

THE HEART OF ROCK 'N' ROLL: READINGS BETWEEN THE SHEETS

Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* dished up the debauchery of Tinseltown, confirming many fans' darkest fantasies. His film *Scorpio Rising* celebrated the unspoken homoerotic implications in '60s pop. The pop hit "He's a Rebel" was matched to suggestive shots of S/M bikers. Anger was handing out the concealed, secret history of pop—reclaiming it—which is what the best pop books do. The current paperback *Midnight Movies* by Hoberman and Rosenbaum (Harper, \$9.95) is a fine example (which includes the goods on Anger). The authors write of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* that it "translated many intellectual and avant-garde ideas about sexuality and culture into terms that teenagers could relate to," pinpointing a subversive power that has been crucial to rock 'n' roll. Appropriately, another new book—*Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth* by Philip Core (see review p. 52)—includes such rock artists as David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Bette Midler, Lou Reed, Grace Jones and Boy George in its roster of camp heroes. As Core deciphers these *flirtations*, the indefatigable Boyd McDonald has bowed in with the fifth volume of his "Straight to Hell" series, *Juice* (Gay Sunshine Press, \$12), another collection of graphic recollections of gay sexual adventures by a slew of contributors that demonstrates deliciously how timid even "daring" pop has been in acknowledging homosexuality. It is a history, like many, that is a pleasure to claim.

Most pop stars are fairly reticent about baldly announcing sordid details of their sex lives, but Little Richard has never been anyone's average pop star. Author Charlie White interviewed the man, his family, friends, former producers and

band members for *The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Quasar of Rock* (Harmony, \$15.95). I suppose *quasar* is the scientific equivalent of "Mad Queen." Sadly, I've seen only an excerpt from the book. But critic Greil Marcus told me: "There are informed discussions of his music, lots of photos and a fine discography. But what is remarkable is that Richard is so fucking *frank* on the very things you'd think he would cover up. There are astonishing sexual stories, including homosexuality and orgies. The book is about fucking, sucking and making music. And when it comes to sex, Little Richard is saying, 'People do these things and it is fun.' There are no regrets. The book ends with a sermon, but the only thing Richard sounds contrite about is using dope." Track this book down.

I have read about 10 other new pop books. Here are the briefs. First: Be wary of glossy, hardback doorstops. *Rock Stars* by Timothy White (Workman, \$35) is beautifully designed by J.C. Saures, but the glib, abrupt profiles of 41 stars (from Robert Johnson to Prince) are history as a special issue of *People* magazine. White claims that rock is really about artists selling their souls. I reckon any author who picks Carly Simon and Stevie Nicks as rock avatars while ignoring Van Morrison and Patti Smith doesn't know enough about soul to discuss one. *Bob Dylan* by Jonathan Cott (Doubleday, \$35) features lots of terrific photos and a staggeringly reverential, erudite, humorless text. Cott is still defending Dylan's disastrous movie *Renaldo and Clara*. For Chrissake, grow up! *David Bowie's Serious Moonlight* by Chet Flippo (Doubleday, \$35) is the sorriest tome of the three: a smug celebration of Bowie's recent tour as an impeccable commercial enterprise. Rent the video but skip this blather.

For a tour book worth the read, find Stanley Booth's terribly titled *Dancing With the Devil* (Random House, \$16.95). Today, the Rolling Stones are boring old pros. But in 1969, when a 27-year-old Booth joined them for an American tour that culminated in their disastrous free concert at Altamont, he was embarking on a project shot full of promise and panic that became profoundly entwined with his own personal destiny. Despite the melodrama, Booth retrieves the quality of that time—both harrowing and hilarious. It took him 15 years to do it, and the book is a gem.

Come Together: John Lennon in His Time by John Wiener (Random House, \$10.95) is a beautifully researched account of Lennon's political involvement dating from his time with The Beatles until his death. The book illuminates the era with artful accounts of the choices Lennon made and their circumstances. Wiener is both critical and sympathetic of his subject. He has interwoven reams of material he obtained from FBI files on the agency's surveillance and harassment of Lennon. The results are remarkably funny and suspenseful. They also paint a scary picture of governments' fears of the power of one pop star.

Nick Tosches is one brilliant mad-dog writer (author of the stunning biography of Jerry Lee Lewis, *Hellfire*). In *Unsung Heroes of Rock 'n' Roll* (Scribners, \$8.95), Tosches makes a brief for the artists who set the stage for Presley and Chuck Berry in what the author calls "the dark and wild decade before Elvis." Tosches profiles 26 artists, most of whom were fringe country-music acts and mainstream black pop artists. It is hard to resist a writer who begins one profile with "Wanda Lavonne Johnson was, simply and without contest, the greatest menstruating rock 'n' roll singer the world has ever seen," and another chapter with "Screamin' Jay Hawkins stayed drunk through most of the psychedelic sixties." Then again, Tosches' authorized biography of Hall and Oates, *Dangerous Dances* (St. Martin's, \$10.95), is recommended to only their ardent fans. And no, the book suggests that neither is gay.

The picture book to track down obscure artists from the late '40s to the late '60s is *Rock Archives* by Michael Ochs (Doubleday, \$16), which features 1,100 too-small black-and-white images, including Joan Rivers in a '60s folk trio, Gladys Knight on Ted Mack's *Original Amateur Hour* and Elvis chatting with Sal Mineo. The book suffers from a lack of captions under the photos and of dates telling when the shots were taken. But pop fanatics may still be thrilled.

My favorite reference book remains *The Rock Yearbook 1985*, edited by Al Clark (St. Martin's, \$13.95). This latest in the series from England features a diary of events, U.S. and U.K. charts, genre essays, profiles of the "Acts of the Year," a feature on best and worst LP covers, and reprints from competing weeklies of capsule reviews of all the rock releases in the past year: pithy to ponderous, irreverent and delightful.

Finally, highest marks to *When Cameras Go Crazy: Culture Club* by Kasper de Graaf and Malcolm Garrett (St. Martin's Press, \$7.95), replete with a mother lode of pictures of Boy George—from baby shots, through high school, and in all of his various incarnations. This book provides a fine illustrated history of the band, pics of George and Jon Moss kissing, and a swell shot of George grasping a bouquet, captioned with "Boy George turning U.S. youth into homosexuals."

That's beating Kenneth Anger to the punch.

—Adam Block

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Boy George:
When Cameras
Go Crazy