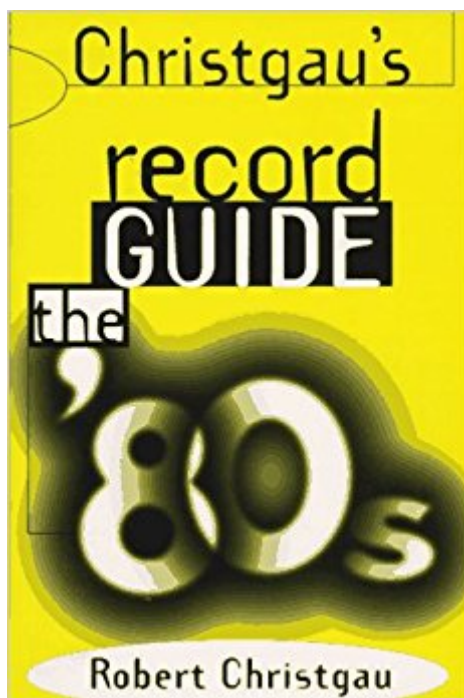


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# Christgau's Record Guide



## Synopsis

This text surveys the popular music of the decade that brought us rap, hardcore, MTV, new age, new wave, worldbeat and speed metal - the decade of Prince, King Sunny Ade, Marshall Crenshaw, De-Barge, The Replacements, Black Union, Hukser Du, New Order, Sonic Youth, R.E.M., Madonna and Public Enemy. Robert Christgau, author of "Rock Albums of the '70s" is one of America's leading rock critics. In this book he reviews and letter-grades some 3000 albums, providing a guide to the rock, pop, country, rap, blues, rock-related jazz, reggae, and African records of the 1980s.

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## Customer Reviews

The Grand Poobah of Rock Criticism and longtime Village Voice contributor rates 3,000 releases in this dandy book, which belongs on the night table of every self-respecting music fan. Robert Christgau's tastes are admirably catholic: refusing to limit himself to solid rock, he takes on rap, hardcore, country, blues, reggae, worldbeat, and everything in between. His vest-pocket pronouncements are always fun to read--even when they seem perversely wrongheaded--and who else would zoom in on Ruben Blades's "ability to skip along the shores of schlock without ruining his best pair of shoes," or refer to "Amazing Grace" as "the 'Send in the Clowns' of roots music"? Who else, for that matter, could almost persuade you to run out and pick up The Very Best of Deep Purple?

YA-- A companion to Christgau's Rock Albums of the '70s (Ticknor & Fields, 1981), representing all types of music: country, rock, rap, metal, etc. The book is arranged alphabetically by the name of the group or artist, and not by genre. A short paragraph gives Christgau's biased but informative views on each of 3,000 CDs/LPs/tapes, along with his A+ through C ratings. An appendix includes a core list of pre-1980 music and a "Gone But Not Forgotten" list of music that is good but not quite core quality. While similar to The New Rolling Stone Record Guide (Random, 1983), edited by David Marsh, and The New Trouser Press Record Guide (Macmillan, 1988), edited by Ira Robbins, this volume covers only one decade. However, it works well not only by itself, but also as an update of the other two guides.- John Lawson, Fairfax County Public Library, VACopyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Robert Christgau's Record Guide: The 80's offers a nice snapshot into the decades musical styles from Rock to Rap. Each album review has one of Mr. Christgau's biting blurbs about the album as well as a letter grade. Mr. Christgau doesn't suffer fools gladly and he isn't shy about lacing into an artist. These reviews are from the Village Voice and like the paper itself always offers information that make you sit down and think.

Great book.

Robert Christgau, one of the most famous names in rock criticism here, tackles albums of the 1980s in this guide, his second following the very similar one for the 1970s. This guide was one of my first readings in the difficult-to-comprehend field of rock criticism, but I nevertheless took what interested me completely to heart (and misread bits of it when I wanted to). As such, it is very important to me. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that Robert Christgau scarcely makes an ideal critic for someone trying to get beyond the generally annoying music played on both commercial and noncommercial radio today. He generally fails to give the reader any idea at all as to what is good or bad about an album, with the result that real depth is completely missing from his writing when compared with almost any other critic I have read (Richie Unterberger, Joe S. Harrington, David Fricke etc. etc.). In this book, often also the focus is on the musician rather than the music, as if Christgau merely wishes to publicise music he either loves or hates. It is fair to say that even back in 1996 I did not agree with most of his judgements, but I was overimpressed by Christgau's actually-not-great ability. Nonetheless, the humour in this book is unlike any other critic, and will keep you reading long after you realise Christgau's judgements are mediocre at best. His ability to

make funny connections or comparisons about every artist he talks about will make you remember him for years and years, as if he were a humorist rather than a well-respected critic. Interesting more than really truthful to my eyes today, but at least worth a read or two.

The absolute worst critic in the business today, not just because I disagree with most of his assessments, but because he's consistently inconsistent in his likes and dislikes and his writing is as clear as a San Francisco sky in summer. The haiku like reviews, which are more about Christgau's clever hipsterism than criticism, often left me asking "Well what did the music sound like?"

In these days of vinyl disposition for replacement CDs, I continually find myself referring to this invaluable resource (as well as its predecessor for the 70's decade) before going to used record stores and garage sales. Christgau's insightful record reviews with their effective letter grading system (F through A+) have protected me from those "disaster purchases," while steering me to several bargain used albums that I have spun at home to great satisfaction. He admirably flaunts a highly discriminating musical taste that spans an array of musical genres to expand the horizons of even the most devout enthusiast. But the real beauty of the book is that it also provides for downright fun reading as in "What was I thinking when I bought that record?"

Bah. Why is Christgau's 1970s album guide in print, while the 1980s guide is out of print? I suppose we are going to have to wait for the old nostalgia wheel to make another cycle (or two) before this situation is rectified. If you get one Christgau album guide, you need to get all of them. After all, if you are any kind of a serious record listener/collector you aren't going to write off an entire decade, are you? You don't necessarily have to agree with Christgau all the time (and whatever you do, don't base your buying decisions on his letter-grading system) but he is indispensable for putting a particular artist or album in something like a cultural context. Store it on top of your toilet tank - your guests will thank you!

Although somewhat more obtusely written than the '70s volume, Christgau's '80s rock and roll music guide is an excellent way to find the best music of the decade. Notable for what was included as much as what was not: an appendix lists a couple hundred "post new wave" bands that the author felt did not merit more than a mention. While relatively obscure in the '80s, some of these bands demand a more thorough evaluation based upon their achievements and/or influences in the

'90s.

Basically, Cristgau thinks too much and overanalyzes everything. These are just pop records, after all. Though he is very intelligent and often makes good observations, half the time you'll probably wonder what the hell he's talking about. Also, he's too predictable in his musical prejudices: anything that's punk and amateurish is good, all metal is bad, and anything that's even remotely pretentious (his favorite word) is bad. I'm still trying to figure out why it's a bad thing to be a good musician. He does have a good selection of world music for those so inclined, but my taste is considerably different than his. A worthy reference source, but hardly definitive.

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