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[Review of] Rock's Backpages

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[Visited Apr'08] Editor Barney Hoskyns, former Mojo editor and author of rock music commentaries (including Hotel California, 2006), heads a solid British popular music press team that includes Mat Snow, another Mojo editor as well as writer for Q and New Musical Express (aka NME). Through a robust search engine, users may access full-text articles (presented in text-only HTML with a print-friendly option) by keyword, and also use drop-down boxes for limits or direct access to specific years, subjects/genres, writers, publications, and artists/bands. The long drop-down boxes (which require pop-up capability) can be hard to manipulate; they restrict limits to one choice per category. Available articles were written from 1963 to the present and come from influential publications, both current (e.g., NME, Rolling Stone) and defunct (e.g., Creem, Musician); major newspapers (e.g., The Guardian, San Francisco Chronicle); and many obscure zines and unpublished sources.

Coverage of each publication varies widely; e.g., of the 12,000-plus articles available at the time of review, some 1,930 were from NME but only 4 from Billboard. This erratic coverage is author-specific. Although major writers such as Lester Bangs, Greil Marcus, and Dave Marsh are represented, others such as J. D. Considine, Jon Landau, Robert Christgau, and Robert Palmer are absent. Works include reviews, interviews, and feature articles on over 2,000 artists. About 125 audio interviews can be heard as MP3 files or in RealAudio format. An e-mail distribution list lets users know about the 30 or so items added each week. All features work well on Mac and Windows platforms with various browsers. Libraries that support significant popular music and culture programs will want this resource for its unique full-text coverage and convenience, but they will need to educate users about coverage limitations and the need to search for information in additional tools such as International Index to Music Periodicals Full Text (CH, Apr'07, 44–4192) and RILM (CH, Sup'04, 41Sup–0164). Summing Up: Recommended. Lower-level undergraduates and above; general audience.

—R. A. Aken, University of Kentucky

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