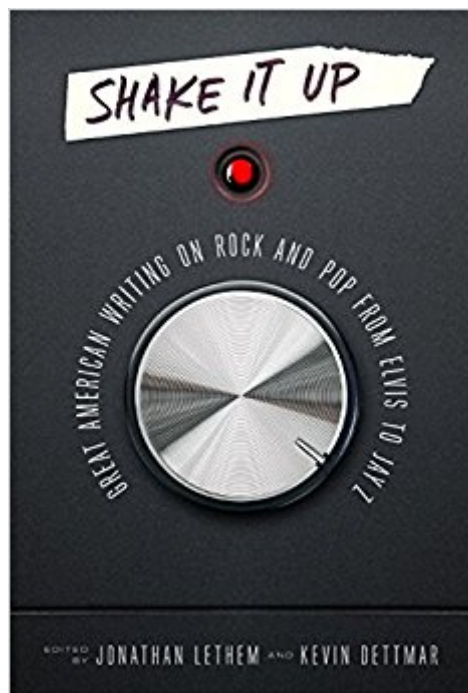




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# Shake It Up: Great American Writing On Rock And Pop From Elvis To Jay Z: A Library Of America Special Publication



## Synopsis

### THE ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST OF GREAT WRITING ABOUT THE MUSIC THAT ROCKED

AMERICA— Jonathan Lethem and Kevin Dettmar's *Shake It Up* invites the reader into the tumult and excitement of the rock revolution through fifty landmark pieces by a supergroup of writers on rock in all its variety, from heavy metal to disco, punk to hip-hop. Stanley Booth describes a recording session with Otis Redding; Ellen Willis traces the meteoric career of Janis Joplin; Ellen Sander recalls the chaotic world of Led Zeppelin on tour; Nick Tosches etches a portrait of the young Jerry Lee Lewis; Eve Babitz remembers Jim Morrison. Alongside are Lenny Kaye on acapella and Greg Tate on hip-hop, Vince Aletti on disco and Gerald Early on Motown; Robert Christgau on Prince, Nelson George on Marvin Gaye, Luc Sante on Bob Dylan, Hilton Als on Michael Jackson, Anthony DeCurtis on the Rolling Stones, Kelefa Sanneh on Jay Z. The story this anthology tells is an ongoing one: "it's too early," editors Jonathan Lethem and Kevin Dettmar note, "for canon formation in a field so marvelously volatile—a volatility that mirrors, still, that of pop music itself, which remains smokestack lightning. The writing here attempts to catch some in a bottle." Also features: NAT HENTOFF on BOB DYLAN, AMIRI BARAKA on R&B, LESTER BANGS on ELVIS PRESLEY, ROBERT CHRISTGAU on PRINCE, DEBRA RAE COHEN on DAVID BOWIE, EVE BABITZ on JIM MORRISON, ROBERT PALMER on SAM COOKE, CHUCK KLOSTERMAN on HEAVY METAL, JESSICA HOPPER on EMO, JOHN JEREMIAH SULLIVAN on AXL ROSE, ELIJAH WALD on THE BEATLES, GREIL MARCUS on CHRISTIAN MARCLAY and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Excellent. . . . A feast of rock writing, freewheelin', funny, and deep." [Bruce Handy, New York Times Book Review](#) "A vivid cross-section of a half century's worth of American music writing. . . . Lethem and Dettmar have made their selections both rightly and righteously." [Jack Hamilton, New Yorker.com](#) "There are so many hits that this smart anthology mostly feels like a dream jukebox." [Dwight Garner, New York Times](#) "Will remind you of just about everything you love about music." [PopMatters.com](#) "Pop writing, at its best, doesn't know the difference between desire and theory, which is precisely the reason for its power and its persistence. Lethem and Dettmar's expansive anthology renders this wild, polychrome tradition, and the state of play today, with gusto." [Ben Ratliff, author of Every Song Ever](#)

JONATHAN LETHEM is the author of *The Fortress of Solitude* and nine other novels; KEVIN DETTMAR is the author of *Is Rock Dead?* and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*.

