Ripped: How the Wired Generation Revolutionized Music

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A decade ago the vast majority of mainstream music was funneled through a handful of media conglomerates. Now, more people are listening to more music from a greater variety of sources than at any time in history. And big corporations such as Viacom, Clear Channel, and Sony are no longer the sole gatekeepers and distributors, their monopoly busted by a revolution -- an uprising led by bands and fans networking on the Internet. "Ripped" tells the story of how the laptop generation created a new grassroots music industry, with the fans and bands rather than the corporations in charge. In this new world, bands aren't just musicmakers but self-contained multimedia businesses; and fans aren't just consumers but distributors and even collaborators.As the Web popularized bands and albums that previously would have been relegated to obscurity, innovative artists -- from Prince to Death Cab for Cutie -- started coming up with, and stumbling into, alternative ways of getting their music out to fans. Live music took on an even more significant role. TV shows and commercials emerged as great places to hear new tunes. Sample-based composition and mash-ups leapfrogged ahead of the industry's, and the law's, ability to keep up with them. Then, in 2007, Radiohead released an album exclusively on the Internet and allowed customers to name their own price, including $0.00. Radiohead's "it's up to you" marketing coup seized on a concept the old music industry had forgotten: the customer is always right.

National radio host and critically acclaimed music journalist Greg Kot masterfully chronicles this story of how we went from $17.99 to $0.00 in less than a decade. It's a fascinating tale of backward thinking, forward thinking, and the power of music.

Ripped: How the Wired Generation Revolutionized Music Details

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From Reader Review Ripped: How the Wired Generation Revolutionized Music for online ebook

Christopher says

Kot examines the influence of the internet on the music industry, portraying the behemoth record companies as the Goliath that have fallen against the stones of the artists and fans that have harnessed the power of the internet to transform the way music is made and distributed. Specific chapters include the stories of Metallica, Arcade Fire, Death Cab for Cutie, Prince, Conor Oberst, Radiohead, and Pitchfork Media as examples of the various ways technology changed things. While at times the portrayal of the record executives as stone age-era businessmen who could not adapt becomes overwrought (it is more likely that the record industry was like the U.S. economy--an oversize ship that couldn't just be turned on a dime), the overall thesis is spot on, thought not directly stated: fans "stealing" music has a salutary effect on record sales. The more artists give away, the more they will sell compared to if they do not give away. This is a concept that never caught on wholesale in the industry, as exemplified by the Napster lawsuit. But savvy artists learned it quick and have benefited from it. Overall, Ripped is an enjoyable read, though I wonder if teenagers who never waited in line outside a record store at midnight, would find it relevant.

Two sidenotes: Kot wrote a bio of Wilco, and while I don't listen to Wilco I know a lot of my goodreads friends do, so thought I would share that.

Also, I don't think the book is released yet. I received an advance copy from the editor and would be glad to pass it on.

Katy-Del says

I just received an email that I am getting this from the First Reads Drawing!!!

Nothing is as good as free books

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This was a great non-fiction book. Some Non-fiction books, no matter how interesting the topic, are really boring and hard to get through. Greg Kot succeeded in creating a narritive that really explained what happened in the late nineties to the music industry. Massive conglomerates started buying up small labels as money makers, often dumping fledgling bands before they had a chance to develope a following. At the same time, the same thing was happening in commercial radio. Music labels and radio stations had always had a relationship where labels would pay to have their bands played on the air. With the playing field becoming more and more limited, more homogenous, people began looking in other places for new music.

Personally, I saw the results of all of this with out knowing what was really happening.

Napster became the first big place to search for music using peer-to-peer file sharing. Napster made it easy to exchange music, where it was a much more difficult process before. All the big labels could see was the drop in CD sales. I think that was an inevitability of their own creation. In the 15-20 years CDs had been around, there had been almost no price drop, despite lowering manufactures cost. Music manufacturers were in no mood to meet consumers halfway and chose to fight music sharing with lawsuits instead of using the new

market of internet music to promote their product. Artist could see the possibilites of using the internet as a marketing tool. But artists like Tom Petty were punished for releasing free songs to the internet public.

Mr. Kot shows some bands that have become successful because of the internet. They had contracts with labels who weren't supporting their music and promotion, so they promoted themselves, or were promoted by fans who just wanted to spread the word. He also points out that bands who were not ready for such attention went down in flames after initial internet buzz.

