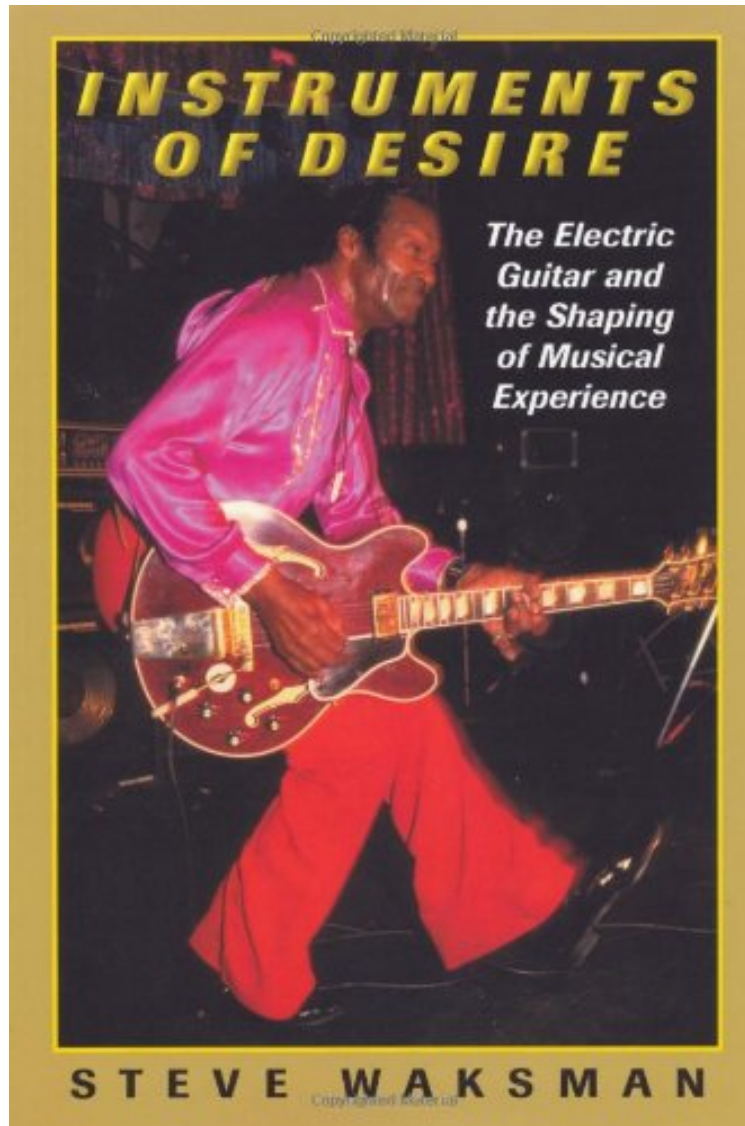


Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience

Steve Waksman

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Steve Waksman : Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Digs deeper into music history and its social impact By Mister Mark I picked up this book expecting a popular history of the electric guitar. That is, an informative skim read but better than

the numerous picture books. But I was surprised at how Waksman unravels the tight braid of intertwined music histories, from blues roots to rock antecedents, from rock-n-roll rebellion to heavy metal commodification, and finally from punk to the avant garde. Throughout, Waksman heralds the instrument's potential as a 'noisemaker' to empower music makers to stretch and ultimately serially reinvent conventional forms. And of course back around to its role in creating music more easily packaged and sold. I expected to learn something about the guitar, sure, but I gained a whole new perspective on music, music-making, and musicians. A great, thoughtful read. 4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. smart *and* entertaining By maria damon this is a terrific book; it weaves together lots of well-researched cultural history, theoretical savvy, musical insight and a true rock and roll spirit to create an eminently readable and yet very intellectually responsible volume. it is hard to find a scholarly book that is so accessible, entertainingly written, and consistently adept at keeping so many balls in the air at once --gender and racial politics, sonic codings in popular music (purity of sound vs. distortion), the facts and figures of the history of popular music and the development of the electric guitar, etc. etc. highly recommended for smart groovoids. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Maybe one of the worst reads about music ever By Bob Fairly well researched and footnoted, but oddly detached, reductionist and preachy. Sort of like a round table about "race relations" at fox news. It's clear the author knows something about music, but it's hard to tell if he actually listens to it.

