



Waiting for the Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes, and The Sound Of Los Angeles

Barney Hoskyns

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No city in the western world exerts such a fascination as the damned paradise of Los Angeles. For decades an uneasy mix of glamour and debauchery has served as a magnet for everything venial and diseased.

Waiting for the Sun offers an excavation of L.A.'s dark, detailed, and twisted music scene, from the days of the thriving jazz clubs in the '40s to the menace of West Coast gangsta rap in the '90s. 180 photos.

Waiting for the Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes, and The Sound Of Los Angeles Details

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From Reader Review Waiting for the Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes, and The Sound Of Los Angeles for online ebook

Alex says

read this (or the relevant chunks of it) again while in LA doing the LA PROJECT, and man-- still amazed by how well it takes a sprawling and ineffable subject and, y'know, renders it effable. the only bound works i picked up more times this week were Alan Furst's NIGHT SOLDIERS and the room-service menu.

Mark says

A brilliant and thorough history of Sin City as seen through its music and musicians.

From early rock'n'roll through The Beach Boys, Beefheart, Zappa, Laurel Canyon, Guns'n'Roses and Jane's Addiction to gangsta rap.

Could have spent more time on the quickly dismissed G'n'R years, especially when so much of the book was devoted to the 1970s.

But it's a small gripe. A great book.

Charles McEnerney says

Hear a playlist of the tunes mentioned in the appendix here: <https://tidal.com/playlist/e83bac6a-4...>

Glen says

I've read several books by Hoskyns, and this one is the best researched of the bunch. I learned a lot about obscure LA bands and music figures, and a lot about the music scene of the 40s and 50s. MY own interest in LA music stems from the fact that I grew up in extreme Northern California, where there is a kind of love/hate relationship (mostly the latter) of all things SoCal in general, and all things LA in particular. However, whenever I visited the LA basin I could not deny the excitement and the appeal, and I have had a long and deep love affair with much of the music from the 70s singer-songwriter salad days, in particular Jackson Browne, Warren Zevon, Joni Mitchell, and the always interesting later solo work of David Lindley. I also happened to see Penelope Spheeris' pre-Wayne's World documentary The Decline of Western Civilization during my one semester at Washington State University, and I quickly fled the wheat fields of the Palouse for the sunny beaches of Orange County and UC-Irvine, albeit for a short season, but it gave me a further taste of the SoCal allure and the sounds current at the time: Oingo Boingo, Rank and File, 20/20, Black Flag, Fear, and many other bands both excellent, terrible, and everything in between. They're all here, and though Hoskyns' apocalyptic conclusion reads a little comically now some 16 years after the book's publication, it's well-written and an excellent reference text, and it's hard for me not to love a book that opens with the (to me) immortal lines of Zevon's classic "Desperadoes Under the Eaves": "And if California slides

into the ocean/Like the mystics and statistics say it will/I predict this motel will be standing/Until I've paid my bill."

Jason Koivu says

This is the L.A. music scene through-the-ages as seen through the eyes of a Brit. And why not? After all, so much of it depended upon the English.

Along with the Beatles, the Stones and the rest of the "British Invasion" of the 1960s came a presence - an almost invisible, yet vocal entity in its own way - the record producer. Sound engineers, moguls, and other music movers and techies from the UK descended upon the city of angels, not only producing their own people, but influencing no-name bands eager for a piece of the pie. So, British rock and rollers were front and center as well as behind the scenes and rather quickly much of the sound of American music came to depend on whatever was the flavor overseas.

Yet, *Waiting for the Sun* begins a little further back, as it should. For without American jazz, blues, rockabilly and eventually the earlier stages of rock and roll, there would be no British Invasion. Hoskyns dives deeply into America jazz, specifically the soft and smooth west coast sound prevalent in 1950s L.A. I found this section very interesting, but I was impatient to get on to the late 60s and the Sunset Strip. I had just finished up a three year L.A. "tour of the duty" (as might be said by folks that don't think much of the place). I wanted to learn more and see if I recognized any of the landmarks I'd seen, aka the clubs like the Whiskey-a-go-go and Troubadour, which I'd frequented.

Indeed, the '60s was the section that shines in this book. Hoskyns holds back little when describing the sex, drugs and rock'n'roll that gave L.A. an infamous name for itself. The Doors especially receive their due. Even the title and subtitle refer to them, as well they should. The Doors bled all over L.A. and received likewise and willing sacrifice. For the briefest of moments, they were gods.

But like Hoskyns, I won't belabor that topic. He moves on to the soft, folk/country rock sound that somehow shuffled its way on to center-stage. One wonders how such wimpy stuff could take over from the muscly jock on the block. But I suppose it's not too hard when the opposition keels over: Jimi Hendrix - d. 1970; Janis Joplin - d. 1970; Jim Morrison - d. 1971; The Beatles - d. 1970....

