

## FOREWORD

CHUCK KLOSTERMAN

Chuck Eddy likes more music than just about any person I've ever known, but the music he likes most makes him impossible to understand. If you want to understand Chuck Eddy for real, you need to focus on the music he hates. And this is not because his taste is irrefutable or because there's some sort of larger truth imbedded within his vitriol—it's because the music Chuck Eddy hates shows how his mind works.

Take a look at this list: 1. Björk; 2. DJ Spooky; 3. Robyn Hitchcock; 4. Iron Maiden; 5. Jodeci; 6. Korn; 7. My Bloody Valentine; 8. Notorious B.I.G.; 9. Pantera; 10. Henry Rollins.

These are the artists Eddy submitted (at some point in the mid-to-late 1990s) as "The Worst Music Ever," a list published in Philadelphia's *City Paper*. In many ways, the list encapsulates the mathematical superstructure of Eddy's cerebellum: we have one band that every critic loves, two acts that every critic pretends to love, a dead man critics are obligated to appreciate, two metal acts that most people don't take seriously (but that Chuck takes seriously enough to hate), one band that people might expect Chuck to support, a singer-songwriter nobody thinks about, the common-sense recognition of an obvious buffoon, and Jodeci. I do not doubt that if someone asked Eddy to make that list today, at least seven of the selections would be different. In fact, they all might be different. But I am certain the underlying Eddy ethos would remain: "All thoughts about music are valid, but most thoughts about music are backwards." Not *all* thoughts about music, but *most* thoughts about music (and certainly those thoughts coming from all the people who are supposed to know better). And it's not just that these thoughts are flawed—it's that the people thinking them know that they're flawed. They know they're promoting (or attacking) artists for reasons that have almost nothing to do with the music itself. When Chuck hears a pop song, it's like he is the first person who has ever heard it; he's certainly aware of what the rest of the world already wants

to believe, but those pre-existing perceptions are never convincing to him. If anything, they push him in the opposite direction. They galvanize his darkest suspicions. Chuck Eddy is his own man, and sometimes he's the only man.

I will never forget the day in 1992 my friend Rex purchased *Stairway to Hell* at a B. Dalton in Grand Forks, N.D. Rex walked into my dorm room and said, "You gotta read this fucking book, man. Some crazy guy has ranked the 500 greatest metal albums of all time, and four of them are by Kix. And you know how many are by Mötley Crüe? None!"

This was a lot of information to absorb.

First of all, I could not believe that there would ever be a book that would mention Kix, unless it was a book about cereal. I also could not believe that any book celebrating Kix would somehow not celebrate Mötley Crüe, a group that struck me as superior in every possible way. But more than anything, I simply could not believe that there was a book about heavy metal, and that this book cost money and existed in stores, and that the adult writing this book seemed to think about Faster Pussycat and Rush in the same way I thought about them in my parents' basement. I disagreed with at least half of the author's opinions and I hated the sans serif font, but the writing style obliterated my skull—it felt like some brilliant weirdo was talking directly at me, yet with no regard whatsoever for how much I enjoyed the conversation. To this day, I've never found a nonfiction book with more voice-per-square-inch than *Stairway to Hell*. It was so funny. It was so maddening. It made no sense. Jimi Hendrix was boring? White Lion was a blues band? Black Sabbath was a jazz band? Poison's second record was better than *Houses Of The Holy*? How could someone with a real job like Poison more than I did? How could someone overrate Poison? And why did this writer seem to mock all the bands he was classifying as important? Moreover, why did he keep mentioning artists who had absolutely no relationship to heavy metal, most notably disco diva Teena Marie (whose *Emerald City* was ranked in the Top 10)?

The answer, as it turns out, was sleeping in the introduction: Teena Marie, Eddy argued, would be "accepted with open arms by all headbangers in the perfect universe of my imagination (which exists in metal's life span because I do!)" It took me years to understand what that sentence truly meant, but it's the premise behind everything meaningful Eddy creates (regardless of the genre or the performer). Very often, a person reading Chuck Eddy's work will conclude, "Oh, come on. No person could ever

think that.” But the fact that they’re actively reading those (seemingly unbelievable) thoughts proves that such thinking exists. More than any other critic, Chuck Eddy showed how the experience of listening to music was both intellectually limitless and acutely personal. There was no “correct” way to hear a song, and there were no fixed parameters on how that song could be described in print, and if that song made you reconsider abortion or the Oakland Raiders or your father’s suicide, then that intellectual relationship mattered (because your engagement was real). I didn’t want to write like Chuck Eddy, but I wanted to think like him.

For most of the ’90s, I wondered who Chuck Eddy was. I knew he was from Detroit and that he’d served in the army, but that was the extent of my tangible knowledge. He was a literary monolith in the zine world, but I didn’t really read zines; he’d write reviews for *Spin* and insist that a certain guitar player sounded like what would have happened if Billy Duffy had liked Tony Iommi more than Jimmy Page, and I would spend two days trying to figure out if that was a compliment. I found an *Entertainment Weekly* review online where he gave the Pet Shop Boys’ *Discography* an A and Mötley Crüe’s *Decade Of Decadence* an A-minus, which partially contradicted his first book and somehow made me feel better. He wrote an essay about the sociopolitical brilliance of Michael Jackson’s *Dangerous* that seemed ridiculous for 18 years, until it suddenly became prescient. I read his second book, *The Accidental Evolution of Rock’n’Roll*, but I think it just confused me. I bought a Status Quo album. I saw his picture in a magazine’s contributors’ page and was surprised he wore a hat.

To me, Chuck Eddy was way more famous than most of the bands he wrote about. I wondered if he was as sarcastic in person as he was in print. I wondered if he was happy with his life. I wondered if he named his kid Linus because he liked *Peanuts*. I wondered if he thought Oasis was cool. I wondered about a lot of things, which is what you do when something changes your life.

Just before I published *Fargo Rock City* in 2001, I contacted Eddy by e-mail, theoretically to convince him to blurb the cover but really because I wanted him to know that I knew that I never would have written my book if I hadn’t come across *Stairway to Hell* first. Throughout the decade that’s followed, we’ve usually sent each other one or two e-mails a year, usually for some semi-work-related matter. And because we have the same first name, he always signs his emails “The Other Chuck.” That’s his signature, and I’m sure he types it casually and without thinking. To him, it has no

meaning. But it always makes me uncomfortable, because it's so totally wrong. He is not the Other Chuck. I am the Other Chuck. Only Chuck Eddy can be Chuck. He was the first Chuck and the better Chuck. And that will never change, even after all the kids that Kix was made for are deader than the diplodocus.