Mr Kot traces the rise of itunes, and points out that, on a $.99 song, the artist still only gets about 17 cents, while apple gets 36 cents. He also outlines ideas that have been presented to have internet service providers charge a surcharge to consumers and make all music on the internet free. Of course ISPs don't consider this their problem and don't want any part of the suggested solution.

The internet has caused major labels lots of fuss, but some artists have embraced it as a way to sell directly to their fans. Radiohead, Prince and Trent Reznor were all mentioned as artists who have become more free to create the music they want without the interferance a major label contract comes with. Trent Reznor was disappointed by the sales of his first produced artist he sold on the internet. Lots of people downloaded it for free and only a fraction chose to buy a higher quality copy. Considering it was a hard core rapper that talked about giving reperations for slavery, I might have gone to listen, just because it was produced by Trent, but I wouldn't have chosen to buy it and probably wouldn't have kept a copy. I think it might have been more a choice of taste than a choice to get it for free.

I really enjoyed the book, and I have a new understanding of how music ends up on the radio. (I am mortified thinking of how much money must have gone into promoting the Barbie Girl Song!) I even went and listened to some of the artists mentioned in the book. I don't think I will keep any of them as music I listen to all the time, but it all shows a fascinating chapter in music history.

Zhuojun says

Biased, misleading, and worst of all, ignorant of the basic principles of business and economics.

Blog on Books says

In honor of the recent Grammy week in L.A., we thought it would be a good time to touch base with Greg Kot's recent book, 'Ripped: How the Wired Generation Revolutionized Music.'
Kot, the music critic for the Chicago Tribune and co-host of the syndicated radio show Sound Opinions, chronicles all the major events of the past decade relating not so much to the so-called decline of the music business, but the way in which smart and clever artists have made new and interesting uses of the technology that some would say is at the root of the problem for the music business.
'Ripped' is the first book (that we've seen) that covers nearly all of the major developments in the tech/music revolution and does so without the often veiled accusations and pejorative tone that surrounds much of the discussion of the decade (not once, for example, does he say 'record labels missed the boat by not embracing Napster.') Instead, Kot sheds light on numerous examples – from Prince's free CD in the UK's Daily Mail to Radiohead's pay-what-you-like album 'In Rainbows' to DJ Danger Mouse's banned 'Gray Album' to the sample-based act Girl Talk, that give rise to an alternative way of getting music to an

enthusiastic audience using an array of new tools and interesting concepts.

Along the way, we get the backstory of webzines like Pitchfork, the rise of bands like Death Cab for Cutie and Arcade Fire and a treasure trove of ideas to build upon for expanding music's influence into the future. While Kot's POV is definitely Chicago and midwest centric (there's little serious mention of Silicon Valley or companies like imeem, iLike, ReverbNation or Artist Direct, save the Lily Allen/YouTube and U2/iPod references), 'Ripped' serves as the best compendium to date of the keystones of the disruptive culture embraced by the alternative music community. A serious must-read for anyone who makes their living in recorded music today – particularly those at the top.

Oscar says

Greg Kot's new book examines the role of king maker as the music industry shifts from local radio to the age of Clear Channel to the MP3 era with a clear time-line, a mix of public knowledge and behind-the-scenes interviews, and an optimistic view of American music's future for a concise overview of 21st century music trends.

Kot is at his best when talking about the emergence of Wilco and Arcade Fire, two bands that benefited greatly from early internet exposure. The chapter detailing the rise of *Pitchfork* magazine and how its grassroots approach to music reviews transformed it from an indy sensation to internet voice of power shows the double-edged sword which is the pluralistic voice of the net.

I could have done without the rehash of Napster's rise and fall since it has little new information to an old subject. Ditto with commentaries on Metallica and Steve Jobs. One piece of info left out is how American Idol's online voting is affecting the buying habits of consumers and directing the future of pop music marketing.

If you're wondering why some bands (especially banal ones) continue to get massive airplay and internet pushes, curious where the next "big thing" is coming from, or how in the hell a small time indy band turn big overnight, *Ripped* is a good place to start reading.

The Brain in the Jar says

I expected to me a a lot nerdier than it was. I thought it was going to be one of those books only read by people who have 1000 ratings in RYM and get into serious arguments in last.fm shoutboxes. I would've been okay with that. I'm such a nerd. Instead, it turned out to be more like a supplement to *Free Culture*, only focused on music with less jargon.

