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# Spin Alternative Record Guide



## Synopsis

America's premiere alternative music magazine presents a book of outrageously opinionated reviews of the essential albums of punk, new wave, indie rock, grunge, and rap. National ads/media.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A guide to the world of alternative music in all its variety and weirdness, from the earliest influences to the latest bands. Provides in-depth and informative record reviews and discussions of such phenomena as the New Zealand sound, alternative hip-hop, and the secret history of women in punk. The book also includes a sure-to-be controversial listing of what they consider to be the top 100 alternative albums of all time, and top-ten lists from such artists as Joey Ramone and Kurt Bloch. Despite some questionable additions (Cindi Lauper?) and glaring omissions (where is Game Theory?), it remains an indispensable guide.

So much of the popular music released these days is billed as "alternative" that it's tough to locate the mainstream without really looking. The proliferation of these alternatives notwithstanding, this guide fills a gap in the literature of modern music. Where else are you going to find the complete discographies of Trobbling Gristle and Jonathan Richman under the same cover? Maybe in the Rolling Stone Album Guide (Random, 1992), but not with the length and scope of the reviews provided by the 64 contributors to this volume. Each entry includes a complete discography, and each release is rated on a scale of one to ten. The hip writing is geared toward those in the know, and the authors themselves are knowledgeable. Entries are interspersed with top-ten album lists

from various artists and photographs of album covers. An appendix offers a list of the top 100 alternative albums of all time, and a mercifully short essay on the nature of alternative music outlines the principles of the category: "antigenerationally dystopian, subculturally presuming fragmentation ...built on an often neurotic discomfort over massified and commodified culture." Though 99 percent of those who check out this volume won't be able to offer anything close to a dictionary definition of "dystopian," they'll probably think it's a pretty cool book. Recommended for both public and academic libraries. (Index not seen.)?Adam Mazmanian, "Library Journal"Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

There is a lot of information in this book but my copy arrived pretty damaged. Would've been thrilled had it not been pieced together with packing tape.

This book is a good resource to learn about many groups that are forgotten and gone but which might interest you. The worst part of the book are the Rob Sheffield reviews, which are almost always wrong, whether in overall quality or in the ranking of the albums an artist made. Still, you can laugh at him and say "What a maroon!" when he gets on your nerves too much.

My copy of this guide is literally falling apart--the pages are spilling out. And that is because I have read so many entries over and over and over again. I have about 10 record (yeah, records dude!!) guides and this is probably my favorite. It presents an alternative landscape that is rich in possibility, thickly textured, and, when needed, as primal (and essential) as any Stooges riff. It was written in 1994 (I think) so a lot has happened since, but I still think it is essential reading for anyone deeply interested in rock. I found out about Can from this book, and the Minutemen (OK I'd already heard about the Minutemen but knew almost nothing about them!), and Lee Scratch Perry. I'm still finding new things I missed--the X/Flesheaters connection--and exploring new sounds thanks to this guide. And the writing is excellent--no "this band is Bob Dylan meets Bob Marley on acid" sort of dreck that most rock mags peddle now. Find it and then read it from cover to cover--your life might never be the same!

The writers and their individual styles and personalities are as much the star here as the artists themselves. Smart, irreverent, witty, playful. Many hilarious bon mots and aphorisms. While the Trouser Press guide is more thorough and features equally good writing, this one is slightly more fun. I like how the editors define "alternative" as a critical lens, an interpretative process, rather than

a clearly defined genre of music. This leads to an incredible mashup of disparate artists ranging across the full breadth of the cultural landscape, from the sixties avant gardists to the fluffiest of pop stars. I would love to see a revised edition that further elaborated on the musical rivulets defined in this volume.

This book is a wonderful guide to bands and artists deemed "alternative" by the editors of Spin magazine--The book's forward provides the best definition I've read/heard of the alternative genre, and it includes such diverse acts as Abba and Kronos Quartet. My high school library had a copy of it, and I think I had it checked out for the majority of my four years there. The library at my college doesn't have it, and I've considered buying it, but it's already become pretty dated since its publication in 1995. There is no mention of Tricky, Portishead, or Radiohead; Debut is the only one of Bjork's solo albums in the book; they even say something like "What will Natalie Merchant be doing now that 10,000 Maniacs have broken up?" It's a wonderful authority on musicians like Neil Young and David Bowie, whose discographies can be intimidating to a relative young 'un like me. There's also a great piece on PJ Harvey, whom I will consider underrated until there are VH1 tribute concerts in her honor. Anyway, if you're interested, check out the Northfield High School library.

I know, I know, the "Spin" label should've made it clear that this book would be 100 parts attitude, 0 parts substance. But still, I was amazed by the haphazardness of the omissions (and inclusions!) and the shallow, inconsistent reviews. Since this book sacrificed inclusiveness in favor of a long-review format, wouldn't it make common sense to include only "alternative" artists, and thoughtful essays? But no, we get everyone from Madonna to Pearl Jam, and the writers spend their whole five paragraphs flouncing around in this year's ultrahip ready-wear. Describing a band's style and weighing its strengths and weaknesses are not as important, apparently, as measuring it against a chart of fashionability and (far-fetched) political correctness. Meanwhile, everything truly original seems to go right over their heads. It's funny that the Smiths had to abandon their radical sound and go for the then-fashionable, glossy wall-of-sound style before Spin would accept them. That's just one telling example of this book's whole approach. This is completely true: when I saw that this guide had a "100 Best Albums List", I predicted that the Sex Pistols' album would be exactly in last place. I was right!! That is how predictable and cutely "hip" this useless poseur of a guidebook is.

I found the book to be informative in listing a majority of artists and bands whose songs you will

never hear on "commercial" radio. These include the Modern Lovers, Pere Ubu, Replacements, the Shaggs, and much much more. Without this book, I would not have known about them. One thing I found unnecessary was that the book included AC/DC, ABBA, Cheap Trick, Black Sabbath and the Police; They were hardly alternative in my view. In spite of that, a majority of obscure bands grace the pages of the book, so it's not a total disappointment. Despite most of the critics' snootiness and know-it-all style of writing, some lists songs as they critique the albums of the bands. The listing of the songs was really helpful and allowed me to listen to each band's unique musical style. After all, you are your own critic. If you can bypass the faux literal pretensions of the critics, you will find the book to be a good guide to "alternative"/non-commercial music.

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