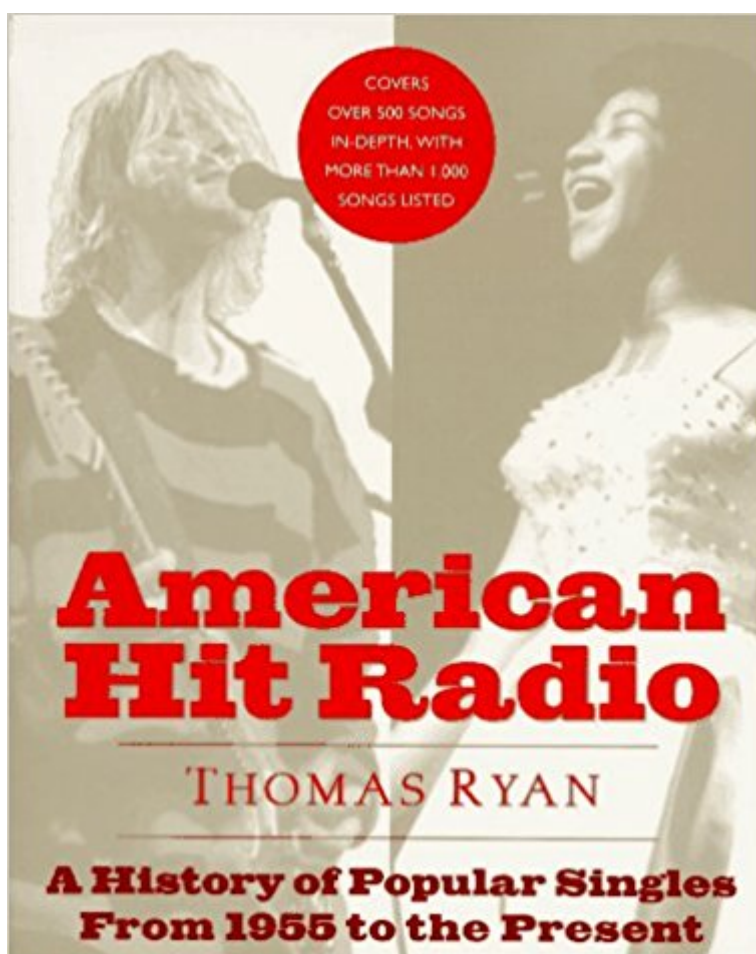


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# American Hit Radio: A History Of Popular Singles From 1955 To The Present



## Synopsis

Starting in 1955, America began tracking its favorite songs on the Top 40 Charts. More than a record of our collective music tastes, the charts became snapshots that reveal who we are. Now Thomas Ryan takes us through all forty years, providing a wealth of insight based on exhaustive research. Arranged chronologically, *American Hit Radio* puts 1,250 of the Top 40 songs in perspective, spotlighting 500 with carefully crafted essays describing the artists' backgrounds and inspirations, the cultural context of the songs, and how the song styles and statements relate to the music scene before and since. From Fats Domino to Nirvana, popular music reflects the radical changes we have experienced as a country and a culture. *American Hit Radio* explores where our music has taken us in the last half-century—what we have left behind, what persists, and why. Whether the song is "Maybellene" or "Billie Jean," popular music is something we all share. *American Hit Radio* is more than an enjoyable popular music survey, it's a vivid cultural history of the American psyche.

About the Author Thomas Ryan, a music reviewer and obsessive vintage vinyl collector, has been an active drummer for the past twenty years. He has spent the past decade actively studying the Top 40 lists, accumulating in the process a massive collection of music and videos.

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## Customer Reviews

Covers over 500 songs in-depth, with more than 1,000 songs listed!

Starting in 1955, America began tracking its favorite songs on the Top 40 Charts. More than a record of our collective music tastes, the charts became snapshots that reveal who we are. Now Thomas Ryan takes us through all forty years, providing a wealth of insight based on exhaustive research. Arranged chronologically, American Hit Radio puts 1,250 of the Top 40 songs in perspective, spotlighting 500 with carefully crafted essays describing the artists' backgrounds and inspirations, the cultural context of the songs, and how the song styles and statements relate to the music scene before and since. From Fats Domino to Nirvana, popular music reflects the radical changes we have experienced as a country and a culture. American Hit Radio explores where our music has taken us in the last half-century—what we have left behind, what persists, and why. Whether the song is "Maybellene" or "Billie Jean," popular music is something we all share. American Hit Radio is more than an enjoyable popular music survey, it's a vivid cultural history of the American psyche. About the Author Thomas Ryan, a music reviewer and obsessive vintage vinyl collector, has been an active drummer for the past twenty years. He has spent the past decade actively studying the Top 40 lists, accumulating in the process a massive collection of music and videos.