Around 1930, a group of guitar designers in Southern California fitted instruments with an electromagnetic device called a pickup--and forever changed the face of popular music. Taken up by musicians as diverse as Les Paul, Muddy Waters, Jimi Hendrix, and the MC5, the electric guitar would become not just a conduit of electrifying new sounds but also a symbol of energy, innovation, and desire in the music of the day. *Instruments of Desire* is the first full account of the historical and cultural significance of the electric guitar, a wide-ranging exploration of how and why the instrument has had such broad musical and cultural impact. *Instruments of Desire* ranges across the history of the electric guitar by focusing on key performers who have shaped the use and meaning of the instrument: Charlie Christian, Les Paul, Chet Atkins, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix, the MC5, and Led Zeppelin. The book traces two competing ideals for the sound of the instrument: one, focusing on tonal purity, has been favored by musicians seeking to integrate the electric guitar into the existing conventions of pop music; the other, centering on timbral distortion, has been used to challenge popular notions of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" noise. *Instruments of Desire* reveals how these different approaches to sound also entail different ideas about the place of the body in musical performance, the ways in which music articulates racialized and gendered identities, and the position of popular music in American social and political life.

From Library Journal Waksman (Harvard Univ.) presents a scholarly treatise on the history and development of the electric guitar and how its use shaped the course of popular music. Beginning with the first electrified instruments of the 1930s, he traces two competing sound ideals: one with a focus on tonal purity (favored by artists such as Les Paul, Chet Atkins, and Wes Montgomery), and the other centering on a more distorted sound (used by Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page) that challenged popular notions of acceptable and unacceptable "noise." In comparing these two divergent ideals, Waksman, editor of the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, argues that they also draw on different concepts about the place of the body in musical performance, about the ways in which music articulates racial and gender identities, and about the position of popular music in American social and political life. Well written, and with extensive footnotes, the book's only apparent drawback is that it ends with music produced in the mid-1970s. In that sense, it is less than complete. (Perhaps a second volume will bring the work up-to-date.) Still, this is an excellent analysis of the growth and impact of the electric guitar on popular music and culture; for all libraries. -Eric C. Shoaf, Brown Univ. Lib., Providence Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Waksman's critical look at the electronically enhanced plectral lute and meticulous tracing of its influence is a darn fine book. Its purview includes Hendrix, Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, the ubiquitous Pete Townshend, and Blue Cheer (Blue Cheer?), as well as, of course, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, and Chuck Berry. Respect is rightfully paid to Chet Atkins and Les Paul, too. But, although it tells blues and rock musicians' stories, this isn't a book about musicians or, really, music. It is an exploration of the "racialized nature of rock's favorite mode of Phallogocentric display . . . the electric guitar." Waksman makes much of the sexuality conveyed by the instrument and keeps the issue of race close to the surface of the discussion. Far more theoretical and involved than most other books about guitars, Waksman's is a delineation of the implications of one of our era's endemic icons, the boy with his guitar. Persuasive, responsible, and wide-ranging, this is the thinking headbanger's guide to the evolution of the mighty axe. Mike Tribby Instruments' natural-language passages are knowledgeable and sympathetic. Waksman's profiles of musicians Charlie Christian and Les Paul--each chapter centers on one guitar icon--provide useful overviews of their careers and an aficionado's suggestions for listening. (Jim Taibi Business Week) Until recently, the history of the electric guitar, the most influential of the 20th century, had never been fully chronicled. Now, *Instruments of Desire* traces it through its 70 years of development, examining its pan-genre musical influence, its role in race and gender politics, and the unprecedented power that rewarded those who mastered it. (Patchen Barss National and Financial Post) [Waksman] plays to both ax-heads and