That means that even if finding new music is not part of your everyday activities, you might still want to read it. Even the most casual listeners are downloading now, so even they might want to know the history of the whole thing. In fact, I think most of us take for granted things that ten years ago seemed surreal. In the acknowledgement page, Kot documents a respond one guy had to the mentioning of MP3's - "What the hell is that?". Nowadays, people know what is an MP3 before their age hits two digits.

Although it gets its point across and avoid targeting a very narrow audience, it still commits some obvious mistakes. It champions the indie culture heavily over the Evil Major Label one, creating a David/Goliath

situation. Anytime you're met with that, there's good reason to doubt the David. For example, Kot praises the artists who made political music in the wake of 9/11 and the War on Terror, which he sees as something spread by the hard work of the artist and the audience and not the label, thus something more 'authentic' and 'independent'. Unlike him, I see most of these artists as bandwagoners who had nothing to say but wanted to stay relevant. They not have played Catchy Guitar Rock Against Bush on the radio, but maybe the record label knew it didn't that to get that stuff selling.

That type of political music spread because it was catchy and appealed to angry teenagers who wanted to rebel. In depth political music that contains more than slogans - The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, Corporate Avenger, remains obscure.

I digress. Kot also turns some of the chapters into band profiles rather than examples of how they came to fame via the internet. Death Cab for Cutie's and Arcade Fire's chapters in particular, turned out to be a fan telling the story of his favorite band. The chapter involving Bright Eyes seemed almost detached from the subject. While I enjoyed these subjects, I think most readers - who probably listen a lot less music than me - would get a bit bored.

The best parts were near the end, when the iPod and iTunes emerged - another thing we take for granted - and Radiohead's and Nine Inch Nails' shit-starting. In fact, I think NIN deserved a bit more pages. Kot forgot to mention that there's a section in the website devoted to nothing but fan remixes, and that Reznor gave away plenty of multitracks for his songs so fans could remix (That means that you can actually re-create the whole song in your computer. Reznor pretty much gave all of Year Zero for free). One fan remix even appeared on an official release.

It's a book that begs to be expanded. The dragging in the middle is redeemed by the great end and beginning, and Kot's stance is admirable - He wants the artists to get paid, he wants the audience to enjoy the music and that all of the tiny businessmen on the side will get a lot less money than they deserve. Some will think Kot advocates illegal. What I saw more is demand that artists will get paid more. Whenever he writes about the way the profit from CD sales and such is divided, you can feel his *anger* when he mentions the artists only gets 10 percent. His anger is justified. This whole industry relies on the artists, in the end. If they didn't create the product, all those businessmen would have nothing to sell.

I wonder what Kot would have to say about the Brostep scene. It deserves its own chapter in an expanded edition that will hopefully arrive. You're talking about a scene full of remix competitions, free giveaways (Datsik's released his second LP for free. Most record labels have a lot of songs available for free download, not to mention the tons of mixes that are given away for free) and their independence. The most prolific artists of the scene - Skrillex, Datsik, Excision, Skism, Downlink, Zomboy are all on independent labels* which also happen to be the big 'tastemakers' of the scene. The next time someone writes a book about Music on the Internet, he must mention these guys.

*I might be wrong, but last time I checked anytime something was released through these labels it never mentioned being also released through a major one.

KAOS says

this felt very immediate and succinctly (and entertainingly) covered how the music industry has struggled over the past decade with the advent of MP3s and how bands have successfully promoted themselves over

the internet (and sometimes in spite of their own record companies). with chapters, interviews and/or sections devoted to radiohead, nine inch nails, wilco, the arcade fire, bright eyes, and others, it was fun and insightful to read about how technology has really changed the face of music.

a favorite quote from thom yorke really sums up the current state of the traditional record label: "they've already sold the back catalog twice, at inflated prices, and developed no new artists in the meantime. and now people have discovered they can copy music on the internet for free. oh dear, now what?"

the history of napster (and metallica's boneheaded reaction), the ridiculous "go after anyone" mentality of the RIAA suing peer-to-peer file sharers, and OK GO's use of youtube to revive a stalled career are all covered. i'm not sure how well this book will age, but that's not the point - it's a great overview of where music fans and the industry have departed from one another, and does not surmise to have answers for what will happen next.

as a chicagoan, i really enjoyed kot's many references to our city (i love reading about shows i attended) and as a music fan who hasn't purchased a physical cd since 2005 but is continually learning about new bands and finding new music to love, this was a really well-done history lesson of a time not yet past.

oh, and the publisher sent me an advance copy to read and hopefully post a review, which i just did. i would have liked it even if it wasn't free.

