narcotic: Testament for the Electric Church Details

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From Reader Review Rock and the Pop Narcotic: Testament for the Electric Church for online ebook

Beverly says

Who gave this meathead a typewriter? Okay, but seriously, when he is actually writing about music he has a lot to say that is worth reading and much of it has already affected the way I approach writing about music. But to get to those nuggets you have to wade through the entire contents of his fevered brain and much of that doesn't bear repeating. And he makes up words.

Larry says

I can't fucking rate this book. Some of the best prose I've ever read about what ROCK is mixed with a reactionary's rants. It did make me think every time he called out bleeding heart liberals like myself but there is so much fucking borderline Elders of Zion stupidity mixed in it was tough to take.

P says

If you want to know what's up with american independent rock music, no other book even comes close to Carducci's. Yes, he's as snobby as french poodle but he's probably sniffed more asses then anyone else so you don't have to. The way Carducci puts it, rock is simply what gets played live, in front of an audience. When the Beatles stopped touring and stayed in the studio, they stopped being a rock band and started their exclusive addiction to pop.

Andrew says

Kind of an eye-opener at times, and nothing if not pithy, though how much it impresses you depends on how much you buy into its central argument. I've got to give credit to the guy for having the balls to state (correctly) that the role of blues in rock has been overstated. But his anti-pop biases are colossally annoying, and his attempts to impose some sort of campaign of eradication of the pop element from rock ridiculous. Also, filled with inane comments like "Amon Duul sold out to no-one in 1972." Really? WTF is that supposed to mean? That Viva La Trance is commercial pop? Are you kidding?

Mark Desrosiers says

Odd coincidence: in 1990 two snarky outsiders decided to recast the rock canon in their own image, thereby exploding rock history in an ecstasy of Spenglerian divination. One was Chuck Eddy, whose Stairway to Hell is hilarious and infuriating throughout, with some great suggestions for metal research. Plus his assumption of prophetic powers (he predicted disco-metal as the future, while the grunge tsunami swelled just offshore) seems both quaint and brave in retrospect.

The other one is Carducci's *Rock and the Pop Narcotic*, which is admired equally by cynical bizzers and self-loathing rock critics. I didn't like it much: an emetic rockist brain stew spackled with some sparse golden insights. The first part features his rock vs. pop dichotomy (which I still don't quite get: he counts Velvet Underground as pop, for example), some interesting viewpoints on drumming, band longevity, and SST Records (though not nearly enough of that last), and far too much baiting of the "fags" (his recurring term) that are ruining rock.

Indeed, Carducci's obsession with "fags" seems irrelevant to his rockist thesis ("get your fag hands off my book" he says at one point to anyone who didn't like Magma), while simultaneously undermining it (Little Richard gets hardly a mention, Queen not at all, Buzzcocks barely). Dare I cite all those social psychology experiments that demonstrate that those who are obsessed with "fags" are likely in the closet themselves?

BUT, the second half of this book -- the "Psychozoic Hymnal" -- is a fun journey through Carducci's bigoted canon. Not nearly as fun as Eddy's iconoclastic metal (cum pop) canon, but it does feature some groovy insights into dinosaurs like West, Bruce, & Laing or Cactus. Plus he gives Saccharine Trust their props (they were always one of my SST faves), mentions both Oar Folkjokeopus and Electric Fetus, and provides the best one-sentence summary of the Mats I've ever seen:

Also in Minneapolis at this time, the Replacements, a young high energy rock band, were skating by on a performance theatre of drunken dramaturgy until later in the decade they learned temperence, at least as far as packaging their rock for rock critics and the collegiate pop crowd.

Furthermore, he seems to love Byron Coley (and I do mean "love"), while dispensing qualified praise upon Robert Christgau of all people (for daring to pitch rock criticism to consumers rather than fellow eggheads and bizzers). He also lusts after Motorhead and the Fall; this is why I added an extra star to this review.

The whole effect is of a jaw-rippling scribbler stewing in his own juices (not sure if he'd moved to Wyoming by this point) -- anti-pop, anti-rock-crit, anti-"fag". Too much nasty; not enough joyful raving about rave-ups.

