

Introduction

Sold a Decade at a Time

When people meet me and find out what I do for a living, they inevitably ask me what kind of music I listen to and write about. I never know how to answer the question—never have—so usually I just kind of fumble and stutter a lot. If I told them how I really felt, they’d probably just think I was weird: namely, that pop music is bigger, more multidimensional, endlessly compelling in more directions, than they ever imagined. So it’s kinda hard to pin the stuff down.

If it helps, though, when I used to moonlight as a bar DJ late Saturday nights while living in New York City at the start of the 21st century, here’s how I advertised my genre leanings: “DJ Edelweiss spins a danceable and drinkable ALL-VINYL selection of proto-Eurodisco bongo-rock, German reggae, danceable prog, hair-extension metal, Gregorian garage, boogie-oogied country, stoner glam, industrial bubblegum, popping-and-locking Zulu wildstyle space-cowboy hip hop bommi bop, and drunken frat-soul with parties going on in the background. Plus zillions of ancient Top 40 songs you’d forgotten—until now.” Okay, maybe that doesn’t help so much.

Still, here’s the thing: I see music history repeating itself, revolving again and again in strange, intriguing, disturbing, revealing, often hilarious ways. In the more than three decades during which I wrote the pieces in this book, popular music itself, music criticism, the music industry, communication media, and America have all changed immeasurably. So this book aims to plug into a whole bunch of those changes as they occurred, and somehow tie them together.

Though it might look at first like an unnavigable dump, there is rather meticulous method to my madness—a logic, or several overlapping logics. There are trapdoors and secret passages connecting it all; if you want, you can make a game of it. Yet all the material comprises just a fraction of my music writing—or rather, *another* fraction, after the 100 or so pieces compiled in my

previous Duke collection, 2011's *Rock and Roll Always Forgets* (which followed 1997's *The Accidental Evolution of Rock'n'Roll*, which followed my 1991 heavy metal album guide *Stairway to Hell*, which I updated and expanded in 1998). So yes, I am milking my once-prolific career as a rock critic for all it's worth! There's even a short piece I wrote for my high school newspaper, back in the '70s. But though I was contributing a decade later to *Rolling Stone* and still do, I've included no pieces from that magazine, unless a Kanye West live review that only ran on their website counts. None of the hundreds of reviews I've written over the years for *Entertainment Weekly* or *Blender* or *Billboard* (where I worked as an editor) are in here, either.

Even more than its predecessor, *Terminated for Reasons of Taste* includes plenty of writing I didn't even get paid for—much of which first appeared in Xeroxed fanzines, on Internet discussion boards, on nebulous websites that came and went. Two full-length “reviews”—of '60s folk artist Niela Miller and a 2009 Bruce Springsteen album—are actually pieced together from extended off-the-cuff posts on the I Love Music board; for whatever reason, I think they captured more of my voice than most reviews that actually paid my bills. Occasionally, especially with selections from more amateur outlets like that one, I've since self-edited pieces from their original rambling-off-the-top-of-my-head state or folded adjacent posts together for reasons of clarity, coherency, and accuracy and to avoid redundancy and dumb typos; a few pieces have also been condensed somewhat, so as not to waste precious space, or reverted to pre-editor-remixed form when I was convinced they'd lost something in translation. I've also retooled certain headlines if the originals weren't doing their job, or made no sense in retrospect. But throughout, I tried to select work that somehow holds up for me—believe me, a “worst of Chuck Eddy” compilation would be way thicker than this one.

I started writing professionally, if you can call it that, in early 1984, and the book divides itself into five chronological sections, revolving around music from the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, and—in the first one, facetiously titled “B.C.”—all of history Before I was a Critic. Under each of those umbrellas, I tried to organize pieces like a playlist or mixtape or good radio set, to transition logically into each other—to set each other up, answer each other's questions, carry on an internal conversation or debate. So pieces on similar genres or by related artists or with intersecting themes or geography tend to be grouped together when feasible, with cusps between genres (rap-rock, say) sometimes serving as mortar. This allows styles to evolve through the pages. For instance, I trace country music's mutations from the '20s all the way to the present, in

part via five batches of song reviews first published on the mostly hip-hop-oriented website Complex in 2012. In another thread that keeps popping back up, you get to watch me fall in and out of and back in love with heavy metal. Even folk revivals, never my specialty, recur now and then throughout — from Niela Miller and Catholic folk masses all the way to Mumford and Sons.

Other serial threads recur as well, including a few from *Spin*'s post-print-era website: two pieces on country rap; three Sonic Taxonomy columns exploring essential albums in unexplored (and, in the case of “Fake New Wave,” maybe imaginary) genres; three titled with arrows (→ or ←) where I discuss a current artist alongside one from decades before. There are also two assemblages of real-time single-song reviews from the '90s fanzine *Radio On*, sequenced in subsequent decades by similar collections from the *Village Voice* and the Singles Jukebox site.

Some extramusical threads no doubt run through, too, and I'm not even sure I could name those myself. But I do plenty of explaining, in too much detail maybe, in all five section introductions. So I'll terminate this now, and hope you find some of what follows to your taste.