



Band People: Life and Work in Popular Music

Franz Nicolay

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Franz Nicolay's riveting book *Band People* is a behind-the-scenes investigation into the internal dynamics of rock bands.

Nicolay notes that documentary *The Beatles: Get Back* was an eye-opener to many because it revealed what he and other musicians were familiar with: the at-times contentious back-and-forths between band members navigating their group dynamics with the purpose of creating art. The dynamics within the Beatles are used to set up this page-turning investigation—an anthropological study of the internal dynamics, hierarchies, and politics of rock bands. Weaving together fresh research in psychology and anthropology with interviews and testimonials from the musicians who make up the bands behind the singers, it reveals how rock bands function as a unit.

Nicolay chose to focus on rock bands because, unlike creative units in other genres, they often retain the same lineups over several years. There's an expectation of friendship and forming found families, the book notes. To investigate such dynamics, it focuses on bands who made it but never reached superstardom between 1980 and 2010, including St. Vincent, Hole, Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, and the Mountain Goats. The resultant study of human behavior tackles topics such as what makes a good band leader, the borderland between a band member and a hired hand, and experiencing success while learning how to be an adult.

The book's research and testimonials reinforce one another to great effect. It's a written call-and-response between the objective studies and lived experiences of group dynamics. At times, the testimonials take over to the detriment of contextualization and analysis: several direct quotes are stacked one after the other, and long interview chunks appear in the form of block quotes. Still, *Band People* is a deep anthropological study of the internal functions of rock bands.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (September / October 2024)

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