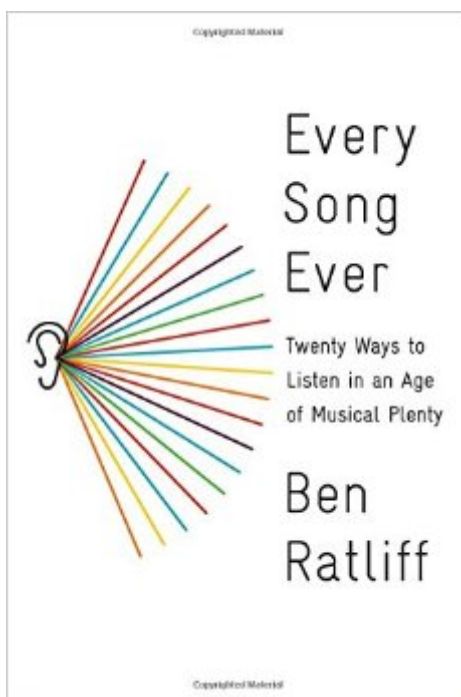


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Every Song Ever: Twenty Ways To Listen In An Age Of Musical Plenty



Synopsis

What does it mean to listen in the digital era? Today, new technologies make it possible to roam instantly and experimentally across musical languages and generations, from Detroit techno to jam bands to baroque opera—or to dive deeper into the set of tastes that we already have. Either way, we can listen to nearly anything, at any time. The possibilities in this new age of listening overturn old assumptions about what it means to properly appreciate music—to be an “educated” listener. In *Every Song Ever*, the veteran New York Times music critic Ben Ratliff reimagines the very idea of music appreciation for our times. As familiar subdivisions like “rock” and “jazz” matter less and less and music’s accessible past becomes longer and broader, listeners can put aside the intentions of composers and musicians and engage music afresh, on their own terms. Ratliff isolates signal musical traits—such as repetition, speed, and virtuosity—and traces them across wildly diverse recordings to reveal unexpected connections. When we listen for slowness, for instance, we may detect surprising affinities between the drone metal of Sunn O))), the mixtape manipulations of DJ Screw, Sarah Vaughan singing “Love Man,” and the final works of Shostakovich. And if we listen for closeness, we might notice how the tight harmonies of bluegrass vocals illuminate the virtuosic synchrony of John Coltrane’s quartet. Ratliff also goes in search of “the perfect moment”; considers what it means to hear emotion by sampling the complex sadness that powers the music of Nick Drake and Slayer; and examines the meaning of certain common behaviors, such as the impulse to document and possess the entire performance history of the Grateful Dead. Encompassing the sounds of five continents and several centuries, Ratliff’s book is an artful work of criticism and a lesson in open-mindedness. It is a definitive field guide to our radically altered musical habitat.

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Customer Reviews

Ben Ratliff might have had me in mind as he was writing this book at least people like me. I am old enough to have purchased most musical recording formats/media and knew how to select music by genre, which, in turn enabled me to know what music to select to listen to at any moment. My "owned" collection was large and extensive, but not all encompassing. I have found what Ratliff describes as a very deep comfort zone of what I think I like, but that comfort zone has become somewhat of a dark dead end alley now. With music streaming services, I have this problem of too much to choose. I no longer know how to choose, because the few choices of new music I do listen to, I don't know how to listen in order to appreciate! If you have this same problem, Ratliff's book is for you. I purchased it in Kindle format after seeing it in new hardcover non-fiction at the very first physical retail bookstore in Seattle. In his very first sentence, "We are living in the age of the cloud." One of Ratliff's main justifications for encouraging us to learn how to listen to music again is to get some personal control over this "cloud". Streaming music services, because they are mediated by the Internet, are always collecting information about our listening habits and using that information to serve us up music to listen to....based on this real deep, safe comfort zone we have. The effect is we don't break out. Ratliff's proposal is that we begin to learn enough about music so we collect as much knowledge as information is being collected about us. He proposes learning about qualities of music that transcend stale classifications like "genre" so we can discover music again. Some of these qualities are repetition, slowness, speed and silence.

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