

mainstream and the *Partisan Review's* intellectual critique of mass culture and society' (p. 186). Yet Brooks also recognised that this postwar (jazz) modernism was ceding to a new kind of (pop/rock) postmodernism, in which mass culture might not be rejected, but reused and meaningfully remade. It's not always easy to care about the composer's years of notes-to-self towards enlightenment, but Ford develops this material into a concluding meditation on a private 'practice without perfection' (p. 220), and a return to the book's Zen beginnings. The author's final message is here, in a defence of simply doing culture, and doing it outside the late-capitalist, whitebread world. If there's a naivety to the notion that a quiet, personal, artistic practice can somehow exist as pure agency outside social structure, then that's part of the writing's heart-on-sleeve hopefulness. The book's hazy historical vision clarifies at moments like this into a sharper critical mode, one which is contentious but – as those hipsters might have said – kind of beautiful.

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### ***Rockin' the Free World! How the Rock & Roll Revolution Changed America and the World.***

**By Sean Kay. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. 292 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4422-6604-9**

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This book is full of good people saying and doing good things. They decry injustice and inequality; they support human rights and freedom. They raise money for humanitarian causes; they participate in education schemes; and they campaign for change. The author has secured an enviable roster of interviewees, from David Crosby and Graham Nash to Jann Wenner (2000; of *Rolling Stone* magazine); from Sinead O'Connor to Kate Pierson (of the B-52s). He has also drawn attention to a wealth of events and initiatives – the furore heaped upon the Dixie Chicks, the imprisonment of Pussy Riot, Live 8, Rock the Vote, and the music education scheme Little Kids Rock.

Yet while *Rockin' the Free World* is populated by good people and good things, I am not altogether sure it's a good book. The subtitle – 'How the Rock & Roll Revolution Changed America and the World' – creates a false impression. Readers will not find direct evidence of a 'revolution' or direct evidence of how any change – revolutionary or not – resulted from rock 'n' roll. Instead, we get to hear a lot about people who *think* that rock 'n' roll changed the world, but little evidence that it did. We learn a lot about what musicians *think* about the state of the world and how it might be better, but it is often unclear why their views are any more insightful or informed than anyone else's. And sometimes they might be less so. David Crosby

is quoted as saying: 'The only sane thing we can do about the Middle East is get the fuck out' (p. 115).

Part of the problem is that it is never entirely obvious what is meant by 'rock 'n' roll'. Is it a specific (US?) genre or is it late-20th century/early 21st century popular music in general? In the Introduction, it is described as 'more than a music form – it is an idea, an attitude, a way of thinking about the world' (p. 1). Yet who might be expected to articulate the idea or the attitude? Mostly, it seems, those typically associated with rock – there's little about hip hop, and there's a sly dig at ABBA for getting inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame ahead of various rock luminaries (Yes, B-52s, Joan Baez) (p. 150).

At various points Kay refers to the 'rock and roll ethic', without saying what that involves either. He writes, for example, that the 'rock and roll ethic' has 'sustained' the value of equality. It isn't evident how and when this happens, especially considering the inequalities that scar the music industry. It seems that Kay is appealing to a more prosaic version of Greil Marcus's *Mystery Train*, where the American Dream and the US Constitution are articulated and explored by musicians. Yet where Marcus finds it in the sounds and the songs, Kay looks to what musicians say in response to interview questions ('The key players in growth are not entrepreneurs; they are consumers. And if consumers don't have proper wages, they can't buy shit' – Billy Bragg (p. 48)).

It seems that, to Kay, musicians are blessed with special powers. He suggests that 'U2 were crucial to shedding light on injustice on both sides of the Protestant and Catholic divide in Northern Ireland' (p. 81). It is true, as he points out, that the band played a part in the peace process, and that many of their songs referred to Irish politics, but grander claims need more in the way of supporting evidence and argument. Elsewhere he writes of the *American Idol* runner-up, Gedeon Luke, that he 'is an artist whose trajectory transcends the deep pockets of inequality in America' (p. 57). I'm not quite sure what this means, but it would seem to be making substantial claims for the musician's powers or talents. Yet again, there is limited support for these assertions.

Later sections deal with activism and the industry. There are fascinating accounts of how musicians and activists come together to support various non-profit organisations or to reform the way the music industry operates. Yet even here there is little or no attempt to theorise the relationship between music and politics or to engage with the now quite compendious academic literature. Instead, we hear a lot about rock's rhetoric, its claims to 'revolutionary power' (p. 6).

Of course, we may be over-supplied with worthy and earnest tomes on music's politics, and readers should welcome the original interviews of the many actors who contribute to music's politics, but they might also expect a more critical and reflective attitude to what those voices say. How and when do musicians get to be figures of credible authority or to claim to 'represent' the people? Why do they take up some issues and not other? And what is special or distinctive about music – as sounds, as opposed to soundbites – as a form of political communication? (Readers might also expect correct spelling of Odetta (not 'Oddetta'), Kenny Loggins (not 'Logins') and Kacey (not 'Kasey') Musgraves.)

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