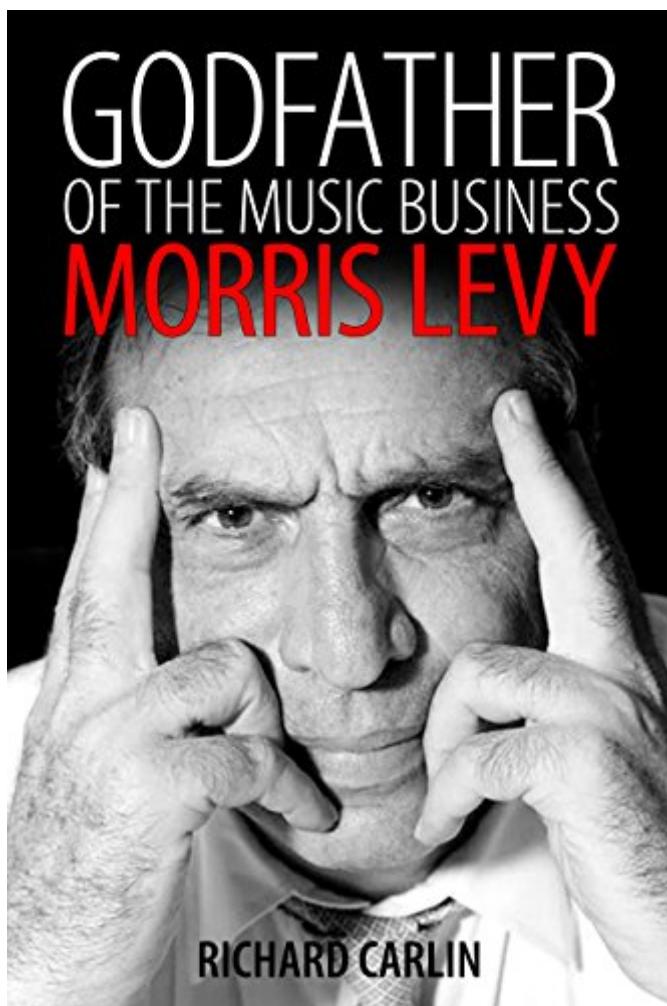


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Godfather Of The Music Business: Morris Levy (American Made Music Series)



Synopsis

This biography tells the story of one of the most notorious figures in the history of popular music, Morris Levy (1927–1990). At age nineteen, he cofounded the nightclub Birdland in Hell's Kitchen, which became the home for a new musical style, bebop. Levy operated one of the first integrated clubs on Broadway and helped build the careers of Dizzy Gillespie and Bud Powell and most notably aided the reemergence of Count Basie. In 1957, he founded a record label, Roulette Records. Roulette featured many of the significant jazz artists who played Birdland but also scored top pop hits with acts like Buddy Knox, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, Joey Dee and the Starliters, and, in the mid-1960s, Tommy James. Stories abound of Levy threatening artists, songwriters, and producers, sometimes just for the sport, other times so he could continue to build his empire. Along the way, Levy attracted investors with ties to the Mafia, including Dominic Ciaffone (a.k.a. "Swatsie" Mulligan), Tommy Eboli, and the most notorious of them all, Vincent Gigante. Gigante allegedly owned large pieces of Levy's recording and retail businesses. Starting in the late 1950s, the FBI and IRS investigated Levy but could not make anything stick until the early 1980s, when Levy foolishly got involved in a deal to sell remaindered records to a small-time reseller, John LaMonte. With partners in the mob, Levy tried to force LaMonte to pay for four million remaindered records. When the FBI secretly wiretapped LaMonte in an unrelated investigation and agents learned about the deal, investigators successfully prosecuted Levy in the extortion scheme. Convicted in 1988, Levy did not live to serve prison time. Stricken with cancer, he died just as his last appeals were exhausted. However, even if he had lived, Levy's brand of storied high life was effectively bust. Corporate ownership of record labels doomed most independents in the business, ending the days when a savvy if ruthless hustler could blaze a path to the top.

