



Music: What Happened?

Scott Miller, Bob Lloyd (Foreword)

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Scott Miller has released more than a dozen albums with his bands Game Theory and the Loud Family, and his music has been described as "a cross between Alex Chilton, James Joyce, and the Electric Prunes" (Stereo Review) and "smart, funny, and instantly memorable" (Rolling Stone). In this book, Miller writes about each of the past 53 years in popular music-1957-2009- via countdown song lists, blending the perspectives of a serious musician, a thoughtful critic, and an all-devouring music fan. Miller not only tells you why he loves particular songs, but also what was going on in the musical world in which they competed to be heard.

Music: What Happened? Details

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From Reader Review Music: What Happened? for online ebook

Tom says

A fantastic book of lists although the songs from this century just rubbed my nose in how old and out of touch I am.

Taylor says

If you love music criticism like I do, this book is an absolute quotable must. R.I.P. Scott Miller; I'm sorry to have made your acquaintance posthumously.

Tankboy says

Miller proves that well-written capsule reviews are still a viable art form if you have the skills. The first couple decades especially helped reinvigorate some of my own views on music writing in extreme short form.

Micah Joel says

This is a must-read book for anyone who listens to music. Scott's perspective on things is just perfect, and I've discovered all kinds of great music I was only dimly aware of before. My only regret, and it's a doozy, is that I didn't read this (or even know about it) while Scott was still around.

Paula says

Smart, incisive, and often funny musical commentary, arranged year by year. Cover art is worth the price of admission.

John says

Starts strong, peters out around 1980. He has a big focus on production.

Ray says

I knew Scott Miller when he attended UC Davis in the mid-70's. I really liked his bands Alternate Learning and Game Theory. He used to shop at a record store I managed and we bonded over Big Star and Chris

Stamey records.

Basically, he reviews his favorite songs by year from 1957-2009. Almost all of the songs are on YouTube. Most of the reviews are great, but I especially like his viewpoint from 1977 forward. He relates to the newer bands as musical peers and brings a fresh perspective to what makes a song great. His review of Big Star's "Back Of A Car" is the longest review and he clearly connected with it musically. I know that Scott was making similar music well before he heard them. One of the great pleasures of this book is to listen to some of the more obscure songs cited here. He doesn't always pick the best known songs on the albums. He chose songs for the unique arrangements, production and more importantly, the emotional connection. I listened to a good number of the songs on YouTube and found more than a few of them to have similar composition management to his Game Theory songs. I enjoyed his dry humor too. For example, he describes Springsteen's "Candy's Room" as a "cross between The Raspberries and Rambo".....

Josh says

Scott Miller was the creative force behind Game Theory, a smart, literate 1980s indie-pop band in the vein of The dB's, early R.E.M., and The Go-Betweens that was criminally undervalued, and The Loud Family, a 1990s powerpop band I'm less familiar with. He died suddenly and unexpectedly a few months ago at the age of 53, and I was surprised to learn from his obituaries that he'd written a book of music criticism. It's not your ordinary rock crit book. Miller picks a group of his favorite songs (anywhere between 12 and 22) from 1957 to 2011 and writes a paragraph about each one. His insights about why he loves the songs he does are intelligent, unusual, articulate, enlightening, occasionally maddening, sometimes frustrating, and often funny. Really funny. He's not a perfect guide. He has major blind spots (country, hip-hop, riff-based garage rock and metal, the more abrasive, avant-garde side of postpunk) though he owns up to them and still manages to include several examples of each, he's a much bigger powerpop nut than I am, and some of his picks are baffling (Blues Traveler? Indigo Girls?). However, the majority of his choices are excellent, and the writing is always great. He approaches each song with the same enthusiasm, whether it be a major hit, an obscurity, a critics' favorite, or a cheeseball guilty pleasure. And I have to trust a guy who loves Guided By Voices almost as much as I do. As a fellow obsessive music fan, I made a playlist of these songs as I read the book, and I would have loved to sit down with him over a beer and talk about music.

James says

I learned a lot, especially about alternative 1980s-2000s music. Author had very particular tastes in music - but that's OK. This is an interesting look into one (very talented) music-lover's mind.

Dirk Heinz says

I enjoyed the picks each year and the reasons for the choices. He mentions re-edits of some of the songs that would be cool to hear. I wonder if anyone has put together youtube playlists of his picks. The picks already forced me to look up a dozen songs at least that I had never know about from artists I like.

Stephen Parker says

This is a charming little book of criticism that pretty much travels in the direction that you think. Miller is wry, sharp, envious and analytical in equal measure. It's refreshing to see a musician with such a wide breadth of knowledge while working on his own albums (though hip-hop/R&B could use a whole separate volume given how ignored it is here). The book works best when Miller articulates the nuts and bolts of the songs he loves. His writing on Kirsty MacColl's "Free World" and Sufjan Stevens's "Casimir Pulaski Day" sent chills down my spine and were worth the price of the book. Recommended for music obsessives, power pop fans, and anyone who can tolerate a conversation about chord progression.

Chris says

I'll keep piecing my way slowly through this for years, and it's something I'll read and re-read in perpetuity. Music writers that can form their opinions concisely and precisely are always going to be textbooks to be studied for me -- I can do neither. Miller stands out from the Christgaus, the Shaar Murrays, the Ira Robbinses of the world by being able to talk not just about songcraft or emotional impact, but also the secrets of recording and production wizardry and the creation of pop classics. Most writers don't know anything about how a record gets made, how it's nuanced (or not) in the studio, or how that certain sound or style can affect a band, or even a musical era. Miller can lead us through "the dire years" of the late '80s, when it was all DX7 synths and line-in guitars and electronics, as well as the eras where the sound of a live band is favored, to the betterment of the recordings.

Like I say, lots in here to come back to over and over.

Daniel says

This is a beautiful book. I own three copies and my mother owns at least five copies. She had a brother that owned a copy, and our neighbor borrowed one of my copies and returned it to me only after he purchased his very own copy.

So that's roughly three plus five plus one minus one plus one plus one copies of this book in our neighborhood alone, minus the one copy belonging to my mother's brother since he lives out of state.

Anyway, where has Insane Clown Posse been all my life?

Jeff says

I found myself disagreeing with, or being disappointed by, a fair amount of what Miller had to say in here -- but that's part of what a book like this is about; it's just one guy's opinion, and whether or not you share it, Miller presents his eloquently and with clear passion.

Grant says

Miller has a great ear and casts a wide net to find his favorite pop songs from every year since 1957. My tastes overlap with Millers (particularly in the 60s and 90s/00s), and where they don't, it's typically because I simply haven't heard the songs he's writing about. In that way, it's a great wishlist for me as I venture into the musical past with my album purchases.