With an aw-shucks grin and bolts of plaid, the likes of James Taylor, America, Bread warmed the airwaves with a heavy blanket of dull. The L.A. scene slept for a bit, woken by the occasional visit from Led Zeppelin, before having its eardrums plucked out and beaten upon by punk. You can tell this is not Hoskyns' area of expertise, because a sorrowfully slim section of *Waiting for the Sun* gives scant detail on the underground craze of So Cal hardcore. The book hurriedly moves on to rap/hip hop and then calls it a day, a generally satisfying day.

Wayne Wilson says

As a former SoCal resident and music/music history fan, I found this book fascinating. You'll learn of the important distinctions between NorCal and SoCal music scenes, as Hoskyns delves deeply into the movements and contributions of notable artists, engineers, record companies...how they all came together

over many decades to give us the stuff we love: From the early East-Coast transplant jass masters to the happen-stance formation of notable group like The Doors, all sub-genres are addressed. A thoroughly researched historical document, as well as a can't-put-it-down book. Read this one for me, OK?

Mrs. Palmer says

In terms of information, this book was a goldmine. It was pretty much everything you ever wanted to know about the music industry in LA starting after WWII.

It is dated, though, as it only goes up to 1996, and some of the language is woefully out of date and it could get very tedious at times reading about groups and albums that I'd never heard of-it seemed like a laundry list of sorts. But, I learned a LOT and now I am inspired to look up some of these more obscure bands. I wish Hoskyns would write an update and include the past 20 years.

Dan Pasquini says

A deeply cynical history of the LA scene, from the '40s through hip hop, but focused on the '60s and '70s.

Cynical because Hoskyns is dogged in pushing his tired, contrarian take: underneath all the fake-plastic-sunshine-and-palm-trees LA is a ruthless, corrupted, dog-eat-dog wasteland. (Ooh, LA is phony! Where have we heard that before?) To him, success is suspect. With the exceptions of Sam Cooke, Brian Wilson and Steely Dan, only the outcasts deserve praise. Only those who never hit it big, because they were too out-there, too unwilling to 'play the game' (never, of course, because they were simply not good enough). And so we have a story of the '60s whose heroes are Kim Fowley and Van Dyke Parks. Marginal figures whose contributions to the dominant sounds of American rock and pop music are vastly outstripped by their cult status and self hype.

Hoskyns' determination to fit the facts around his hypothesis leads to bizarre assertions like this: "Not even the Woodstock Festival, staged in upstate New York a week after the killings, could restore the good vibes of hippie America pre-Manson." What evidence does he give to back up such a bold, revisionist statement? None. Because none exists. In actual fact, there's plenty of video evidence to suggest that the hippies had a damn good time at Woodstock. (See WOODSTOCK, film.) As Michael Walker laid it out in his history of Laurel Canyon nobody knew for two months after the murders that Manson had perpetrated them -- and the '60s only 'ended' when the hippies were horrified to learned that it was one of their own who'd committed the crime.

Then there's the hilariously erroneous read of David Crosby's "Wooden Ships;" the oft-repeated but baseless claim that Neil Young's "Stupid Girl" was a swipe at Joni Mitchell; and a recurring sub-theme that the pop scene of the Beach Boys was a intentionally created as an 'Aryan' statement of white paradise. These glaring missteps call into question the other facts and assertions with which this book is filled.

But full it is. Hoskyns gives us a prodigious connecting of the dots of various artists, labels, sounds and peripheral players. Because he assumes a great deal of familiarity with these references, it's not ideal for beginners.

Mark Desrosiers says

"The Sound of Los Angeles" -- now what does that mean to you? Or anyone? NWA? Black Flag? Tha Alkaholiks? Firefall? Lots of folks will zoom in on the sixties, Beach Boys and Byrds and Doors, and yes this history devotes considerable attention to that very fertile and strange, even demonic era. But Hoskyns really does try to encompass the whole of L.A. music history, from early jazz beginnings all the way up to 1992 (this was published in 1996, but his narrative stops in that grunge-besotted year). Thus, you do get a thin seam of sociology -- particularly the oddly persistent phenomenon of East coast (primarily Jewish) carpetbaggers setting up in town in order to make lots of money from the music scene. Other phenomena -- such as surf culture and nose candy and weepy confessional songwriters -- also get proper attention, but on the whole, this book would be 800 pages thicker if he inserted everything about everything he clearly wanted to put in here, from evil (Manson) to creepy (Eugene Landy) to crazy (Phil Spector). This means that the many awesome interviews he conducted during research are often sadly truncated into soundbites throughout.

