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[Review of] The Guinness Encyclopedia of Popular Music

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The Guinness encyclopedia of popular music, ed. by Colin Larkin. Guinness Publishing/New England Publishing Associates, 1992. (Dist. by New England Publishing Associates, P.O. Box 5, Chester, CT 06412) 4v. 3,295p bibl indexes ISBN 1882267001, \$295.00

Larkin, British book designer and popular music journalist, has edited a far-ranging collection of brief, pithy articles on popular music, including rock, jazz, blues, soul, country, reggae, Latin music, and popular music from Asia and Africa. The entries (more than 14,500 ranging from 150 to 3,000 words) include performers, bands, writers, labels, Broadway shows, musical instruments, and instrument companies from around the world (with a focus on the US and Britain) and across the 20th century. Entries include a history of the topic, with birth date and locations for individuals, a discography, and selected readings. The unsigned entries, composed by a team of mostly British writers, are solid yet have plenty of subjective commentary (e.g., Dexy's Midnight Runners are the object of extreme admiration, with phrases like "brilliantly fashioned," "extraordinary," and "superb"). Entries have many boldfaced cross-references, although some are blind (e.g., those to John Prine and World Party, certainly entries that should have been included). Other notable absences include Peter Himmelman, Adrian Belew, Poi Dog Pondering, and The Call, yet coverage is extensive, with entries for rock and jazz greats and little-knowns as well as Lawrence Welk, Danny Kaye, Andy Williams, Carmen Miranda, and Ethel Merman. Errors are rare but evident: Stealin' Horses is still recording, albeit on an independent label, and has not disbanded; the Who concert fan deaths occurred in Cincinnati, not Cleveland; Three Dog Night drummer Floyd Sneed was born in Canada, not the US; KGB recorded two albums, not one. Most entries are correct, informative, and timely (the Freddie Mercury AIDS Benefit Concert of April 1992 is mentioned) with an extensive index and a solid bibliography finishing off the work. The index shows several construction flaws, including numerous page references under specific names with no indication of the entry or the volume they appear in. Larkin projects four editions culminating in a 20-volume set. For libraries that want a basic guide to the major figures in rock music, Donald Clarke's *Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music* (CH, Feb'90) is adequate, but Larkin's work is essential for libraries that support serious study of popular music.

--R. A. McGill-Aken, *University of Kentucky*

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