

are vital to the U.S. Army—they constitute about 15 percent of the force. And they are assigned to patrols and small units that routinely go into combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Neither the Army nor the nation has begun to come to terms with this reality.

Rostker's historical account is exhaustive and meticulous. At the last, however, he falters, for he concludes that the all-volunteer force can probably suffice for America's future needs. True, the all-volunteer force did well during the Reagan years. It did well during Desert Storm, as did the service reserves and the National Guard, its vital partners in the Total Force. But as President Bill Clinton reduced and underfunded the force while increasing its deployments and tempo of operations, a certain frazzle set in among both full- and part-time volunteers.

Five years of war under President George W. Bush have demonstrated an ineluctable truth: People wear out. They wear out as soldiers who, whatever their devotion, can't keep returning to war. And they wear out as human beings who want to spend time with their families.

Whatever happens in Iraq, this nation needs a much larger Army to deter or deal with future

conflicts—in Iran, North Korea, Africa. In the face of this reality, Rostker notes only that “increased incentives [i.e., bonuses] have always proven to stretch enlistments, but there is a limit.” Seasoned military leaders will do everything they can to ensure the all-volunteer force's continued success, he concludes, but “only time will tell.”

Indeed it will. Time will tell us that voluntarily putting oneself in harm's way solely for pay is an activity fit for mercenaries, not Uncle Sam's soldiers; that women must be admitted to full equality under arms; and that we cannot much longer avoid renewed consideration of how to raise the Army America needs—whether through the old-style direct federal draft, some form of national service, or an entirely new volunteer arrangement, such as a contract to fight only in the cause of homeland defense. If history is any indication, the coming debate will be acrimonious and ill informed. Those interested in bringing some reason to the table will do well to consult *I Want You!* We can't know where we're going unless we know where we've been.

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## Nashville's Forgotten Little People

Reviewed by Grant Alden

THE 1950S WERE THE AMERICAN DREAM, OR at least they have seemed so ever after. A generation worn hard by the privations of the Depression and harder by the demands of World War II found itself unexpectedly atop a world of plenty, the leaders of a great and kind and undamaged nation in which anything truly *was* possible. We born after can never grasp quite what that meant, or how it felt.

Caricatured today as a time of lockstep conformity, the postwar era saw enormous artistic, economic, and social innovation. The failure of one

idea—one scheme—only begat a dozen others, one of which was simply bound to work. It was a time when, as one aging bohemian put it a decade ago, “We took jobs for sport.”

And America danced. The country was hungry for music, for wartime rationing of shellac had made new records scarce. Years of unrecorded songs awaited capture, and all over the country, men who had nurtured dreams at small-town

### A SHOT IN THE DARK:

Making Records in Nashville, 1945–1955.

By Martin Hawkins.  
Vanderbilt Univ.  
Press/Country Music  
Foundation Press.  
318 pp. (with CD). \$65

radio stations and learned their way around the new electronic gizmos of the battlefield decided they'd have a try at the music business. A few had carried tape recorders home with them, discovered amid the ruins of German invention. Most were simply businessmen chasing a dollar.

The great, complicated stew of American popular music was enriched by their risk, though only a few of their record labels are remembered as innovators: Sun (Memphis), King (Cincinnati), and Chess (Chicago), say. But solely in Nashville, argues music historian Martin Hawkins, did their efforts create a new industrial center. Today, Nashville is marketed as the home of country music (and Christian, and gospel). But until at least the 1970s, city fathers were none too keen to have the place known for hillbilly music, preferring that their self-styled Athens of the South be known as a financial and religious hub.

Indeed, at various times Atlanta, Dallas, Knoxville, and Cincinnati might as easily have ended up hosting Music Row, the intimate neigh-

borhood around Nashville's Sixteenth Avenue that has, since the early 1960s, been home to most major players in the country music business. Without that small community, country music might have been assimilated into the broader strains of popular music and never have settled into a separate genre. But instead, country music made its home in Middle Tennessee, and by 1960 Nashville was well on its way to becoming a third mecca of the music industry (after New York and Los Angeles).

Country music historians typically argue that Nashville benefited from a confluence of luck, talent, and geography (Nashville is a day's drive from some 30 states and a crossroads of major interstate highways), as well as the dominance of radio station WSM's 50,000-watt signal and its Saturday night show the *Grand Ole Opry*. Hawkins is little interested in that argument, choosing instead to advance his case for the importance of a motley crew of pioneering businessmen.



R&B singer-songwriter Jimmy Sweeney, center, records a song for Hickory Records. The label, founded by music entrepreneur and renaissance man Fred Rose, was one of several "indies" that sprang up in Nashville after World War II to cater to America's appetite for new music.

He begins their story in 1945, with a short conversation between serial entrepreneur Jim Bulleit, restaurateur and jukebox operator C. V. Hitchcock, and gospel singer-songwriter Wally Fowler. After perhaps 20 minutes, the three men agreed to go into the record business together. Fowler, like many musicians before and after him, apparently lacked the money to join the new enterprise, though he gave it the name Bullet before Bulleit walked through the door. And so, for \$1,500 each (roughly \$17,000 today), Hitchcock and Bulleit started a record label. A bit later, an assistant cashier at the First American National Bank named Orville Zickler bought into their business.

