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## Book Review: "Nettwerk: 25 Years of Music We Love"

by Alexandria Stuart



### Nettwerk: 25 Years of Music We Love



*Nettwerk: 25 Years of Music We Love* is a compelling look behind the scenes of one of the Canadian music industry's greatest success stories. How did Nettwerk Music Group (NMG) grow out of **Terry McBride's** West End living room and into offices in Vancouver's False Creek, Los Angeles, Nashville, New York, and London? Given exclusive access, *The Vancouver Sun* journalist **Denise Ryan** brings the story to life.

Nettwerk artist **Sarah McLachlan** opens the first chapter with an account of her debut gig at Dalhousie University written in the voice of the teenager she was at the time. McLachlan's career as it relates to NMG's history is key to this book. She remains one NMG's best earners so there is no lack of material to appeal to McLachlan's fan base.

We're also introduced to the story of Lilith Fair, a summertime festival featuring female artists. The

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genesis of the idea is fascinating: essentially McLachlan had a petulant knee-jerk reaction to the industry's reluctance to place two female acts on the same bill. So, she gave them an entire touring festival of women and told them to deal with it. It was a calculated risk that paid off.

The balance of the story is largely co-founder McBride's story. He talks of connecting with the partners who would join him starting the label with three disparate acts: McLachlan, acoustic pop-rockers **The Grapes of Wrath**, and industrial-goth pioneers **Skinny Puppy**. McBride's imagination, vision, and tenacity are largely responsible for the label's success. As an artist manager, he pioneered new ways of marketing and touring artists, pushing many to the brink of their abilities. For some, international stardom was the payoff.

One voice that we don't hear in this book is author Denise Ryan's. Writing in third-person accounts of past events, she is simply an observer, a scribe to the story. Other voices absent from the book include A-list artists managed by NMG, including **Dido**, **Coldplay**, **Barenaked Ladies**, and **Avril Lavigne** (the latter three have moved on to other management companies). With a couple of exceptions, their stories have been carefully excised from the overall history of the company. There was the potential for a sensational tell-all book here, but that would have been out of character for the players at NMG. This is a company born and bred by three nice Canadian boys who grew up in a laid-back West Coast version of the music industry.

*Nettwerk: 25 Years of Music We Love* is an entertaining read with plenty of never-before-seen pictures; this is a book indie music fans will be happy to find under the tree. But I think a book celebrating Nettwerk's 25 years could have been much heavier on stories. Almost as telling here is what's left unwritten: stories of the tireless staff and the plethora of other talented artists who also fuelled the company over the last quarter century. The names and players left out are almost as illuminating as the ones who made the final manuscript. Maybe when they turn 50?

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