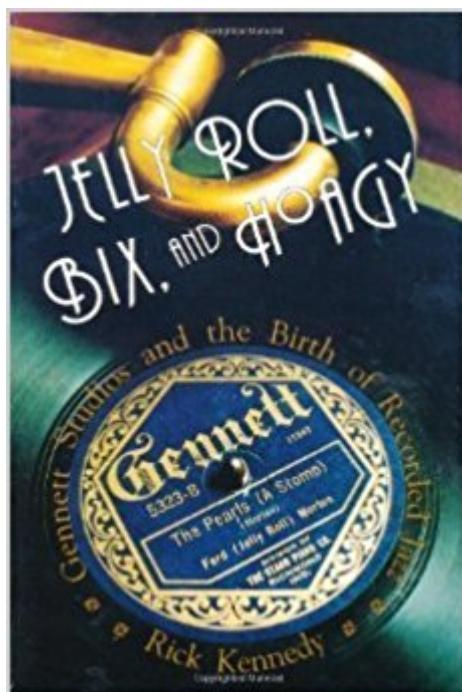


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Jelly Roll, Bix, And Hoagy: Gennett Studios And The Birth Of Recorded Jazz



Synopsis

An account of the Gennett Records company which began business in the 1920s in Indiana.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this well-researched, behind-the-scenes account, Kennedy, a media relations manager at General Electric, tells the story of Gennett Studios, a small company in the 1920s that produced the first recordings of many of our nation's great jazz, country and blues performers. The Gennett family of Richmond, Ind., owners of the Starr Piano Company, opened a recording studio in 1915 to make records to sell in their showrooms across the country. Taking advantage of a court decision that placed recording processes in the public domain, the Gennetts entered the business as jazz captured the population's fancy. They would record anyone who approached them and thus captured, often quite primitively, the original sounds of such artists as Jelly Roll Morton, Joe "King" Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Earl "Fatha" Hines, Bix Beiderbecke, Hoagy Carmichael, Bradley Kincaid and Charlie Patton. Unable to ride out the Depression and family bickering, the Gennetts stopped producing records in 1934. Kennedy's account adds a significant footnote to the history of recorded music. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Nestled in rural Richmond, Indiana, the Gennett studios made musical history in the 1920s, producing early and important discs by the legendary Jelly Roll Morton, Bix Beiderbecke, and Hoagy Carmichael, among others. By focusing on the trio's recording studio activities, Kennedy

adds a new dimension to our knowledge of their careers. He also shows how early recordings accelerated popular acceptance of new musical styles, signaling the birth of what is now a billion-dollar industry. Carefully researched and well written, this study strikes an entertaining balance between the business of recording and the art of early jazz and popular music. Good for large collections.- Paul Baker, Wisconsin Ctr. for Education ResearchCopyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Any collector of old 78s knows about the Gennett label. Gennett was the first independent label to have a serious impact on the recording industry, and in part helped to launch the careers of many early jazz legends. King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Bix Beiderbecke, Hoagy Carmichael, Earl Hines, and others made their first records in Gennett's hot, cramped studio by the side of railroad tracks in Richmond, Indiana. Today, those original 78s are highly-prized collectors items, fetching hundreds or thousands of dollars at auction. In years of collecting 78s, I have come across dozens of Gennett records, but until I read this book, I knew little about them or the company that made them (outside of tidbits here and there from reissue liner notes or chats with other collectors). Rick Kennedy has written a book that is filled not only with entertaining anecdotes, but a wealth of information. Reading about Bix's sessions with the Wolverines is almost like being there, and listening to the records afterwards gives the recordings a whole new meaning. Kennedy introduces us to the people who made Gennett records happen--the musicians, the sound engineers, the businessmen, and the distributors. The book traces Gennett Records from its beginning in the Starr Piano Company, through its legal struggle to continue (ultimately defeating Victor's patent for the right to make lateral recordings), to its glory days in the 1920s, and its demise with the onset of the Great Depression. Along the way, the book answers questions about how the records were made, how they were distributed, and what happened to the recorded masters (which is an interesting story in itself!). Gennett's relationship with the infamous KKK records is explained (basically, they were "custom" records that Gennett made solely for the extra profit, turning a blind eye to the content). Gennett recorded some of the most creative and lasting jazz, blues, and "old-time" music in the 1920s and the label's story is a fascinating one. Lovers of jazz, old records, or American history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in general will enjoy reading this book. It is well-written and very "readable" (I went through it in about three sessions). It also serves as a handy reference to answer questions that may arise among 78 or jazz collectors. Highly recommended!

For anyone interested in the history of the early years of jazz music, this book will entertain and illuminate. It is well researched and the author has included many anecdotes about the Gennett studio recordings during the 1920's. It begins with a good description of the early history of recorded music including the history of Starr piano and its recording arm of Gennett. It also includes how the mechanics of the recording process developed which I found very interesting. It then takes us through the Chicago and midwest groups that recorded in Richmond, IN describing the history of these early groups and their importance to jazz music. It is filled with many interesting facts that I have not seen in other books. It is a very readable book.

as promised

In this eminently readable book, Kennedy manages to provide the reader with an overview of the early history of the whole recording industry while also providing a view of successful Midwestern entrepreneurship---and that is just the background laid for this fascinating topic. I had heard about those "incredible Gennett sides" for many years, and acquired several samples of Gennett records around 15 years ago. In many cases the unknown or obscurely known artists turned in amazing performances that anticipated where jazz and popular music would be several years in the future---in the later 30's and 1940's. I often wondered how these performances failed to come to the attention of the larger American listening audience. After reading this book, I feel that I have an understanding. Learning the history of the company that pioneered recorded jazz was the enjoyable and enlightening result of reading this book. The incredible history of this American popular music form and its legitimacy as a recorded music encompasses the entire history of the Midwestern and Southern United States during the first quarter of the 20th century. Kennedy's book will soon have you absorbed in that history. While the topic is certainly the genesis of Jazz music recording, the reader will soon discover there is much more to it. Highly recommended to anyone interested in American cultural history!

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