Gabriel says

If you are considering reading this book and you are not an immediate part of the music industry, then you should. Most likely you will learn something or find a new way to justify your method of finding the music you listen to.

Greg Kot's book has done a great job of consolidating most of the information about the wireless revolution and its impact on the music industry. It is a very biased take (as most historical documents are, but this does little to mask who Kot believes the "bad guy" is), but one that has lots of great information packed in it. He maps, for instance, the evolution of the mash-up from the art of sampling in hip-hop. Granted, it seems obvious once told, but I must admit that I hadn't really thought of the two as correlated till Kot described it.

It is also important to look at this book now as so many companies and the like are looking for ways to take control of the internet and the music on it. The Napster battle is only the beginning, after all. We are living in an age where piratebay is being sued and their members are possibly also looking at litigation. A time when many different artists have been using the internet for many different reasons.

The danger in writing this type of book (and keeping it to a slim 250 pages) is that you will always leave stuff out. Momus, for instance, is an artist who had his fans pay him $1000 per song (look up Stars Forever sometime for the full story) to combat legal fees, and also has a paypal account up on his website since the early part of the 2000's for people to give him tips (not to mention his blog, once noted as the most popular livejournal). Also missing are a history of mixtapes. When the only mention of hip hop is in regards to mash-ups and Kanye West, the genre is (unconsciously) being dismissed. The same can be said about country, which only is mentioned in regards to protest songs. Similarly, nothing is mentioned about non-English speaking bands except the band Molotov (who sings in English and Spanish).

Of course, I've grown up with these thoughts. I was there while it was happening. This book acts as a great refresher course and still stimulated my mind in quite a few ways. I hope other books follow to document the future of music as it happens. I know that I will be recommending Ripped to students and offer it as a summer reading choice in the future. There is too much good stuff here to be ignored, and if the big industries begin to take notice of this book, then maybe we will see a feasible and exciting future for the entire music industry.

Gus Sanchez says

Greg Kot examines the role of the Internet in bringing the consumer, i.e., the music listener, back into the picture in the music industry over the past decade. As broadband Internet has become more prevalent, access to music, either via download or streaming media, has become easier, but not without a price; the RIAA's reluctance - outright hostility, really - towards embracing the Internet forced fans to seek alternate routes towards acquiring music that was already too expensive in traditional format; the meteoric rise of Napster bore fruit to hundreds of other file-sharing browsers. The RIAA's ridiculous, archaic stance also forced artists from their own labels to seek alternate routes in distributing their own music. The most eye-popping example was Radiohead releasing *In Rainbows*, via the Internet, without the help or funding from a record label, and allowing fans to name their download price.

While Kot admirably paints the struggles of both the artists and the fans to regain control of music, he fails to document the downside to this so-called "revolution". As brilliant a strategy as Radiohead's *In Rainbows* distribution was, it could have easily blown up in their face; it took a tremendous leap of faith for the band to commit an entire album in this fashion, but the consequences did exist, and should have been more clearly noted. Kot also fails to document how every revolution in music bears unintended fruit - the DIY status of music, and making it readily available for immediate consumption doesn't guarantee success; for every struggling artists carving their niche on various social networking sites, you've got other artists like Lady Gaga and Soulja Boy who, while orginating online, have become yet another disposable product of the RIAA's Public Relations Machine.

Overall, it's an interesting read, but it would have served both the subjects and the book's readers a more thorough analysis and prognosis regarding the future of wired music.

Ben says

Ripped is a decent basic overview of the digital revolution but Kot completely avoids the negative consequences of illegal file sharing from the small artist's perspective, preferring instead to point out the admittedly hysterical reaction of the Big 5 and RIAA. But the real victims of illegal file sharing are regular working musicians.

For every success story like the Arcade Fire or Death Cab For Cutie, there are a thousand other bands that will die on the vine because of illegal file sharing. In the past, these niche bands were able to survive by cultivating a dedicated audience that would pay for recordings; but at this point an entire generation of music fans has grown up with the notion that paying for music is for suckers. This has resulted in good bands with a decent fan base simply being unable to record at the rate they once did or, in some cases, at all. Mainstream bands, and bands riding current trends, are stronger than ever. Interesting, unique, edgy bands are the ones

being squeezed out. Now if Kot doesn't believe this is the case, fair enough. But to not address the issue at all is a major, massive oversight. Bands with a dedicated fan base ought to be able to continue to ply their trade; that many no longer can is a tragedy. And by the way, it's really bad for the future of music, too.