bookworms so that prickly issues of race, sexuality...and technical authorship are also addressed in this perceptive and overdue narrative of a singularly American machine. (Kirkus)As a survey of the development of the electric guitar and its impact on society, the book is invaluable--and frequently fascinating. Instrument designers such as Leo Fender and Paul Bigsby are given their due, but the focus is on the musicians themselves. Among those discussed in detail--and with a keen musical ear--are Charlie Christian, Chet Aktins, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix, Wayne Kramer (of the proto-punk MC5), and Jimmy Page. (Lee Hildebrand Berkeley Express)Waksman presents a scholarly treatise on the history and development of the electric guitar and how its use shaped the course of popular music...Well written, and with extensive footnotes...this is an excellent analysis of the growth and impact of the electric guitar on popular music and culture. (Eric C. Shoaf Library Journal)Waksman's critical look at the electronically enhanced plectral lute and meticulous tracing of its influence is a darn fine book...Although it tells blues and rock musicians' stories, this isn't a book about musicians or, really, music. It is an exploration of the 'racialized nature of rock's favorite mode of Phallogocentric display... the electric guitar.' Waksman makes much of the sexuality conveyed by the instrument and keeps the issue of race close to the surface of the discussion. Far more theoretical and involved than most other books about guitars, Waksman's is a delineation of the implications of one of our era's endemic icons, the boy with his guitar. Persuasive, responsible, and wide-ranging, this is the thinking headbanger's guide to the evolution of the mighty axe. (Mike Tribby Booklist)As a musician Steve Waksman can get deep enough inside the guitar to explain its workings with a precision uncommon in musicologists and unknown in social scientists. As a historian he has the taste and guts to meld sources humble and hifalutin into a coherent narrative that is neither. Thus he comes closer to revealing the secrets of the definitive 20th-century instrument than anybody else who's been foolhardy enough to try. (Robert Christgau)Instruments of Desire is a powerful book. The way in which Waksman moves with real authority from style to style as he considers each guitarist is almost a virtuosic accomplishment in itself. (John Covach, editor of Understanding Rock)This is a new kind of--polyphonic and polyrhythmic--history of popular music. It seamlessly weaves together everything from theory to biography, from economics to technology, from race and gender to aesthetics. Anyone interested in popular music will enjoy reading this book, and everyone will leave it wiser than when they came to it. (Lawrence Grossberg, author of Dancing in Spite of Myself)These instruments of desire are the tools of our trade, the means of production and while the muddled, middle-aged prophets of year zero predict their demise, Steve Waksman lays out a history that's essential reading for all foot soldiers in the music biz wars. (Jon Langford, The Mekons)Instruments of Desire is an extremely useful addition to the dog-eared debate on the theme: 'guitar as pinnacle of ecstatic sonic excess versus guitar as phallic appendage for big-haired white boy dorks'. Due largely to Waksman's ongoing engagement with rock's under-the-counter culture (he's more likely to quote Bangs than Benjamin), this is a highly readable account of the rise and subsequent fetishisation of six electric strings. (David Keenan The Wire)If you're fascinated by how the electric guitar became what it is, and by what it's told us at each stage in its development, then Waksman is as cool, erudite, provocative and non-geeky a guide as you could possibly desire. (Charles Shaar Murray Mojo 2002-01-01)Few of the histories of American popular music address the manner in which technology embodies a range of concepts and propositions. Steve Waksman's Instruments of Desire corrects this lapseHe employs a wide range of theoretical formulations in his work and is particularly successful in his attention to a variety of public media in which musicians were featured Instruments of Desire is one of the most groundbreaking studies of popular music in recent memory and will be of interest to all readers, whether they are prone to playing power chords or merely addicted to the more common practice of air guitar. (David Sanjek The Journal of American History)An American studies scholar, Waksman offers intriguing information and ideasInstruments of Desire provides a cultural context for the electric guitar in a thought-provoking manner. (Rebecca McSwain Technology and Culture)Steve Waksman's book is a selective history of the electric guitar since the thirties, focusing on eight key performers or groups who especially illustrate the instrument's cultural significanceWaksman's narrow but brilliant study will inspire more investigation of the impact of the richly stimulating "axe" that still carves paths through planet Earth's musical forest. (Burton W. Peretti Notes)