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Metaphysical Graffiti: Deep Cuts In The Philosophy Of Rock



Synopsis

Metaphysical Graffiti explores the philosophical themes prevalent in the music of the classic rock era. Each chapter is a detailed study of a classic rock performer or ensemble, applying insights from philosophers ancient and modern. It will appeal to an audience that was inspired by the music of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In the words of the author, "Philosophy is in this music and it is of this music and for this music." The author is an accomplished professor of philosophy and also an accomplished musician, who plays in the folk rock group, Bone Dry River Band. Among the chapters included in this book "Frenzy" applies Plato and mystery religion to the Rolling Stones, "An Everlasting Kiss: The Seduction of Wendy" applies Vico to Bruce Springsteen, "Warm Impermanence" applies Danto and Andy Warhol to David Bowie, "Magic Pages and Mythic Plants" applies Cassirer to Led Zeppelin, "A Touch of Grey: Gratefully Dead?" applies Kant and Whitehead to the Grateful Dead, "Yesterday" applies Tom Sawyers, "Tom Sawyer's" applies Suzanne Langer to Rush, and "Dead Reckoning and Tacking the Winds of Fortune and Fate" applies Machiavelli to Jimmy Buffett.

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Customer Reviews

Randall E. Auxier is the editor of Bruce Springsteen and Philosophy and the co-editor of The Wizard of Oz and Philosophy. He is Professor of Philosophy at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and is a member of the Bone Dry River Band.

These days, some academic professional philosophers are working to expand the scope of philosophical thinking beyond the classroom and beyond standard philosophy texts. Rebecca Goldstein is perhaps the best-known example of a philosopher expanding her scope and audience. She has written novels such as "32 Arguments for the Existence of God" and a modern imaginative vision of Plato visiting the 21st Century, "Plato and the Googleplex" which aim both to entertain readers and to encourage thought. Another philosopher, Andrew Pessin, has recently written "The Irrationalist", an excellent historical novel based upon the life and possible murder of Rene Descartes. Moving away from novels, John Kaag, a scholar of American philosophy has written a popular and moving memoir, "American Philosophy: A Love Story" which combines romance with Kaag's efforts in preserving the library of an earlier American thinker, William Earnest Hocking. Another philosopher, Nathan Andersen, has written a book, "Shadow Philosophy: Plato's Cave and Cinema" which explores Stanley Kubrick's famous film, "A Clockwork Orange" while drawing parallels to Plato's "Republic", its allegory of the cave, and Plato's reasons for banishing poets and artists from the ideal state. Randall Auxier's new book, "Metaphysical Graffiti: Deep Cuts in the Philosophy of Rock" (2017) belongs in the company of the books mentioned above. Auxier writes to encourage philosophical thinking about rock music. Auxier, professor of Philosophy and Communications Studies at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. has played the bass guitar since his youth and plays in a band that performs frequently in clubs in southern Illinois. He is a scholar of the American philosopher Josiah Royce and has written a well-received book, "Time, Will, and Purpose" on Royce's thought. I have not heard Auxier's band, but we have become friends through our shared interest in Royce. He kindly sent me his new book to review. The book consists of 18 essays, 14 of which had been published earlier. Each essay focuses on a rock group or rock musician that Auxier loves. The collection begins with a lengthy treatment of the Rolling Stones, a group close to Auxier's heart. Bruce Springsteen is perhaps even closer to Auxier's heart, and he too receives extended discussion. Other performers include David Bowie, Paul Simon, Rush, The Who, Led Zepplin, Jimmy Buffett, Neil Young, and Jackson Browne. Other possible candidates for inclusion in the book, such as Bob Dylan, are discussed in passing but don't have an extended discussion of their own. Auxier met Elvis when Auxier was a boy and treats Elvis respectfully. But few other rock musicians before the Stones get Auxier's attention. Auxier is also, quite clearly, not a fan of the folk music scene which captured the public's attention for a time. I loved rock back in the day and still do. Although they were part of my generation, my interest in rock basically cut off before the groups Auxier discusses and I know little about them. When I turn to rock, I generally

listen to doo-wop or girl groups.. I also have been a blues fan for many years, and Auxier touches on the blues. I am a student and amateur performer on the piano (classical music and American ragtime), and Auxier's insights into playing his bass guitar transfer easily to my own musical efforts. It was good trying to understand Auxier's insights into and love for his music. In each chapter, Auxier offers his view of the personnel, music, and songs of the group under discussion and of what that group personally means to him. The discussion of the music and the groups is engrafted with wide-ranging and erudite philosophical discussions and of philosophical figures Auxier finds help illuminate the music. Auxier's erudition both in terms of popular culture and of philosophical reading and thinking is impressive. Philosophers he considers include A.N. Whitehead, Plato, Aristotle, Vico, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Suzanne Langer, Arthur Danto, and others. He writes well and clearly about philosophers and philosophical issues. In most but not all cases, the philosophical discussions flow well from and illuminate the discussion of the music and musicians. In some instances, the discussion of the music is less clear than the discussion of the philosophers. Some of the essays are expressly geared to readers deeply engaged in the music and performers Auxier discusses. For those with less familiarity, the discussions of their work sometimes is opaque. Still the passion for music and for this particular genre of music comes through. So far, the review has only scratched the surface of this book. Style makes writing and Auxier's writing in this book is unique and attention-getting. There is nothing in "Metaphysical Graffiti" of the careful, restrained prose one might expect in a philosophy book or article. The book is colloquial and profane throughout. It raves and rants and wanders in a style that might be called "Dionysian" as Auxier himself aptly styles the kind of rock he enjoys. The style is aimed to speak to the kind of reader that Auxier thinks is likely to be seriously committed to rock. It is an expressive style but also a style of excess. The result is uneven. The book includes many brilliant, thoughtful passages alongside many verbose, digressive sections that to me fall flat. There is a lot of hyperbole, some to me unnecessary familiar efforts at colloquialisms (references to "that dude, Whitehead"), some refreshing irreverence, moving autobiographical stories, and considerable vulgarity. Auxier succeeds in the broad aim of the book which, as I understand it, is to show that rock (and American popular culture) deserve to be taken seriously and that rock and popular culture can be the source of philosophical reflection. Auxier wants to break down the distinction between "high" and "popular" culture, an aim which I generally approve. I appreciate his love and passion for music. The particular music he loves still mostly leaves me cold. I was moved by Auxier's discussion to explore a song or two that had been unfamiliar to me and my appreciation of these works and the performers was enhanced. On the whole, I found the philosophical discussions in the book

worthwhile on their own. I found these discussions more consistently good than the musical discussions. I admire Auxier for his passion for music and for combining his avocation as a musician with his work as a philosopher. This is a fine book in the company of the books mentioned at the outset of this review which show the importance and breadth of philosophical thinking to the events of daily life. The title of this review (A Paperback Crossroad of Music and Philosophy) is borrowed from the introduction written by Luke Dick, an editor, songwriter, and former student of Auxier's. Robin Friedman

Although a distinguished philosopher, Auxier's *Metaphysical Graffiti* is a breath of fresh air. Philosophy went academic a long time ago and remains so today. It's abstract and analytic tedium no one wants to read but for a few renegades like Auxier who writes simply with flair and attitude. His treatment of The Stones is unrivaled, about their music and the extraordinary creativity that occurred between Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, also about the movement with shorter pieces on Grateful Dead, Bruce Springsteen, Neil Young, The Who. And yeah, he is also a rock musician himself. If you love rock music as I do, read this book, and you also will learn a bit of applied philosophy. Jim Hanson Retired Senior Researcher Southern Illinois University

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