Whichthat says

Arguably the best and certainly the most blistering aesthetic screed in rock and roll history, a lovingly (and profanely) detailed exploration of an art form and its practitioners and a brutal takedown of the frauds and pharisees who have twisted it to their own ends over the decades (spoiler: Carducci does not like Jann Wenner). If this sounds fun to you, find a copy immediately. If not, save yourself a headache.

Aidan Nancarrow says

There came a point when I said to myself, "If this guy says the word 'britfag' one more time, I'm going to close this book and never pick it back up."

He did and I did.

I keep it on the shelf because I paid 20 bucks for a severely abused copy and I'm too much of a penny

pincher to throw it away.

{Update: I threw it away. It felt good.}

flag Like · see review

Jun 22, 2014 Scott rated it it was amazing

Another reread. I don't think any other book on rock criticism has quite the flavor this one does, nor does any other have the capacity to be thorough as well as a measurement for rock's social impact.

flag Like · see review

Jan 15, 2008 Eric rated it liked it

Shelves: arts-music

A rather exhaustive critical summary of the musicians and bands that comprise rock and not-rock musics.

Very masculine and opinionated writing style.

flag Like · see review

May 04, 2008 Paul Anson rated it it was amazing · review of another edition

everything i NEEDED to know about music is here. from forecasting mp3s in 1991 to the concept of "yeah, but DOES IT ROCK!"

flag Like · see review

Nov 08, 2007 Hater Shepard rated it it was amazing

...

flag Like · see review

Oct 30, 2011 Mrnotarides notarides rated it it was amazing

Best book about rock music ever. Not just about music or history, but how rock and roll works in society and what it represents.

flag Like · see review

Suki Smith rated it really liked it

Apr 04, 2016

Morgan Huff rated it really liked it

Jan 05, 2014

Mike McPadden rated it it was amazing

Apr 16, 2013

Craig rated it it was amazing

Feb 25, 2012

CJ Price rated it it was amazing

Nov 21, 2017

J Eff rated it it was ok

May 22, 2014

Jordan rated it liked it

Oct 20, 2012

Thomas Mallon-McCorgray rated it really liked it

Mar 02, 2012

Matthias rated it really liked it

May 17, 2016

Peter rated it liked it

Aug 22, 2013

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Brendon says

Rock& the Pop Narcotic is one of the essential pieces of rock writing, and Joe Carducci get's damn close to "Bangs-hood" with this extended essay on rock - what it is, what it's not, and why kicking out the jams is still a righteous preoccupation for long-haired lunk-heads everywhere. I'm still reduced to tears of laughter and mirth as fast as I was 20 years ago when I first read his 1 line appraisals/dismissals of rock bands.

Derek says

The best writing about rock music (literally, writing about the music itself) I've ever come across. Carducci is a libretarian right-winger. His version of popular music history and cultural theory, upon which he expounds at length, contains a fair amount of homophobia and sexism. It's up to you to decide if you want to deal with that. I have read this bk multiple times.

Vaughan says

Holy smoke, not for the faint of heart, but this is the best about rock, what it is and isn't, and why Rolling Stone/Christgau/Marcus and almost every other rockwriter for a daily is so stupid. I read the original version of this way back in 1990 or so, before Nirvana broke. Then Carducci wrote a post-Nirvana version and I bought that too and devoured. My original copy has totally self-righteous and indignant notes scrawled over the margins--what an angry young simp I was! Anyway, if you're interested in rock music at all, and ever wondered why your favorite indie band wasn't covered in your local paper, read this and find out why. Of course now the internet has come along and made some of this irrelevant but not much. I want to be buried with this book.

MacDara Conroy says

A tribute to the essence of 'rock', and an indictment of its dilution into 'pop', from the former label manager at SST Records. If you can get over the attitude - and he's got a lot of attitude - his ideas are just as interesting, thought-provoking and worthy as those of Lester Bangs, et al. He brims with enthusiasm for the sounds that a simple guitar-bass-drums set-up can produce, and it shows.

Tobey says

A scathing and highly opinionated look at rock music. Carducci clearly has his opinions and he doesn't care if you disagree with them or not. I found the book intersting but also frustrating at times. I do not want to be buried with this book like Vaughn does but I understand why he would want to.

