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Punk isn't a sound--it's an idea! In its history, K Records has fostered some of independent music's greatest artists, including Bikini Kill, Beat Happening, Built to Spill, Beck, Modest Mouse, and the Gossip. In 1982, K Records released its first cassette and put its own spin on punk's defiant manifesto: You don't need anyone's permission to make music. Thirty years later, the label continues to operate in the underground while rightfully claiming a role as one of the most transformative engines of modern independent music. It has also galvanized the international pop underground, helped create the grunge scene that took over pop culture, and provided a launching pad for the riot grrrl movement that changed the role of women in music forever. *Love Rock Revolution* tells the story of how it all happened, recounting the early journeys of K Records founder Calvin Johnson from the punk mecca of London to the hardcore clubs of Washington, D.C., in the late-'70s, the creation of K Records in the '80s, the label's role in revolutionizing independent music in the '90s, and its struggle to survive that revolution with its integrity intact.

Love Rock Revolution: K Records and the Rise of Independent Music Details

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From Reader Review Love Rock Revolution: K Records and the Rise of Independent Music for online ebook

MM says

Reading up on Olympia.

Charlie says

I'm deeply torn about this book. It is full of intriguing, useful information, including much of the backstory for a lot of music I was only semi-aware of in the past ten years, and the book contains many great stories about how people interact and collaborate and experiment. And yet, the book frustrated me deeply as it seemed to be a Calvin Johnson hagiography more than a journalistic history; the exhaustive and exhausting detail for some stories contrasted with the breezy dismissal of others (e.g. the very careful explanation of how Calvin Johnson crossed the Canadian border without his passport has more detail than his conversation with K Records co-founder Candice Pedersen before she leaves the label) was deeply distracting.

I'm glad I read it but I wish it had been written with either more personal connection by the author or in a much more journalistic, neutral way. Reading the book felt like listening to a drunk tell you a story about your ex-girlfriend.

Amy says

I liked it, mostly because I think the punk rock way of doing things (DIY, handshake deals, hard work, fuck corporations and chains) is still the best way of doing things, and the K people seem like good people. But this story gets a little mired in the details at the beginning -- the first several chapters seem to be about every single show Calvin Johnson attended as a teen -- and leans heavily on the 80s and 90s, then glosses over the last 20 years. Plus, how can there be no pictures?

Eryk Salvaggio says

I wish it got a little deeper and a little broader at the same time. Kind of a "who did what when ok now it's 2014 bye" style of book. Seemed unnecessarily rushed.

Trevor says

I love K Records and, being a music dork, I am happy that a book about them came out this year. Smiles.

meredith ann says

if you're a fan of independent record labels and a strong DIY ethic, i suggest you read this book, even if you know nothing about k records.

love rock revolution isn't so much about k records as a label but how that label came to be and all the contributing factors that brought it to where it is today (still an indie label, doing things themselves). there is history about beat happening, since k's founder was a member and they were important to the founding of the label; as a beat happening fan, i enjoyed this.

surprisingly, i did find that it didn't always paint founder calvin johnson in the best light, making the book a better read. usually works like this - where the author is working closely with the company - don't have anything that could be portrayed negatively. i was a bit taken aback at the stories from tobi vail about johnson's reluctance at all girl band shows (which he quickly made up for).

i did wish there was some talk about k records and the "popularity" of twee pop but again, this was about the making of an independent label that remains so today. (i can vouch for that - my order from them last week came with a "thanks, meredith!" written on the package.)

Amanda says

Lots of good information on the formation and operation of K Records, perhaps some factual errors, but enjoyable, probably even for someone without a lot of previous knowledge about the culture surrounding K Records, Calvin Johnson, etc. The sidenote about what indie culture is were really awkward and unneeded. Seems like anyone that was reading this would get it.

Also, my cat's name is Calvin Johnson.

Ian says

I longed for this book 10 years ago, and yet, it wouldn't have been what I was looking for then. In college, I was obsessed with the Mirah, Little Wings, the Microphones, The Blow. These bands formed a crucial new wave in sound and energy for K Records, but this book is really about founder Calvin Johnson and the DIY spirit and philosophy of a truly independent label during its most formative years.

There's so much ground to cover and so much mystery surrounding the label and its founder that Mark Baumgarten does a great job weaving histories together in a very clear, no-nonsense, journalistic style. K listeners are often dedicated, passionate fans, and while there's plenty of music to dive into, the stories behind the music haven't been told like they have for other influential movements. When I heard Baumgarten read to an audience in Anacortes, during the K Records-affiliated Unknown Festival, it occurred to me that basic connections/relationships between pivotal characters in story of K were explained in the book, but may have been unknown to fans. My feeling is there are assumptions about some of the who's and how's and why's of K, but the questions aren't often asked or answered.

