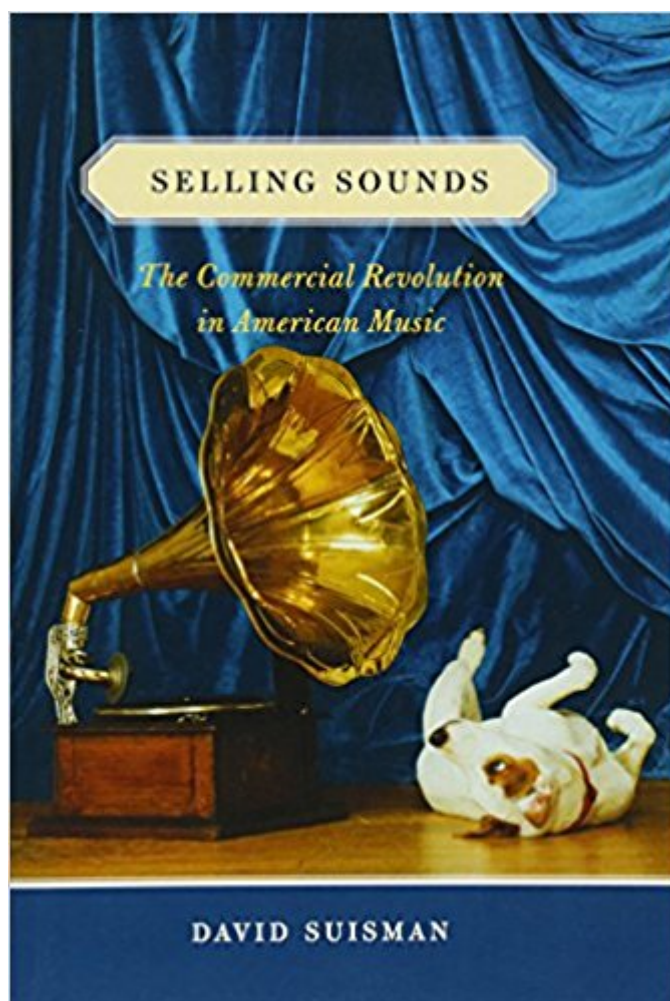




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# Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution In American Music



## Synopsis

From Tin Pan Alley to grand opera, player-pianos to phonograph records, David Suisman's *Selling Sounds* explores the rise of music as big business and the creation of a radically new musical culture. Around the turn of the twentieth century, music entrepreneurs laid the foundation for today's vast industry, with new products, technologies, and commercial strategies to incorporate music into the daily rhythm of modern life. Popular songs filled the air with a new kind of musical pleasure, phonographs brought opera into the parlor, and celebrity performers like Enrico Caruso captivated the imagination of consumers from coast to coast. *Selling Sounds* uncovers the origins of the culture industry in music and chronicles how music ignited an auditory explosion that penetrated all aspects of society. It maps the growth of the music business across the social landscape—in homes, theaters, department stores, schools—and analyzes the effect of this development on everything from copyright law to the sensory environment. While music came to resemble other consumer goods, its distinct properties as sound ensured that its commercial growth and social impact would remain unique. Today, the music that surrounds us—from iPods to ring tones to Muzak—accompanies us everywhere from airports to grocery stores. The roots of this modern culture lie in the business of popular song, player-pianos, and phonographs of a century ago. Provocative, original, and lucidly written, *Selling Sounds* reveals the commercial architecture of America's musical life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is music to my ears-- a much needed history of the rise of the commercial music industry in the first decades of the twentieth century. Deeply researched, smartly argued, and engagingly written, *Selling Sounds* will sweep you off your feet. (Lizabeth Cohen, author of *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*) *Selling Sounds* masterfully charts the rise of the modern music industry in all its commercial complexity. As engaging as the new popular music Suisman describes, his account deserves an audience as wide as that music enjoyed. (Emily Thompson, author of *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*) Ranging from Tin Pan Alley song pluggers to Supreme Court decisions on copyright, from Caruso's Victor Red Seal records to Black Swan, the first major black-owned record company, David Suisman's *Selling Sounds* is a marvelous cultural history of the ways the music industry retuned the soundscape of modern times in the United States. (Michael Denning, Yale University) Virgin's music emporium will soon become a thing of the past: Like so many other retail music stores of late, it has announced that it is going out of business. The story of *Selling Sounds*, then, is especially timely. (Ken Emerson Wall Street Journal 2009-05-12) A fascinating, well-written, richly detailed story of how music became a commodity in America...[Suisman's] scholarship is amazingly wide-ranging. (William F. Gavin Washington Times 2009-06-03) [It's a] fascinating narrative that David Suisman unfurls...Here you learn everything from how the work of creating the songs is distributed to the various sales techniques employed by song pluggers (basically, the salesmen of music publishing), including the use of slides to add a visual component to the song. While there are numerous accounts of the position of so-called song pluggers in the development of popular music in the first decades of the 20th century, one rarely encounters a description that so accurately and compellingly details the quotidian life of these remarkable salesmen and the ways in which they learned to compete while peacefully coexisting...This [is a] really wonderful book. It warrants repeated readings and deep consideration. It is full of surprising revelations and some truly hilarious anecdotes. Well-researched and beautifully documented, replete with beautiful illustrations and photographs, this book belongs on the shelf of any reader serious about popular music and the music industry and given the impact of that industry on our daily lives, that really ought to be all of us. (Chadwick Jenkins PopMatters 2009-06-19) Suisman...tell[s] an alluring story. (George Anders Forbes.com 2009-07-07) A fascinating new book about the formative history of the American music business. (Matt Miller The Deal Magazine 2009-07-15) Inventors ran wild during the years bracketing the turn of the 20th century, creating technology that repeatedly transformed the ways people heard and consumed music. It happened again a hundred years later, which makes David Suisman's lucid account of the