AMERICAN HIT RADIO, a survey of classic pop music from the mid 1950's to the 1990's, is a compulsively good read. Written in a refreshing conversational tone- the author clearly loves his subject- the reader is given an extensive history as well as witty opinions on hundreds of song selections. Within a few short hours, a novice will have a keen insight into what made a particular artist and recording into three plus minutes of magic (at the risk of sounding off like an infomercial, this book does make a nifty I-Pod companion). For the aficionado, you'll feel as if you discovered a new found friend- one you can laugh and argue with over the "merits" of the Eagles' "Hotel California." The one sore point is Ryan's rather peculiar "disco is bad" stance in light of the fact that we live in an era when many happily sing the Village People's "YMCA." Thankfully through correspondence, I've found that the author has recently changed tune (no pun intended) and will add renewed insights in subsequent editions of the book. Until that day arrives, I'll spin this book like old vinyl records- time and time again!

Thomas Ryan sure knows what he likes about popular music. His knowledge of the songs he tackles is comparable to that of a veteran DJ who's been collecting records (or CDs, nowadays) of his faves since he was old enough to collect his first allowance. But a close examination of the book reveals Ryan's biases towards certain types of music and artists (he makes no secret about this in

the text). Furthermore, Ryan doesn't hold back when it comes to music and artists that he does NOT like, and he peppers his book with lists of songs he hates ("Top Misses") that made the pop charts. The only problem with reading this book, aside from getting past Ryan's predictability in his choices, is the fact that, unlike a more informational book like Fred Bronson's "Billboard Book of #1 Hits," which looks at hit songs more objectively, reading Ryan's book is a bit like being on a week-long cross-country journey with a friend who comments on every song that comes! ! on the radio. Despite his enthusiasm, Ryan ultimately comes off sounding too self-serving and cynical to be taken as seriously as a Fred Bronson or a Joel Whitburn. Still, the book is at times very funny, and occasionally revealing tidbits about certain songs appear throughout, but if you want a more objective and factual book about pop singles, check out Bronson's book, mentioned above.

Tom Ryan's collection of essays captivated me from the moment I picked it up. The wit and style of the essays kept me captivated and while I usually skip around these types of books, reading about my favorites first and going back to read the rest later I stuck with this one pretty much page to page. But, as I got into the middle to late 80s' and early 90s' sections I began to get the feeling that Mr Ryan was busy doing other things in those years and stopped listening to the radio. He claims that this is because singles were going out of fashion at this point but I owned a record store at this time and I sold a lot of 45rpm's. (not enough as things turned out, but a lot) Acts like Van Halen, Tom Petty, and to a lesser extent ZZ Top and J Geils had huge singles that still get airplay today, but Tom treats them as if they didn't exist. The same can be said of Bachman Turner Overdrive, The Guess Who, and Chicago from an earlier time, big hits, still getting airplay but not apparently at Mr Ryan's house. I can't stomach Chicago but I can't deny they sold a lot of vinyl. All in all I can recommend this book because what Tom does cover he covers with style. And what he didn't cover maybe someone else will.

I've never read a book about music that can make me steaming mad on one page and then fall over in laughter on the next. Ryan's depth of knowledge is extraordinary, but the essence of the book is not in the content ... but rather in the delivery (i.e. Ryan's letter to Mariah Carey ... I'm laughing just thinking about it). I seldom found myself agreeing with Ryan's opinion (10%), but nevertheless he gained my respect by supporting his pomposity with historical accuracy and down-right good-old American-bred honesty. Like most things that you cherish in life - it's not until your views about them are legitimately challenged that your real love for those things are confirmed. If you want to read a book as if you're talking to an old friend about the most passionate art form in creation - MUSIC -

then get the book ... At least with the book you can choose not to listen. By the way, I hope you don't laugh at people who you see talking to a book - because you're about to become one of those nuts (worse - you'll be yelling at it).

Tom Ryan gets right to the point in his fascinating review of pop culture musical history. The 45 single was the most influential medium for a generation of listeners and for the artists themselves. As you read, you will see how "one hit wonders" made careers and helped these sometimes unknown artists earn their place in history. Another interesting point of the book is how the author relates what was happening socially in America during the time of each hits release. Read how the anti-war movement changed the music scene. Follow the musical trends from folk rock to grunge, and picture how you have grown and evolved with the times. See how some #1 hits have faded over the years and lost their relevance (Disco Duck) while others have become part of the American music fabric, although never reaching the famed #1 status. A great book for all who love music and the culture of the 50's through the mid 90's. Tom Ryan's insightful and slightly sarcastic wit! ! is a wonderful thread to this reading experience.

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