Phil Simon says

An excellent look at the rise of digital music. It's fascinating to hear about different artists' attempts to circumvent record companies, the necessary evils of traditional distribution and marketing. Kot does a great job of providing different examples of artists' innovation in this well-researched, compelling book.

Donna says

This was my first free book to read and review.
This book is more for the younger generation and how the music industry failed to stay current with the internet. I found the book a little tiring in some spots only because I personally am not current with today's music scene.

I am a teen from the 60's and will forever be a flower child. When I was a teen, the radio stations played great tunes, we listened, bought the singles, then the whole album. We weren't interested in what the big record companies were doing or how much of our dollar was going to the artist, there was no such thing as a "bottom line."

Through the years, I've searched in vain for that one station that would continue to play my tunes. I changed with the times, from 8 track to cassette to CD and loved copying my tunes. When napster came about, WOW more music. And what a variety. But I still had a hard time finding my 60's music on CD.

This book points out how the music mogels failed to change with the times and cater to a large group of people coming of age in the 40's, 50's 60's and 70's. And instead of acknowledging their mistake, they proceeded to slap the hands that fed them with lawsuits and copywriting infringements against us for copying tunes from napster.

This book is well written in that it shows how the whole music business has evolved from the cheap recordings taken to the local radio stations by the artist in hopes that they will get air time, to the wonders of the internet and how small, obsucre groups are able to have their music heard on Youtube by millions. Now this is pure, unsensured, freedom of choice!

Donna Freeman

Lauren says

While this book was a little more business and numbers oriented than I'm used to,
it was very informational and interesting. I learned a LOT about the music business
that I could've guessed at but never actually knew. This book is now a bit old so I'd
definitely be interested in learning more about what has changed since its publication.

But, I'm glad I took the time to read through this book even though it took me a bit.

Steve says

As the title indicates, Kot's book follows the digital revolution and it's impact specifically on the music business. Being born in 1981 and fairly tech-saavy, this is a revolution I fully participated in and continue to live through. Kot did an excellent job capturing some of the key points in the timeline and explaining those events in clear terms without dumbing it down.

As a 'music downloader', I was surprised that Kot was able to recount events that I was unaware of, or had slipped under my radar (Wilco's issues with Yankee Hotel Foxtrot in particular). I was equally surprised when Kot missed other milestones (NIN's free, download-only release of "The Slip", though he does cover their "Ghosts I-IV" album that came out two months prior).

The book suffers from over-indulgent passages on Wilco, Radiohead and Conor Oberst. Admittedly, these artists fall outside of my tastes, but Kot focuses too heavily on their growth as musicians and too little on their role leading the digital revolution. I would have liked less "Where'd they come from" and more "What did they do to change things". While the cover art suggests that Kot will discuss the transition from 8-track to cassette to CD to iPod, he focuses entirely on CDs-and-beyond. But, I suppose it would be difficult to visually represent MP3s, piracy, social networking and the internet.

Overall, Kot has put together a successful book that vividly explains the majority of the transitions the music industry has experienced in the last 15 years. He provides a historian's viewpoint: never speculating on the future or directly weighing in on the circumstances that caused the revolution. He allows the artists to give their views and the readers to form their own conclusions. Strongly recommended to fans of music, technology or change.

Ellie says

Kot examines the role technology has played in shaping the music industry and how these entities (Internet, MP3s, MP3 players, music software, etc.) have come to replace CDs, records, instruments, the snobby knowledgeable friend. Kot's arguments are well-researched and his catalogue of quotes from artists, producers, managers, lawyers, and fans make an obvious case against the record label/management juggernaut, which by all accounts is not giving any favors to the artists. At times, the writing is loose, arguments trite and chapters meandering from one point to the next. However, Kot, a music critic, really hits his stride when describing the music. He becomes nearly lyrical as he describes Death Cab's Transatlanticism album, the complexities of overlaying samples on Girl Talk's The Night Ripper and many others. His love for music really shines through these descriptions. On a personal note, I read myself often in these pages. I grew up taping songs off the radio in the 80s, cultivated my tastes and downloaded thousands of songs (using university servers) in the 90s, perused Pitchfork for the next "it" band in the 00s.