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Customer Reviews

I enjoyed reading this book very much. I had just read Tommy James's autobiography, and this is the perfect companion. Both are highly recommended. I confess that I am not a fan of jazz music, and the book does feature his association with jazz artists more than the pop/rock/r&b artists, but ultimately the biography is about Levy, and on that count, Mr. Carlin does an exemplary job. He managed to keep me interested, from start to finish. It's well-researched and put together in an interesting fashion. Morris Levy was certainly a driven man, and given his early years (working at sleazy gangster-owned nightclubs as a teenager), it's not hard to understand how the gangster mentality rubbed off on him. I'm not in any way excusing his behavior, but thanks to Mr. Carlin, it's understandable that he turned out the way he did. I do question a couple of minor things. How could Mr. Carlin refer to Joey Dee as a one-hit wonder, when he and his band produced no less than five national hits, four of which made the top 20 (two the top 10)? Why no mention of the last big Roulette hit makers before Tommy James came along, The Essex, who followed their number one song with a top 20 hit. Between The Essex and Tommy James, there was an iceberg that almost sank Levy's ship. Those are minor, of course. The bottom line is that Richard Carlin has produced an exceptional biography of a sad man, who walked all over, and terrorized most of the individuals who made him rich and powerful. Ultimately, he ended up like we all do, with nothing. Death is the one great equalizer in the world. Very highly recommended!

If I had been a singer or songwriter back in the 50s to 80s, I sure wouldn't have wanted my contract controlled by Morris Levy. This is a great look at how the mob, through Levy, got their hooks into unsuspecting creatives. Especially true for those with no money management skills and substance abuse problems. It's a wonder they got any money at all. I originally heard of Levy in Tommy James

memoir (Me, the Mob and the Music). James has a grudging affection for Levy, who screwed him out of millions. He does seem to have a sort of honest, Mafia-type charm. Carlin, the author of Godfather of the Music Business, tells the history of Levy's record operations in an interesting way, lots of facts. I wish he had gone into Levy's personal life more. He was married several times and had a number of children. Still, the book's a good read, even for people like me who know little about the record industry.

Fascinating stuff despite some errors in terminology. Couldn't put it down - interesting as both a biography and general history of the music business.

Nothing new bared here many recycled items culled from existing works by Tommy James/Martin Fitzpatrick, John A. Jackson, Larry McShane et.al. The stories are entertaining as Moishe was a true character no embellishments necessary. Joel Selvin's "Here Comes The Night" uncovers more arcane Levy-abilia, touching on Bert Bern's dealings w/him, than Carlin manages. Nonetheless, the book does succeed in holding the reader eager to uncover more , his interactions w/Vinnie "The Chin" Gigante and the rest of the central casting types from the Genovese family, for example, disappointingly , what is revealed is neither revelatory nor new. The Alan Freed/Morris Levy partnership is described in depth depicting just how entrenched Levy was when the segue from rhythm and blues/race records into rock 'n' roll was imminent. Moreover, his accuracy in smelling a score having an Alan Freed positioned both as co-producer of Freed's Rock 'N' Roll shows and Freed's nightly radio show on 1010 WINS breaking new records by Roulette recording artists. For the uninitiated, the book delivers somewhat as advertised but for the more fact finding , discerning few alas, it comes up a tad short. 2 1/2 stars(rating system doesn't register fractions).

never thought someone would write a book on Morris Levy. Really written objectively. I know people who knew Morris from the business end. The book confirms what I have been told about him and then some. It is a easy read and very enlightening about the music world of that era.

Amazing! A great read! Informative! The author painted a crisp, vivid picture of the backgrounds and characters that molded the music industry into what it is and why it is today.

An interesting book about a music legend. Yes a lot of the material can be found in other books, but there is much new information and detail. That leads to the problem with the book in my opinion. A

severe overload of minutia that just isn't necessary and makes the booking boring. But still worth a read to learn about Morris Levy who may be credited with "writing" more songs along with George Goldner than most real song writers.

Minor errors in fact checking. Birdland mgr. After Oscar Goodstein was not John Gray but John Gary. Otherwise, authentic. -Jonny 1 - NYC

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