

**Canuck Rock: A History of Canadian Popular Music.** By Ryan Edwardson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 432 pp, ill. ISBN-10: 0802097154 ISBN-13: 978-0802097156 \$27.95<sup>1</sup>

The history of Canadian popular music has been chronicled several times beginning in 1971 with Ritchie Yorke's *Axes, Chops, and Hot Licks*. Since then, numerous biographies of well-known Canadian musicians along with a range of other publications and sources have provided much needed study, analysis, and history of Canadian popular music. The latest entry is *Canuck Rock: A History of Canadian Popular Music* by Ryan Edwardson, an historian from Queen's University. This is Edwardson's second book following *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (2008), in which he explored the changing ways Canadian nationhood has been defined and pursued through cultural means during the twentieth century. In contrast, *Canuck Rock* narrows the focus to provide a fresh perspective on the history of Canadian popular music by illuminating the synergy between the music and Canadian identity. Identity, of and in itself, has been studied by scholars such as Robert Wright and Barry Grant. However, Edwardson looks at the manner in which Canadian identity became fused with popular music largely as a result of legislation and policies undertaken by various Canadian governments. "What transpired," he says, "was a transition from 'music in Canada' to 'Canadian music.'" (5)

The book is arranged in chapters more or less chronologically from the 1950s to the present. The author manages to deal with several genres of popular music from rockabilly to hip hop, but excludes country music except for a few cursory comments and examples. As well as historical events such as Elvis Presley's first appearance in Vancouver and the Beatles' concerts at Maple Leaf Gardens, current issues like the rise of Napster and music television, the impact of the Internet on distribution and sales models, and changes in music listening due to portable devices such as the Sony Walkman and Apple's iPod are all convincingly examined and mapped in terms of the ideology of Canadian identity. Edwardson augments the Canadian story with parallel discussions of American, British, and worldwide events and issues. By including these perspectives, the historical information is placed in the context of social, cultural, technological, and economic developments. As the author notes in his introduction, "Music went from being a means for baby boomers to mediate gender, class, and generational identities to embracing a national identity and membership in a nation as they became politically aware citizens." (5)

The emergence of a Canadian nationalist zeitgeist coincided with the maturation of the Canadian recording industry. Edwardson asserts that the Guess Who's 1970 hit, "American Woman," is a prime example of a song that "resonated with a population caught up in a widespread nationalism that rejected continentalism and sought to reassert Canadian sovereignty in the face of American imperialism." (135) He contends that this new-found interest in Canadian sovereignty came during a period when anti-Americanism was common. The Guess Who, he writes, "came to prominence at a time when rock and roll was undergoing a major shift in which the citizenry started to use 'pop' music to mediate a national sense of self, and in turn, musicians became exalted as representatives of the national community." (138)

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The book is not entirely concerned with English Canadian popular music, however. Edwardson also discusses the Quebec music scene which helps not only to provide a more complete picture of Canadian popular music, but to underscore the contexts of continental and global paradigms. A member of the Quebec band, Layden Zar, is quoted as saying, “We’ve been listening to American rock exclusively for 15 years. Our influences don’t come from here, but from somewhere else, and we’re much closer to the Beatles than to Félix Leclerc.” (176) This shows that in North America at least, there are no national “sounds” in popular music, but regional ones that cross borders. For example, in the sixties, the west coast psychedelic scene included bands from San Francisco and Vancouver, just as the folk revival was felt in New York City’s Greenwich Village and Yorkville in Toronto. Borders did not stop radio or television signals and the multinational record companies that controlled the North American recording industry ensured that the Canadian popular music market was effectively subsumed by the American hegemony.

Overall, the book is well written and, despite a concentration on socio-cultural elements, the author does not immerse the reader in cultural theory. There are no musical examples or analyses. Rather the focus is historical with the author interspersing biographical snippets about musicians like Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, and Bryan Adams. Edwardson discusses the evolution of the music industry, including managers, agents, and recording studios. He also shows how the multinational record companies created the appearance of a Canadian music scene operating on its own terms, yet all the while reaped the fruit of the Canadian content regulations. The book includes a comprehensive bibliography, index, and extensive notes. Also there are sixteen pages of black-and-white photographs of various musicians and groups. *Canuck Rock* is a valuable resource, an entertaining read, and a welcome addition to the literature on Canadian popular music and the recording industry.

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