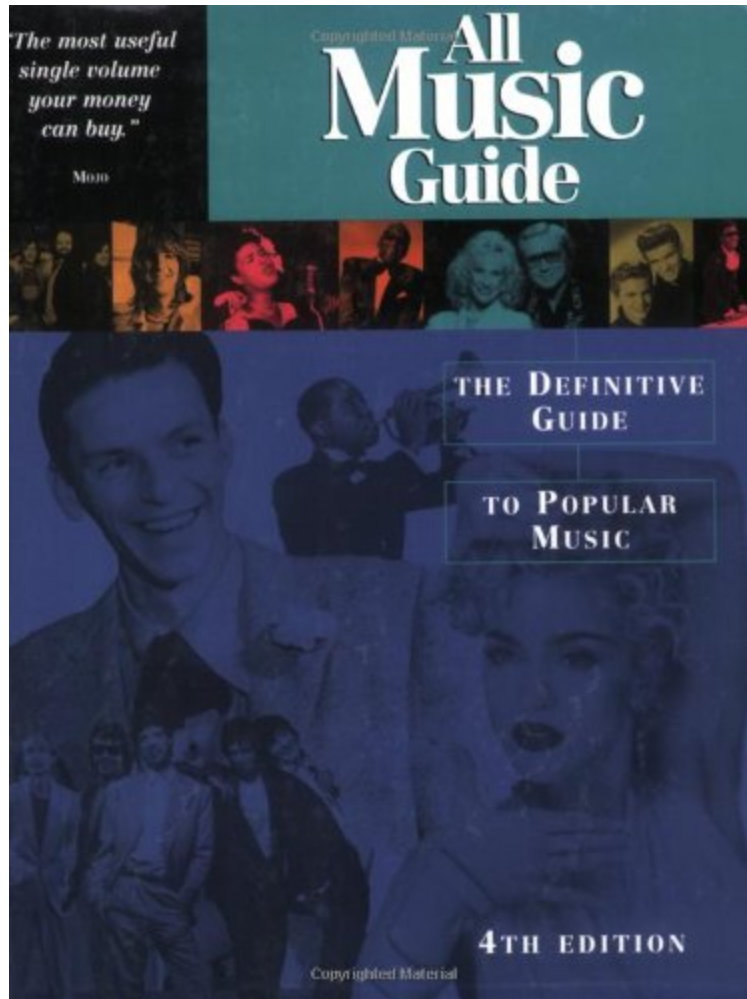


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All Music Guide: The Definitive Guide To Popular Music, 4th Edition

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Given the comprehensiveness, popularity, and timeliness of the free All Music Guide web site (www.allmusic.com), one wonders whether an abridged print version is needed. Still, it's hard to ignore the pleasures of browsing this highly entertaining tome, now in its fourth edition, which provides guidance on the best music from virtually all popular (i.e., nonclassical) genres. Over 20,000 albums and 4000 artists are represented from the worlds of rock, blues, country, jazz, rap, folk, gospel, reggae, avant-garde, and more. The book is arranged into 16 genre chapters, each beginning with an overview of the genre and its various subgenres or "styles." (Tabs on the page edges would have facilitated thumbing to a particular genre.) Artists are listed alphabetically within each chapter, making the comprehensive index crucial for determining the genre under which an artist is listed. Unfortunately, the index is off by a few pages for artists in the fourth chapter (Gospel) through the end. Each artist entry includes vital statistics, styles played, a biographical sketch, and a selective list of albums. All albums are rated from one to five stars, with additional symbols denoting recommended first purchases and albums that are essential representations of a genre. Signed reviews from scores of contributors accompany the most significant titles. (Beware: an album's rating and review do not always jibe. Also, ratings and reviews in the book may differ from those found on the web site for the same album.) Other features include music maps (a sort of family tree outlining the history and key artists of a genre or style) and sidebar articles on topics such as Caribbean music styles and English and Celtic folk instruments. While still selective, the All Music guides (there are also separate volumes on rock, jazz, blues, country, and electronica) tend to provide more detail and analysis of an artist's oeuvre than the MusicHound, Rough Guide, and Rolling Stone tomes. All in all, patrons are better off using the truly comprehensive web site, but this is the best of the print sources. Recommended. Lloyd Jansen, Stockton-San Joaquin Cty. P.L., CA
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