6-1999

[Review of] The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Rock

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Notes/Citation Information
Published in CHOICE, v. 36, no. 10, 36-5381.

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Digital Object Identifier (DOI)
http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.36-5381

This review is available at UKnowledge: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/libraries_facpub/135

Billboard, in conjunction with Virgin Publishing, has made available this "edited down, updated" version of Colin Larkin's concise edition of Virgin Encyclopedia of Popular Music (1997). Much of this material also appears in The Virgin Encyclopedia of Rock (1996) and The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Rock (1993). The full, multivolume version first appeared as The Guinness Encyclopedia of Popular Music (CH, Mar'93; 2nd ed., CH, Sep'96; 3rd ed., The Encyclopedia of Popular Music, CH, forthcoming'99). The present version emphasizes 600 glossy, uncaptioned pictures ("the creation of an illustrated version out of a much bigger, words-only reference work has necessitated some, not always desirable, shortcuts"). Some 1,800 entries cover songwriters, musicians, and producers and include bandmember names, birth dates, and instruments played. Boldfaced cross-references are included in brief essays (e.g., 2 p. for Bob Dylan). Sidebars include primary albums (with star ratings), collaborators, videos, and page references to complete discographies. Typos are not uncommon: the Three Dog Night sidebar runs together two album titles (Captured Live at the Forum and It Ain't Easy) to create "Captured Live It Ain't Easy". Some entries are very current, while others (e.g., Graham Parker's) end with 1992 events. Van Morrison's Astral Weeks, one of the most influential albums in rock history, is barely mentioned. A number of good guides are available: the excellent The New Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll (1995) has more substantial entries with occasional black-and-white photos. Recommended only for collections that need glossy photos of rock artists.

--R. A. Aken, University of Kentucky

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