

[Library ebook] King of the Queen City: The Story of King Records (Music in American Life)

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Jon Hartley Fox

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Jon Hartley Fox : King of the Queen City: The Story of King Records (Music in American Life) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised King of the Queen City: The Story of King Records (Music in American Life):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Its about time !! By Eddie Landsberg Though the King and Federal labels changed American culture and music in ways that many of us barely realize, I find it fascinating how rare it is to hear their names actually dropped these days... say in comparison to Chess and Stax... The reason perhaps, is alluded

to in the book, when we realize that no matter how big the label got, really it was a one man operation - - the brain child of the flamboyant Syd Nathan... the label died with him, but a great deal of its stars, artists, producers and behind the scenes people when on to greater heights... at best, as hall-of-fame inductees, and at... well, most surprising to me... cast of Hee Haw membership (KING also produced "hillbilly" music.) - - Needless to say, as far as I'm concerned KING will forever be best remembered for: James Brown, Hank Ballard, Billy Ward and The Dominoes, Earl Bostic and Bill "Honky Tonk" Doggett (without whom, I and any other Hammond player wouldn't be playing the Hammond today, even with Jimmy Smith!) As for my key criticisms of the book... it would have been great if the publisher got together with COLLECTIBLES (the folks who now have the rights to the King Catalogue) and issued a CD with listening material as well as interview excerpts (fancy thinking though) and although the writing is very good, the book is often repetitive and the narrative is fascinating and draws you in, but sometimes more has the tone of an enthusiastic collector who's done his research and is simply walking you through his collection, rattling out informed facts in the process... at times there seems to be a slight lack of a cohesive narrative - - on the other hand, the author is a sober minded fact checker - - for example, often he'll present the stories of the people he interviewed, but then mention the facts and probabilities behind their stories... in doing so, he manages to walk a great line between being "academically prudent" and a skillful story teller. Some other comments: Like many people, I discovered those old King records in a stack in my father's basement... Their existence in my parents' basement surprised me because my father never seemed like an RB type, but he told me that his father had a store and a guy with a truck used to bring them, so eventually he wound up with the whole collection... The book tells the story of the truck - - and why it made King so unique. (My Grandfather ran a small store that sold pens and office equipment, so Syd Nathan must have had his local's using their revolutionary self contained sales system to connect with fellow Jewish merchants - - not just the big record stories.)-- Another reviewer also pointed out the fact that an actual discography would have been nice... Still... why complain... at least someone got around to telling the story of raspy voice, cigar smoking temperamental yet visionary father figure Sid Nathan (who I first read about in James Brown's great autobiography.)--My all time favorite King recording, incidentally is Chris Columbus's OH YEAH (featuring Johnny Hammond Smith on organ) - - and my favorite chapter is the one on white hipster Ralph Bass, who ran the subsidiary Federal label and who started out as a Bebop producer on Savoy.--The number of people at the label who went on to become major record industry behind-the-scene movers, despite the traditional falling out with Sid was amazing...--The book avoids the pitfall of making it entirely the James Brown Show... though arguably their greatest legacy, the book offers equal play time to many of the artists, including the Country and Western ones who I never heard of but now have a sudden interest in.-- In conclusion... King lovers... lovers of classic blues, RB, jump blues, country and Western, rock and roll and American music in general... your time has come... someone has finally gotten around to telling the story... now let's hope for a big big big boxed set re-issue !2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very good book By Peter S. Shenkin This is a very good book for anyone interested in American music of the 1940s and 1950s and the transition of "vernacular music" from RB, Blues and Hillbilly to Soul, Rock and Country. It's also must reading for anyone deeply interested in the history of race relations in the U. S. in this time period; King provides an excellent (though unfortunately atypical) "case study", well described in the book. The author seems more into the RB, Blues and Soul side of King than the Hillbilly and Country side. His writing seems to me more vivid and personal when talking about the former; when talking about the latter, I got the sense that he had to do some reading, listening and interviewing to write his book, and I disagree with his take on the importance of several of the musicians mentioned, most notably Don Reno. There's nothing wrong with that. I have the Hillbilly and Country stuff more in my bones and, though I was pleased at the inclusion of some of my favorite obscure artists, like Jimmie Widener, I was disappointed by the omission of others, like Red Perkins. I suspect that Fox is better at the Blues and RB arcana than the Hillbilly Country arcana, but cannot say for sure, because of my own limitations on other side. There's an irony here: what was unique at King was the extent of crossover between Black and White on each others' sessions. At King, there was a long incubation together, not a transfer of styles from Black to White, as at Sun. One doubts that Henry Glover or Sid Nathan "specialized" in their knowledge of one side or the other. They imbibed them both and probably knew them both about equally well at the time. We 21st-century roots geeks, on the other hand, tend to gravitate toward one side or the other, even while we so highly praise and even revere the fact that at King, they were not only equal, but also not separate. For me, the best part of the book is not the side that I know more about, but the side I know less about. There are a bunch of King RB and Blues artists, and even Rock artists, that I will now go seek out. I expect that most people who are knowledgeable about one aspect of King or the other will have the same experience: maybe if you know all about Blues and RB on King, you'll be tempted to check out a Moon Mullican CD. But you'll probably still wish the author had said more about the lesser-known King artists that you already know and love. I cannot agree with the reviewers who wish that a discography had been included. As the author points out in the Preface, the discography, a 900-page pair of tomes by Michel Ruppli, is already available. You can get it on , but I regret to say that its already high price went up when the Fox book came out. Also, the sessionography (list of musicians) is more complete for the RB, Blues, Soul and Rock stuff than for the Hillbilly stuff. This might just be an accident of chronology: the Hillbilly stuff started being recorded earlier, and maybe the sessions were not as well documented. So sometimes we have to