An astute, well-edited compendium that belongs on most (but probably not all) shelves of late-20th c. pop criticism. There are a few inclusions that pale in comparison to the majority, and certain authors may have been better served by the inclusion of other (to my mind, better) samples of their work, but, all in all, this volume is worth every penny and every minute spent on it.

Wonderful stories from fabled journalists and writers from the best music journals and magazines! So much interesting tales I'd never known about before.

Each story was a rich account of music and culture. Even those of musicians I don't even like.

"I don't make culture, I sell it." Dick Clark. "If the best thing the Slits ever did were to pose in mud and loincloths for 'The Cut' cover, I'd be satisfied." Carola Dibbell. This book presents a good selection of some of the best writing on rock and pop music, with a good cross-section of writers and rock/pop music. As rock music (and pop to some extent) grew and morphed so did the writing about it. And

not just straight album (or singles) reviews which were relatively amateurish in the early days, but actual thoughtful writing on the subject--artists, albums, and rock/pop music's place in our culture. Beginning with noted music writer Nat Hentoff's '63 piece from Dylan's "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan" album, Amiri Baraka's '66 essay (excerpted here) on Black musical culture, Paul Williams' '67 analysis of the Stones' "Their Satanic Majesties Request" album (and other albums), Stanley Boothe's '69 piece on being in the studio with Otis Redding, and Greg Shaw's '77 "In Defense of Rock Theory", you get some idea of the breadth of writing included here. Also here are pieces on Prince (Robert Christgau), Janis Joplin (Ellen Willis), the Slits (Carola Dibbell), Solomon Burke (Peter Guralnik), The Ramones (Sam Eddy), Sam Cooke (Robert Palmer), The Beatles (several essays and authors), and Ray Charles (David Hadju). Plus pieces like "Emo: Where The Girls Aren't" (Jessica Hopper), "Live At The Apollo" (Douglas Wolk), "Word: Jay-Z's Decoded and the Language of Hip-Hop" (Kelefa Sanneh), "Love and Hope and Sex and Dreams: Punk Rock, Disco, New York City & the Triumph of the Rolling Stones' "Some Girls" (Anthony DeCurtis), and more. This book isn't meant to be an overview of rock/pop, but a focus on some of the better writing from the last half century or so. But focusing on the writing does put a focus on the music written about. Plus we learn a little more about the artists through the incisive and insightful writing from both well and lesser known writers. But all of them have a few things in common, a desire and the talent to put down in words something valuable about rock and pop music. Will you gravitate (like I initially did) toward subjects you like? Yes. But reading about music/artists that don't appeal to me as much as others did broadened my outlook a bit--and that's a good thing for just about anyone. This is a book for music fans who want to go deeper into rock/pop music writing and enjoy good, thoughtful writing on the subject of artists, albums, songs, and the philosophy of music on and in our culture. This book covers a lot of thoughtful, more intellectual ground, and its wide-ranging reach presents some of the best writing on the music. The best of these essays will probably make you think (and hear) rock/pop music with a slightly different perspective--and that could be a good thing for all music fans.

While the one bad review here is insipid, mostly, this collection is, not surprisingly, uneven. Mr. Poirier gets off to a bad start by writing that Paul sings "I'd love to turn you on" on A Day In the Life, and over-analyzes Sgt. Peppers to the point of one wanting to call bull doo on that. Hentoff, Bangs, Goldstein are all good but most people who have followed rock/pop since the '60s know their work. If you are a completist or a sociologist of pop music culture I think this is probably a good representative collection. If you are more fanatic about the music and mostly don't get swayed by

what's written about it, pass this up. I should have. I would say 2.5 stars if I could.

i have read about a third of this book and enjoy the thoughtful writing. a few of the artists i do not care for but their articles at least make them interesting as a read. good book overall. thanks

A lot of babble.

I expected more

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