Joe Lunday says

I've owned this book since 1995, and skimmed key sections many times, but I didn't finally sit down to read it all the way through until recently. Carducci has a provocative and useful concept of small band rock music, and advancing that aesthetic argument (with which I frequently find myself in disagreement) is the primary purpose of the book. In short, he believes 'rock process' occurs when bands with dedicated rhythm sections play together regularly. (So singers with hired session players, groups that favor drum machines - these are all generally outside the definition.) Unfortunately, he devotes nearly half of the text to axe-grinding with the professional music critic press, and railing against various 'scams' - primarily the 'pop scam,' but also the reliably liberal ('commie') culture of rock & pop music writing from the '60s up through the early '90s. While this book was largely penned around 1990, with a major rewrite undertaken for this 2nd edition in '94, Carducci's class-based resentment is the sort of thing that continues to drive a lot of American politics to this day - that of working class people who resent the managerial bourgeoisie and equate any kind of left or center-left politics as unfairly redistributing their honestly-got earnings. But what does this have to do with music? Well, Carducci's class-consciousness drives his greater appreciation of various hard-rock and metal forms than is typical in most rock-crit. (He also doesn't give much of a shit about lyrics.) But he also gets tripped up when he assumes that the ink spilled over critical favs like Springsteen and the Clash is all about politics. (And the VU and Captain Beefheart are definitely 'rock,' no matter what point he thinks he's making here by excluding them from his definition.) The more argumentative sections of the book are a slog, though insightful paragraphs pop up here and there. Particularly confounding is his assumption that the rock press should have been covering 'rock' as he defines it, even when it's clear that most of his don't share his narrow definition of what the term encompasses. (And most professional music critics would not claim to specifically cover 'rock' exclusively, let alone his definition of it.) But Carducci's real-life experience in management of the classic indie rock label SST provides much insight into the American indie rock scene of the '80s, and that pops up here and there. The best part of the book, and the part that makes it worth reading/owning, is The Psychozoic Hymnal, a 150 page final section wherein he maps out the various rock scenes going back to the '50s, describing canonical bands and the interaction of their players, and following up with briefs descriptions of thousands of bands, both known and deeply obscure, and figuring out how they fit into his geographic and aesthetic mapping of the music. The final section makes the rest of the book worth it, but he could have written a much better text by confining the axe-grinding to a brief intro and focusing on his vision of rock aesthetics.

Joseph says

What a horrible book. Not because of the controversy attached to it, but it was boring. I thought there would be more insight to how Black Flag/SST operated from a guy who was part of it all. Carducci's history of rock is good for about thirty-seven pages, not over 300. Many of the bands he uses as references are pretty standard, and his opinions on rock writers/critics are spot on; but I really don't care about someone's concept of what band rocks and what band doesn't. He picks on Crass a lot and to be honest Crass and Black Flag are similar in how they operated. Both had their own record labels, both promoted artists they liked, and although Crass had a more political activist stance with their audience, whereas Black Flag had more of an anti-authoritarian policy of non-involvement with theirs; they both had a message and it's "think for yourself"... Which this book doesn't really want you to do.

I have my opinions on certain rock/pop music, but in the end I'm more of a lyrics guy. I need something I can relate through words that's being driven by the sound. Power is also a big thing. Depeche Mode's "Violator" has that same power as Black Flag's "Damaged". Carducci's writing is all over the place. I like that in a writer but when it comes to rock music and its history it should be more technical and less opinionated. Perhaps fiction would better suit his writing style.

This book is somewhat hard to come by so if you're willing to shell out \$33 dollars just think twice. "Rock" and "pop" will mean different things to everyone. To me "rock" means any music that's powerful, intense, unfiltered, and honest (regardless of speed and style. To me "Kind of Blue" by Miles Davis is a rocking recording), and "pop" means any music that's made for entertainment and has no real creative or artistic value (80's hair metal, KISS, Beyonce, Mariah Carrey). But also there's many rock bands that want pop acceptance, and pop groups that want to come off street. You also don't need a book like this telling you the difference. Just listen to what you like.

Bruce says

A totally different approach to rock criticism