resort to external research and a good ear to identify personnel on the Hillbilly sessions. But it is what it is. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. King's Tale Finally Told By Pawpaw Bruce Shame on the big boys for not having the guts to give music lovers what they wanted. The major recording labels tried to pretend that whites weren't listening to black oriented music back in the forties and early fifties. Most music fans know Sam Phillips proved them wrong with his Sun Records in Memphis since that's what launched Elvis Presley on the road to stardom. Far fewer ever heard of Syd Nathan whose King Records in Cincinnati played a major role in the growth of rhythm and blues into a widely accepted genre and also recorded major country stars on the day. King later was noted its two awesome bluegrass groups, the Stanley Brothers and Don Reno and Red Smiley. Besides the music, this book offers a look at a company whose behind the scenes workers were fully integrated in a city long known for its southern biases. Like many successful people, Syd Nathan was successful because of his keen sense of public taste and his hard work. His individualism also led to mistakes that held King and its artists back. The most important player in the King game was Henry Glover, an African-American who produced some of the outstanding country artists at a time when that was unheard of. His involvement in the recording of the Delmore Brothers classic "Blues Stay Away From Me" warned us that change was coming and rock'n'roll was just around the corner whether the establishment liked it or not. It's good that the King story has finally been told. I think old Syd would like it.

King of the Queen City is the first comprehensive history of King Records, one of the most influential independent record companies in the history of American music. Jon Hartley Fox tells the story of a small outsider record company in Cincinnati, Ohio, that attracted an extremely diverse roster of artists, including the Stanley Brothers, Grandpa Jones, Redd Foxx, Earl Bostic, Bill Doggett, Ike Turner, Roy Brown, Freddie King, Eddie Vinson, Johnny "Guitar" Watson, and even a young James Brown. While other record companies concentrated on one style of music, King was active in virtually all genres of vernacular American music, from blues and R B to rockabilly, bluegrass, western swing, and country. Founded by businessman Sydney Nathan in the mid-1940s, King Records led the way for the hundreds of independent record companies of the 1940s and 1950s. A progressive company in a reactionary time, King was led by an interracial creative and executive staff that redefined the face and voice of American music as well as the way it was recorded and sold. Fox weaves together the elements of King's success, focusing on the dynamic personalities of the artists, producers, and key executives such as Nathan, Henry Glover, and Ralph Bass. Drawing on personal interviews, research in newspapers and periodicals, and deep access to the King archives, this book captures a sense of the inspired mayhem that permeated King Records in its glory days. The book includes a foreword by legendary guitarist, singer, and songwriter Dave Alvin.

From Publishers Weekly Fox first made his case for Cincinnati-based King Records as the most important record company in the United States between the years of 1945 and 1960 in a series of public radio documentaries in 1986; those original interviews are an important foundation of this history, with much supplementary research added. There's much to be said for the label's legacy: in addition to introducing James Brown to listeners, King had stars in several popular genres, pioneered the introduction of RB songs to the country music repertoire before Sam Phillips at Sun and may even have released the first rock and roll record (Wynonie Harris's Good Rockin' Tonight) in 1948. Unfortunately, though loaded with great stories, Fox has some difficulty getting into gear. Instead of telling a straight chronological account, he organizes the King story around personalities, beginning with the company's founder, Syd Nathan; each subject's history is then tracked forward past their King years, forcing Fox to continually circle back and pick things up again. Some repetition creeps in; a story about how much Nathan hated Brown's first single is told on three separate occasions. Still, his account gives us a much needed glimpse of an underappreciated pop culture institution. 23 photos. (Oct.) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Fascinating biography on Syd Nathan's King Records. 4 stars."--MOJO "Fox and the University of Illinois Press have given us an important book about a very important operation. Thank you."--Oxford American "As entertaining and dynamic a story as the music that inspired it."--Metro Times