

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.

GRANT ALDEN is coeditor and art director of the alternative-country music magazine *No Depression*.

## 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.

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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

enlivens the chapter on the birth of that institution in 508 BC, and leaves no doubt about the contrasting grimness of life in Sparta and the despotism of the Persian kings or of an emperor such as Nero.

Lane Fox has a deft way of showing how intimate the connections were between Greece and Rome, and yet how starkly different the two could be. In 166 BC, for instance, Rome was embarked on a period of intense Hellenization following its triumph over Macedon the previous year. But when famous Greek flute players and dancers were brought to Rome, the audience soon tired of their performance, and “they were told to liven it up by starting a mock battle.” Boxers climbed onstage. The Greek historian Poly-

bios, who was likely present, “could not even bring himself to describe it for his serious Greek readership.”

In compressing the events of a thousand years into roughly 600 pages, Lane Fox reduces some of the

*The Classical World* is old-fashioned narrative history at its finest, though Lane Fox occasionally comes off as a bit crusty.

most compelling personalities of the ancient world to ciphers—an unfortunate shortcoming in a history billed as “epic.” Alcibiades, the glamorous Athenian general who led the expedition to Sicily that was to prove so disastrous for Athens in the Peloponnesian War, is here only a dim presence, as is Catiline, the upper-class demagogue who led a coup against the Roman Senate in 63 BC. Other figures, however, are finely sketched; the portrait of Cicero is about as clear-eyed and generous as one could wish.

*The Classical World* is old-fashioned narrative history at its finest, though Lane Fox occasionally comes off as a bit crusty. In his brief discussion of Sappho, the preeminent Greek poet of erotic desire, Lane Fox blushingly marvels at her lesbianism—“she really desires these ladies”—before changing tack and deeming her a “poetess of flowers.” (Perhaps it’s his horticulturalist’s eye, not old-fogeyism, that’s to blame: He writes a

weekly gardening column for *The Financial Times*.)

Throughout this dense yet leisurely telling, the author comes across as urbane, genial, and a tad snifty: in short, the consummate don. His occasional aperçus could just as well be delivered over a glass of port at high table as between the covers of his book. After extolling the talents of the typical Greek aristocrat—raised to speak eloquently in public, ride, play music, and compose verses—Lane Fox remarks drily, “He was accomplished in ways in which his modern critics tend not to be.” One can imagine the appreciative chortles of a tableful of Old Etonians and Harrovians.

—Amanda Kolson Hurley

## Fighting Over Money

FROM THE LATE COLONIAL ERA until the establishment of the Federal Reserve System in the early 20th century, conflicts over America’s money supply shaped the country’s history. Those taxes in the American colonies on stamps, tea, and the like may

have tipped the scale in favor of rebellion, but the Revolutionary War’s main economic causes were volatile interest rates and Britain’s restrictions on what could be used as money in the colonies. The monetary chaos that emerged during the American Revolution and the severe deflation that followed it drove the movement for a new constitution. And contentious political battles in the 18th and 19th centuries over the Bank of the United States, championed by capitalists who desired the stability of a central bank, were obviously related to monetary policy.

Control of the money supply meant control of the price level and interest rates, a situation that pitted Americans against each other: Consumers and lenders benefited when the price level fell and were hurt when it rose, while, for producers and borrowers, the inverse was true. Likewise, high interest rates (adjusted for inflation) aided

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