I should mention, too, that he really gives heavy metal short shrift -- sure, he mentions Van Halen, Mötley Crüe and G'n'R, but it's like he dismisses the scene as so many pathetic cockroaches feeding on the the greatness of "quality" music. The Red Hot Chili Peppers (zzzzzzzzzzzz) get many more paragraphs than Van Halen. Even worse, after dismissing Guns 'n' Roses as "merely a Xerox of a Xerox of a Xerox: the 1969 Stones via Aerosmith via Hanoi Rocks", he says this of slick charlatan Perry Farrell (who is from NYC, by the way): "This dionysiac guru was a true mongrel, a creature who stood outside even the prevailing norms of rock rebellion." So, yeah, Hoskyns kinda loses himself in ridiculous cock-smoking toward the end -- but on the whole, this is an engaging and insightful history of a wide variety of music scenes in a very strange city.

Murray says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book both for nostalgic and 'educational' reasons. Hoskyns' book is filled with lots of interesting anecdotes as well as tons of facts. He doesn't spend much time really analyzing what made these musicians great -- or not so great -- but focuses more on their lifestyles, glories, fails, and in some cases their tragic demises.

It was fun to read the book with Spotify nearby so that I could listen to the music of some of the more obscure artists. I would recommend doing the same if you can. For the more prominent artists, like Jackson Browne, The Eagles, The Beach Boys, Ronstadt, The Byrds and CSN, there's always the old turntable or CD player.

If you're looking to read strictly about rock and rollers, beware. The book starts in the 1940s when jazz and eventually jump blues were the music of the time and place. Hoskyns doesn't spend a lot of time on these musicians, but does examine enough of their contributions to establish a baseline for Southern California music that came thereafter. He also looks closely at the behind the scenes producers, executives and studio musicians who made things happen. His portrayal of Phil Spector alone will send shivers down your spine -- and this was written years before he went from dangerous schizophrenic to murderer.

I would have liked to have read a more updated version of this book (it was written in the mid-90s), but, honestly, there isn't nearly as much to report since then that would be of high interest.

Steve Duffy says

Terrific overview of the Los Angeles music scene - or, I should say, the Los Angeles music scenes, since Hoskyns takes us from the zoot-suiters of the 1940s to the gangstas of fifty years later, covering everything in between in a series of carefully considered thematic overviews. Maybe the best test of books such as this is whether they send you off to your record collection, digging out old favourites, reassessing old familiars, exploring overlooked gems. By this yardstick **WAITING FOR THE SUN** succeeds handsomely.

Kirk says

I'd forgotten until recently what a fun book this cultural history of the LA music scene is. The scope is impressive: from the late 40s of King and Sinatra to the early 60s of B. Wilson, the late of everybody in the world, and on to the Runaways, hair bands, and assorted other scenesters. I didn't always agree with his estimation of the music itself, but then this isn't a review book. It's a worthy model of how to structure an broad view of a place.

Julee says

Great account of the history of music in La La Land by an almost always topnotch music writer, the West Coast editor of Mojo magazine.

Thomas says

A good survey but the author tried to bite off more than he could chew in this book. Some important acts were covered in 1 paragraph while others had pages and pages (really? Randy Newman? He was given as much coverage as James Taylor!!!) I'd rather have read 3 books and gotten more details about later periods of time that were only touched on here. I did like hearing his opinions come out (We Are The World, etc.) and I'm glad he "got" Janes Addiction, even though he obviously didn't "get" Excene and John Doe's "X".

Suzanne says

Lots of fun for rock and roll fans. Hoskyns' research yielded some great stories. There is a lot of detail, minutiae even, on the personalities involved, their personal lives, the creative process, business dealings, and how famous and not-so-famous bands came about and worked together. In the chapters on the sub-genres I was less interested in, I did some skimming, but most of it was really entertaining. Got some real insight into just how crazy Phil Spector was even way back (and we know how that turned out), how one of the seemingly squeaky clean Beach Boys hung with the Manson crowd, how the Mamas and Papas were living

the high life --in so many ways-- in Laurel Canyon. And much, much more, through punk and hip-hop, with an epilogue essay on Beck. If you've ever wanted to know how records like "Don't Eat Stuff Off the Sidewalk" came to be recorded, this is the place. (Not a well-known piece of music, but always good advice.)

If I had one complaint, it was that one of my favorite bands, Lone Justice, got only one mention on one page. OK, so they only made two albums, but they were so remarkable, especially notable for their stunningly talented front woman, the incomparable Maria McKee. One of the most amazing performers I have ever seen, she also gets only one mention, and there's nothing at all about her subsequent solo career. I'll stifle my outrage and still give the book 4 stars.