emergence and consolidation of the music industry particularly welcome. (Grant Alden Wilson Quarterly 2009-06-01)[A] meticulously researched history of [the music industry's] early days. (Mark Athitakis Washington Post 2009-08-23) Though the story Suisman tells is a broadly familiar one, he has assembled valuable reminders of something many would rather ignore; namely, the extent to which the music we hear, and how we hear it, has less to do with our personal preferences than with what a large, well-organized sector of business makes available to us. Most listeners--and, I'd wager, artists--would surely prefer to see their musical experiences as a respite from capitalism, not a function of it. Still, it would be hard to deny that phenomena from the selling of youth culture back to itself in the form of rock and roll to the rise of ringtones as a tiny, publicly audible lifestyle indicator (and a fresh income stream) are rooted in structures and processes whose origins Suisman describes. (Franklin Bruno Los Angeles Times blog 2009-09-15) With *Selling Sounds*, David Suisman kicks the legs out from the romantic account of the music industry's innocent start and slow move to commercial heartlessness. Suisman investigates the early decades of the popular music industry, from 1880 to 1930, and his descriptions of the upstart crews of scrappy entrepreneurs who hawked sheet music in the old days call to mind the corporate suits at major labels plugging the next Disney-spawned tween star or mall punk band. Put it in a pretty package and the kids will go ape for it. For Suisman popular music has always been heavily commercialized (songs, albums and artists are just more widgets to be peddled), and his book leaves one wondering whether the history of commercial music resembles the aesthetics of the pop song: the pattern has little variation but has proved to be endlessly repeatable, and mostly profitable. (J. Gabriel Boylan The Nation 2010-01-11) If you're interested in the history of the music industry, or have wondered idly how the song that's stuck in your head got to be there, you should read David Suisman's detailed and entertaining *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*. Every page held a new discovery for me, from the competitive world of song pluggers (piano-and-crooner teams hired to perform songs in advance of the sheet music publication, often to "spontaneous" applause from plants in the audience), to the rise of the player-piano (in 1900, it would have been regarded as more potentially culture-transforming than phonographs), to the reason tenors surpassed sopranos in popularity (their voices better masked deficiencies in early recording), to Irving Berlin's nine rules--some seemingly contradictory--to writing a hit song. The chapter on Black Swan Records alone, which from 1921 to 1923 attempted to combine racial uplift with a viable business model, is worth the price of admission. *Selling Sounds* is a profound and fascinating book, not just for academics but for anyone with ears. (Ed Park The Millions 2009-12-21)

David Suisman is Associate Professor of History at the University of Delaware.

What you need to know about origin and evolution of pop music and the commercial music industry in general. A fantastic book.

all good.

Perfect

I am only 50 pages into the book. It is a story about how today's music happened. I am fascinated by stories of forces of commerce, and early personalities, shaping the world. I do not always like what happens, but it is always a great story. The book is very well written so far, pages just go by, and early 20th century dances in front of my eyes. But I can't tell you much yet, I am only 50 pages into it. What I can tell you is that I regret buying the Kindle edition. It has no illustrations, there are many, and I want to see them. Musicians, records, old NYC, are cool to look at, and I can't see them. I'd have gladly spend \$8 more for it. And donated the book to my local library when done. Or not, if I really, really liked it.

this is very good , and I would recomend it to anyone who is interested in American Music and any kind of music

Assigned for class I am taking. Very thorough but way too wordy. His writing style is very flowery. Lots of hundred dollar words. It would be half its size if he removed the obscure adjectives.

David Suisman has written a thoroughly researched and much needed history of the growth of the American commercial music industry. Insightful and well written this book deserves a much wider audience than music industry professionals. I highly recommend Selling Sounds. Gave my copy to my wife and she read it over the weekend and has already ordered a second copy as a gift for one of her managers.

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