



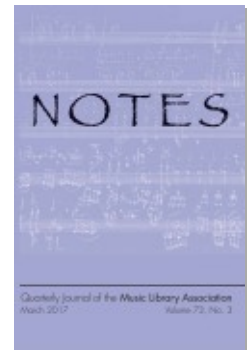
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Music Magazine Archives: Rock (review)

Marci Cohen

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NEW MEDIA REVIEWS

EDITED BY STEPHEN HENRY



Music Magazine Archives: Rock [Ann Arbor, MI]: NA Publishing. (Accessed 5 September 2016). [Requires a Web browser and an Internet connection. Pricing: Ranges from \$1,200 to \$6,350 based on type of institution and purchase or five-year subscription.]

Music Magazine Archives: Rock (MMA: Rock) is an online collection of the full runs of approximately a dozen rock magazines published from the late 1960s to the present. It features cover-to-cover scanned images, including advertisements, and the editorial text is searchable. NA Publishing has produced the database in a partnership with the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Library & Archives and Bowling Green State University (BGSU) Music Library. The resource is aimed at academic libraries with pricing based on the type of library from two-year colleges to Association of Research Libraries members. It is available for one-time purchase with an annual access fee or pre-paid five-year subscription.

Content

Unlike many periodical databases whose strength is in the breadth of coverage, MMA: Rock provides a very focused collection. All the publications deal with rock music and its associated culture, and these consumer magazines are aimed at a specific audience. The content makes it clear that the publishers did not care to reach the broadest possible readership but were targeting those in the underground, subculture or alternative culture. In particular, the promised addition of *CREEM* serves as a needed counterbalance to the widely-available *Rolling Stone*. The latter has established itself as the journal of record for rock, but it has had a different editorial outlook from *CREEM*, often ignoring or dismissing acts that *CREEM* heralded during its 1969–1989 run. Hitting a sweet spot between artisanal fanzines and slicker mass media, these professional magazines are

neither excessively personal and precious nor blandly commercial. These are the work of competent staff with a particular point of view that often veers from the dominant narrative of its times.

Articles are available as both the original image and as accessible OCR-processed text. For some articles, OCR-processed text is missing or riddled with errors when the task clearly exceeded the limits of automation due to text at askew angles or background images that interfere with contrast even for readers with perfect vision. The transcriptions begin with a linked disclaimer, including, “The searchable text and titles in this collection have been automatically generated using OCR software. They have not been manually reviewed or corrected.” The zoom function helps to overcome such difficulties, giving this resource an advantage over print. Users can adjust the width of the columns containing the images and text transcription.

As an example of distinctive content, *Royal's World Countdown* has a hand-drawn map of the festival grounds for 1967's Monterey International Pop Festival and a hand-written list of the names of legendary session musicians in the Wrecking Crew as members of the festival's all star house band. (June 1967, 2–3). An issue of *Slash*, which documented Los Angeles's emerging punk scene, includes the results of their first readers' poll that gives a glimpse not only of their culture of favorite and hated bands but also of their demographics: “And dare you think that Slash is a leisure class publication, a full 70% of you work (!) for a living, while only 10% mooch off mom & dad (1% none of your business, 5% welfare,

3% blackmail and/or pillage).” (“The Results of the 1st Slash ‘yousaiditnotus’ Readers Poll...,” *Slash*, January 1979, 12.)

Little of this content is available elsewhere online. Some articles are in Rock’s Backpages (RBP), but that content is licensed from individual writers rather than cover-to-cover for the publications as a whole, and RBP is strictly text without any images, such as the artist photos and stand-alone comics found here. The Trouser Press Web site compiles reviews from their book-length album guides, and the only content from the original *Trouser Press* print magazine is selected cover images. The complete run of *Slash* was posted online in 2015 as a single, massive PDF, followed by a 500-page edited collection in 2016. *Maximum Rocknroll* offers minimal indexing on their Web site and charges per issue to download a limited selection of back issues. Other titles have less of an online presence.

At the time of writing, two promised titles, *CREEM* and *Jazz and Pop* were missing, and only a spotty run of *MaximumRocknRoll* was included. However, this is likely to be rectified by the time this review is published.

Search and Navigation

The simple search function searches all available text. Users can limit results prior to searching with Advanced search or afterwards with facets. Quotations marks allow for phrase searching, for example enabling finding materials about The The, a band clearly named in an era before stop words were a concern. Lack of subject or artist indexing and the limits of automated OCR mean that some content is discoverable only through serendipity rather than methodical effort. Theoretically, this could improve if a critical mass of users add tags.

Search results display a line of text with the search terms highlighted, easing distinguishing relevant results from false hits. As a minor improvement, the facets could be reordered to move more useful ones to the top, such as giving preference to decade of publication over source library. The faceting is not sophisticated enough to concatenate author names in all capital letters with those with only initial capital letters, and searching by any field is case-insensitive.

There are many ways to browse the content. Browsing by date is a helpful way to get a snapshot of the landscape in any

given month; this method lends itself well to the concise, focused set of publications. One can also browse by a particular title’s issue list, and search hits display in the context of a full issue. For navigation within an issue, ads are labeled as such, although the classifications, such as Music Albums, Business or Reading Material, are often vague or inaccurate. Scrolling through the page images of an issue is choppy, and there is a notable lag in image loading, but it is a minor annoyance. The interface works on mobile devices, although touch-screen zoom is not smooth.

Features

The interface is by no means elegant, but it is mostly clear and functional. The platform is built for library subscriptions rather than a cobbled-together adaptation for individual subscribers. It works with off-site proxy authentication.

Help is available via a link in the top navigation bar. It is not context-sensitive, but it is linked to a short table of contents. There are also specific help links that retrieve just the relevant topic. The entire block of help text appears in a window that floats over the content. It has no Close button, and all other functionality is disabled when the window is open, so one must reload the page to do anything else.

The database’s most frustrating aspect is the difficulty of making use of selected content after identifying it. Saving and sharing articles is possible but awkward. The site lacks a native print function. The Help text instructs users to use their browser’s print function after selecting the article and clicking the Clip this Article link, but that function is accessed by right-clicking the article or image. Clipping the article lays out the text blocks in a single column that does not work well depending on the layout of the original page. Similarly, once one has clipped an article, there are links to share it on a variety of email, productivity and social media platforms, but it shares a link without context. Users can create individual accounts to add comments or tags, save articles to private lists, save search histories, correct OCR errors or add text when OCR text is missing. One can create multiple private lists, move selections from one list to another, add notes to an individual article or email a list to oneself. The email con-

tains links to the original articles, but one cannot save articles for local/offline access. Researchers accustomed to downloading complete articles with citations will be disappointed. Users can only hope to stumble upon these features.

Conclusion

For institutions with the right targeted research, MMA: Rock provides a treasure trove of content not readily accessible online elsewhere. The interface lends itself to browsing to discover essays and general editorial tone, coverage and perspective that are missing from more mainstream sources.

Beyond popular music studies, it is valuable for American studies because all the publications are U.S.-based, and some specifically reflect the scene in their city or region. One publication, *Raygun*, whose art direction is a paragon of 1990s aesthetics, would be a boon to scholars on the history of print design. The interface lacks the rich features of databases from larger vendors, but it is sufficient for users of this unique resource.

MARCI COHEN
Boston University

