



Siren Song: My Life in Music

Seymour Stein , Gareth Murphy

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The autobiography of America's greatest living record man: the founder of Sire Records and spotter of rock talent from the Ramones to Madonna.

Seymour Stein is America's greatest living record man. Not only has he signed and nurtured more important artists than anyone alive, now sixty years in the game, he's still the hippest label head, travelling the globe in search of the next big thing.

Since the late fifties, he's been wherever it's happening: Billboard, Tin Pan Alley, The British Invasion, CBGB, Studio 54, Danceteria, the Rock n Roll Hall of Fame, the CD crash. Along that winding path, he discovered and broke out a skyline full of stars: Madonna, The Ramones, Talking Heads, Depeche Mode, Madonna, The Smiths, The Cure, Ice-T, Lou Reed, Seal, and many others.

Brimming with hilarious scenes and character portraits, *Siren Song*'s wider narrative is about modernity in motion, and the slow acceptance of diversity in America – thanks largely to daring pop music. Including both the high and low points in his life, *Siren Song* touches on everything from his discovery of Madonna to his wife Linda Stein's violent death.

Ask anyone in the music business, Seymour Stein is a legend. Sung from the heart, *Siren Song* will etch his story in stone.

Siren Song: My Life in Music Details

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From Reader Review Siren Song: My Life in Music for online ebook

Don says

Ironically, I read this book just a few days after it was announced that Stein was leaving Warner Music Group, his record label home for the last 30 plus years (probably involuntarily). Stein is probably the last living participant in the '50s-early '60s era when independent record labels thrived in the U.S. and had not yet been overwhelmed by the "major" labels. That era, and those independent labels, were full of colorful characters. I had, for a long time, hoped that Stein would write about that era and this autobiography certainly covers that ground. While he doesn't devote as much time and attention to that period as I would have wished, he does give some real insight into the independent label scene.

One flaw--this book could have used better copy editing. I noted several errors that should have been caught and corrected. For example, he refers to the (very much alive) Roy Bittan of the E Street Band as "the late Ray Bittan", and at the back of the book he refers to Jerry Goldstein as "Jerry Goldstone". I'm sure there are other errors here.

Mitchell Kaufman says

A tale of life in the music business. If you ignore Sy's self-promotion, it is an interesting history and indictment of the big business of music.

Debra Komar says

Readable and for the most part entertaining (how interested you might be in the childhood of a relatively unknown person depends on your taste...). I suspect that, like me, most people will be reading this because of Stein's role in "discovering" bands like Talking Heads, Ramones and other NYC greats from the 70s. There are some good stories scattered throughout but not enough to warrant a full book. I was left frustrated and wanting more.

It is clear Stein has his favourites and is curiously silent (or has been "edited" into civility) on a few key characters. Stein has no problem speaking his mind on some people in his orbit but is evasive on others. He is surprisingly honest about his homosexuality, his marriage and his absentee fathering. His ego is large and often on display but I was left with the sense that the music mattered most.

Jon Chaisson says

An excellent memoir from one of my heroes from the music biz. He talks about his humble beginnings as a teenage intern at Billboard to his move to King Records and finally creating Sire in 1977. Over the course of the next two decades he'd sign an amazing number of core bands from the early days of alternative rock -- and coining the term 'new wave' because 'punk' didn't quite fit. He can be coarse and unrelenting towards many of his former associates, but it's never with malice. A fantastic story of one of the best A&R men out

there.

Jay Gabler says

Full of details about the record industry and the life of one of its all-time great A&R guys. That said, this is a tough read if you're not particularly interested in how all that sausage gets made. I reviewed *Siren Song* for The Current.

John Spiller says

"Siren Song" by Sire Records head honcho Seymour Stein is the 1975-1985 analog to Joe Boyd's excellent autobiography "White Bicycles: Making Music in the 1960's" or maybe Jac Holzman's "Follow the Music". If you enjoy books about the "business of music" or are simply a huge fan of punk/new wave/indie music from the mid 70's to late 80's, you will find much to enjoy.

Stein describes himself as a music fan first and foremost with vinyl running through his veins. He parlayed a weird obsession with Billboard Magazine into a job working under Syd Nathan at King Records. (If you know who Syd Nathan is, then you, too, should read "Siren Song".) From there, he created Sire Records and made his name by signing The Ramones, Talking Heads, Madonna, among others. (Making his seed money for the label through Focus and Climax Blues Band!) Throughout the book, Stein takes pains to align himself with other "music first" executives such as Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler of Atlantic against profit driven music execs such as Mo Ostin of Warner Brothers.

There are interesting vignettes on Dee Dee Ramone trying to seduce him, meeting Madonna for the first time in the hospital as he was being treated for endocarditis, and the fraught interpersonal dynamics of Talking Heads. He doesn't hide the warts. He admits to being a largely absent father to his two daughters. He had a combative relationship with his ex-wife, Linda Stein aka Linda Ramone. He was a big cokehead. Warts and all, Stein seems like a genuinely nice person, which has to be some kind of accomplishment for 50+ years in the music business.

Larry says

Wonderful story about a true music business legend. Couldn't put it down. Loved all the stories about his passion for signing bands and the dirt he dishes on so many other big music business characters. If you are a Sire Records fan this is the story told by the guy who created it all.

Don Gorman says

(2 1/2). This is a good but not great memoir. What is great is the music history involved. That, and the evolution of a young Jewish kid from New York who follows his dream and is able to live it. Music is one of my main interests, and this is another important read for me. Lots of interesting stories, lots of bands and records you have never heard of, but lots of hidden gems as well. Music historian nuts rejoice!

Spencer says

Easily the best record exec book. Nobody did more to bring punk, new wave, and weird UK indie bands into the homes of mainstream Americans as Stein. His tales of his early years at Billboard and King records is also of great historical value. A must for any serious music geek.

Steve Erickson says

A worthwhile read, but pretty self-serving and shallow. Some of the most interesting passages deal with Stein's youth at the indie King label, which is best known for releasing James Brown's early music but put out a lot of pioneering early rock'n'roll. The long run Sire had before punk gets short shrift; the Ramones and Talking Heads really made the label's name, as well as the indie bands it licensed from UK labels like 4AD, Creation, Mute and Rough Trade (such as the Smiths, Modern English, My Bloody Valentine and Depeche Mode.) Stein speaks with great pride about being able to sell half a million copies of every Smiths album with no commercial radio play and minimal US touring. Of course, Madonna was Sire's best-selling artist, and he writes about her initial rise (she was only offered a three-single deal at first.) He also writes with pride about signing Ice-T but neglects to mention the controversy over "Cop Killer," which first led to that song being dropped from Body Count's album and the rapper then getting kicked off Sire. The final chapters of the book are a great documentation of how major label consolidation and monopolization have made it impossible to run a label with the kind of personality Sire had in the '70s and '80s now: he discusses the way Sire's deal with Warner Bros., which began in 1977, enabled the Pretenders and Talking Heads to reach a level of commercial success they couldn't have achieved with independent distribution, but in the 2000s, Sire got folded into other Warners-owned labels and he lost control over it until he was able to run it as a commercially marginal pseudo-indie (he mentions the artists recently released on Sire, and I'd never heard of any except Paul Shaffer and Cyndi Lauper.) And around the time this book was published, Stein quit Sire altogether. Considering that he's now 76, that might have been his decision to retire or he may have been forced out. Stein discusses his personal life, including how homophobia led him to marry a woman and his feeling that he never exactly "came out" (although he talks frankly about his gayness), here, and his thoughts about his gayness are not totally woke by today's standards, but they're probably honest for a man born in the 1940s.