And so, while the "unknown" can be sexy, and mystery is definitely a historic vice of the Northwest and its

musicians, it's also refreshing to have these stories, told first-hand, possible for the first time. I hope this means there will be even more to come.

Evan Brown says

Some Velvet Sidewalk's Al Larsen coined the term "love rock" in his music manifesto: "When Sonic Youth do 'Kool Thing' they are love rock. Or when Beat Happening trade roles, singer to guitarist to drummer. When Nation of Ulysses makes an absolute sincere mess or when the Melvins play, three people as one. These people create music about the most important thing going: the transformation of society. And each one suggests possibility...All ages shows in Grange Halls across the land. Engaging. Enacting. Ennobling...Let's. We. Free. Go, love rocker." Calvin Johnson, always pushing for change and action, added the word "revolution" on the end for a concert poster and it turned out to be an appropriate slogan for his label, K Records, and the burgeoning music movement in the Pacific Northwest.

"Love Rock Revolution" documents K Records' lifespan from the early 1980s to date, impressively positing a wealth of information in just 250 pages. The book also functions as a pseudo-biography of K Records' founder and Beat Happening frontman Calvin Johnson who is certainly the most important indie rock figure of Olympia, WA and arguably one of the most influential and encouraging characters of the independent music scene in general.

The book is written in narrative form and Baumgarten's voice welcomes the reader in without even the slightest air of condescension. He has a distinct ability to tell a story and generally avoids the all too common temptation to over-write. Of course Baumgarten is also afforded one of the most compelling and eccentric central characters in Calvin Johnson. Johnson expressed his doubts to K Records' story being of any interest. Truth be told, it is interesting.

"Love Rock Revolution" outlines Johnson's hard work, dedication, and incredible outreach to fans, zines and other labels and musicians. He started a label with cassette tapes sold in select shops and ended up garnering world-wide attention. This all culminates in one of the most important and yet relatively unheard of musical festivals of the past three decades: The International Pop Underground Convention.

From 45 singles to LPs, from America to Europe, K Records established an independent dynasty rivaled by only a handful of other American independent labels. Baumgarten follows Johnson along with the unsung and very patient hero of hero of K, Candice Pederson. Johnson and Pederson are almost solely responsible for the emergence of twee pop in America, the new punk vision (without the Henry Rollins-esque machismo) and the riot grrrl scene. The story's delivery is fresh and enhanced by interviews with some of K's big-hitters.

That being said the book isn't without its hangups. The "brief history" blurbs at the end of the early chapters, though informative and contextual, can be a tad disruptive and read a little too Indie Rock 101; though a writer always has to consider a complete outsider picking up their book. At times it seems as though Baumgarten has not even heard some of the bands that he is writing about and there are a handful of K artists from the mid-2000s (i.e. Mirah, Kimya Dawson and Saturday Looks Good to Me) that are completely glossed over. There are also a few chronological errors and oversights, but Baumgarten admits in the book's introduction, "I know I've captured only part of the story here, and I'm sure that I've gotten a few points wrong, but everything this book I believe to be true." Even though it's a total contradiction barring pathology, he sounds sincere.

"Love Rock Revolution's" preferred audience is best described by an excerpt from one of Johnson's promo posters for the International Pop Underground Convention:

"Hangman hipsters, new modrockers, sidestreet walkers, scooter mounted dream girls, punks, teds, the instigators of the Love Rock Explosion, the editors of every angry grrrl zine, the plotters of youth rebellion in every form, the Midwestern librarians and Scottish ski instructors who live by night...No lackey's to the corporate ogre allowed [to read this]."

In reality this book is a must-read for those fans of K or any Calvin Johnson project and a should-read for anyone who considers themselves to be an authority on the independent music scene. There are indie rock giants like Ian MacKaye, Kathleen Hanna and Phil Elverum that float into the narrative as if they were the reader's casual acquaintances and even the most in-tune fanatic will discover a few unfamiliar anecdotal nuggets. At the very least "Love Rock Revolution" is the definitive book on Olympia, WA's music scene.