They were, apparently, the first to try such a thing in Nashville, and were quickly (if not widely) imitated. From 1946 to 1952, Bullet released some 500 records, then collapsed. Bullet was followed into the marketplace by Nashboro/Excello (which specialized in black music), Hickory (launched by Hank Williams's music publisher, Fred Rose), and Dot (which grew out of Randy Wood's Gallatin, Tennessee, record store). Only Dot, which was moved to Los Angeles and sold to Paramount in 1957, survived long enough to provide any kind of retirement fund for its owners.

Hawkins details the fates of a number of even smaller labels, whose operators discovered either that creating a hit was not as easy as it seemed or that handling the demand for a hit record once they had one (and preventing better-known artists from covering it) was beyond them. But they were willing to *try* anything, to cross color barriers, to record unknowns, and to play fast and loose—with social mores, audio fidelity, legal niceties, bill collectors, musical conventions, and each other.

The music produced by and for these postwar entrepreneurs was hardly limited to country. The 20-track CD accompanying this volume goes some welcome distance toward explaining what the major releases sounded like, and represents a broad spectrum of artists—including dance bands, blues and R&B performers, and some of

our finest gospel singers. A few of these songs were major releases: Pianist Francis Craig's big band hit "Near You" apparently sold two million or more copies for Bullet, though it's hard today to know why such a modest riff caught the nation's ear. It is somewhat easier to guess why Dottie Dillard's "Save That Confederate Money Boys," recorded with the Owen Bradley Orchestra, found a much smaller audience.

**H**awkins has been working on this book off and on from his home in England since 1975, when he became fascinated by the original indies that sprang up in postwar Nashville while he was working with Colin Escott on the pioneering study *Good Rockin' Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock & Roll* (1991). Beyond preserving the music, the principal achievement of *A Shot in the Dark* is the appendix, for which Hawkins and a handful of collector-collaborators have painstakingly reassembled these obscure labels' discographies. No small task, that, especially given that Hawkins found that Bullet tossed its masters into a Dumpster after filing for bankruptcy in 1952, and that Excello's founder saved money by taping his favorite easy listening LPs over master sessions.

In some ways, the text of *A Shot in the Dark* functions best as a long series of footnotes to that appendix. Most performers' lives and careers are summarized in a tight paragraph, with major players spilling into a few hundred words more. This is in part because Hawkins is chiefly interested in the history of the business itself; in part because many of the performers involved are, like honky-tonk singer Lattie Moore, of importance only to devoted collectors and scholars; and in part because Hawkins has amassed so much detail (despite how much remains unknowable) that he scarcely has room in which to thread a narrative.

Sometimes his book offers fascinating glimpses into the early careers of, say, jazz legend Herman "Sonny" Blount (Sun Ra), rock 'n' roll pioneer Little Richard, and Richard's crooning

white imitator, Pat Boone. Indeed, the figures at the edges of *A Shot in the Dark* who went on to shape the music industry are the musicians who played on these indie sessions. Blues bassist, songwriter, and producer Willie Dixon became integral to Chess Records, while Owen and Harold Bradley would go on to create much of the music that came to be identified as the Nashville sound. But none of these early indie labels produced a star, much less an indelible signature recording.

Most of the businessmen behind these labels were not absorbed into the increasingly professional music business—particularly the distribution side—as it emerged and consolidated in the 1960s and '70s, and they seem neither to have understood nor much cared about the nuances of publishing and union contracts. They provided a training ground for others, and became object lessons themselves. (One of their odder legacies is a surviving Nashville record-pressing plant.)

One of Hawkins's main goals is to rehabilitate

the memory of Jim Bulleit, whose oral history and business dealings run through this volume. Too few of Bulleit's collaborators were alive to give accounts that might balance his testimony, though clearly he was a gifted salesman and promoter. Ultimately, his desire to record pop music with full orchestras—and the commercial failure of the expensive sides that resulted—drove him from Bullet three years after it was founded. The label did well for a time after his departure, then ran out of creative steam and closed in 1952. Bulleit subsequently invested in and was a promoter for Sun Records, but eventually he drifted far from the music business. He was a candy broker when he died in 1988.

Bulleit's dream, however, remains alive in Nashville. Today, dozens of indie labels thrive and struggle in the shadow of Music Row, each hoping that their latest shot in the dark will somehow top the charts. And every once in a while, one does.

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## IN BRIEF

### HISTORY

## Old-School History

FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND luxury are the preoccupations that drive Robin Lane Fox's one-volume survey of classical Greece and Rome. Rather than organize his book around modern theories, Lane Fox instead follows these three explanatory threads, favored by ancient historians, through the turbulent centuries from about 800 BC through AD 138. His account begins with Homer's archaic Greece and traces classical civilization through the death of Hadrian, the

#### THE CLASSICAL WORLD:

An Epic History From Homer to Hadrian.

By Robin Lane Fox. Basic Books. 656 pp. \$35

Spanish-descended Roman emperor who embodied, through his "Greekling" tastes, the "common classicizing culture" that bound together the empire's far-flung elite.

An Oxford historian and the adviser to Oliver Stone on his 2004 film *Alexander* (though he might wish his name removed from the credits), Lane Fox has produced a work of exhaustive scholarship, but what proves more winning is his willingness to take sides. Freedom, he tells us, was a contested value always and everywhere in the classical world. That freedom reached its (relative) apogee in classical Athens, he is certain. "The nearest to an ideal state in the classical world was not the state of Plato or Aristotle: It was the Athenians," he flatly declares. His passionate admiration for Athenian democracy