Scot says

I discovered K records in college and although I tended to gravitate more towards the harder edged Kill Rock Stars label, K was a label I always held in high esteem. Two of my all time favorite bands, Karp and Lync were both put out by K and so for that alone I will always love them, but I also loved everyone from Beat Happening to Kicking Giant to Tiger Trap and many more. I had very high hopes for this book as I love reading the histories of bands, labels, scenes and everything else music related especially as I lived through it in my small way of being a music director at my college, and going to thousands of indie rock/punk shows and collecting zines etc etc. However, the author foreshadows what I found to be the case early in the intro. He mentions that when he proposed this book to Calvin, he responded with something along the lines of "that sounds very boring..." Unfortunately this ends up being true as this turned out to be an extremely uninspired and ultimately boring writing. It is written like a wikipedia article with almost no emotion in an almost stream of consciousness blurt, and makes the mistake of focusing on banal and bland events which get reported on in extensive detail, while pivotal events such as Candice leaving the label and Calvin suffering a TBI and having to learn how to speak again receive marginal coverage. This makes for a kind of bizarre story, actually.

The only time when the author opens up and there is a hint of excitement seems to be when there is mention of giant stars that in one way or another collided with the K world. People like Courtney Love, Kurt Cobain, and Beck receive probably more time than their contributions should warrant in this book which leads me to believe (in my opinion) that maybe the author only knew of K records through these alternative music mega stars (he sort of alludes to this in the beginning of the book that Beck is what introduced him to the label) and is therefore maybe not the best person to detail the history of K records. Nothing against him, of course but those of us who followed K's releases, and not just the "big" ones maybe deserve a retelling of the K tale by someone who better understood the underground world of punk rock.

Streator Johnson says

Yeah, its kind of dorky for me to read a book about your brother.....

jess says

This book is interesting, and also weird. Interesting because, really, it is nearly impossible for me to even imagine the history of K Records laid out in a linear, narrative way like this book. And it is weird for the same reason. I am always baffled by history projects of underground happenings because there is so little archival and published material.

It was an enlightening read, and certainly filled in gaps of knowledge that I didn't even know I was missing. For example, it never occurred to me to wonder what band came before Heavenly. But now I know. And I like books that talk about Olympia history, which this certainly does. And it definitely offers up an Olympia scene that's more successful and creative than *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*.

Anyway, this book is exuberant and enthusiastic about the K Records spirit and business model. It's optimistic and youthful, which I felt was appropriate. The author manages not to get bogged down in endless lists of bands and shows, although I can't say that many of the characters really "come alive" in these pages.

Calvin Johnson is presented very favorably in this book. Some might call it hero worship on the part of the author? Everyone else in the book has like, personal issues, they date and get married and have kids and move around and stuff, but not Calvin. Have you ever been to Our Lady's Grotto in Portland, OR? They have this grotto with a life-size marble replica of Michelangelo's Pietà in the center of it.

Imagine this book is the Grotto, and Calvin Johnson is the Pietà.

Kevin C says

If you have any real interest in the early days of American Independent and Punk music - or just like learning more about Olympia and other parts of the Pacific NW, this book is essential reading. K records founder and indie musical icon Calvin Johnson is the main character but he really serves as a symbol for the many lesser known people like him who passionately distributed their own (and their friends) independently produced art. I'm only a third of the way through the book and am finding it less and less easy to put down.

Abby says

A brief history of K Records, a local (Olympia) independent label started by indie rocker/underground punk icon Calvin Johnson. I listened to a lot of K Records stuff as a teen riot grrrl and then later in college, so I was interested to learn more about the label's origins and the Olympia scene in the '80's & '90's. Baumgarten does a good job describing that scene and Johnson's role in the indie/punk underground on the 1980s/90s but I felt that he really didn't have enough critical distance from his subject to give a full picture of the scene and K's impact on it. In his introduction, Baumgarten describes Johnson as the "hero of this book" and it becomes evident pretty quickly that there is some serious hero worship of Calvin Johnson going on. Johnson certainly did a ton for the independent music scene locally and nationally but he's also a complicated individual about whom there is some serious disagreement (especially among some of the female artists in the scene), and this book doesn't give much space to those complaints or critiques.

The other strange thing about this book were the sidenotes in between chapters, entitled things like "A Brief History of Hardcore" or "A Brief History of Zines" in which Baumgarten breaks down a few major aspects of the punk/independent/alternative music scene, presumably for readers who don't know anything about the history of punk and its related subcultures in the United States. This feature seemed a little odd and superfluous to me, because I think most people who are going to pick up a book about K Records will do so because they already know about the label and are already familiar with these things. I don't imagine that this book is going to have a wide readership beyond K Records fans.

Eric says

Interesting history of K Records and the founder of the label. Well written, and worth reading!
