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Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music

Martha Bayles

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From Queen Latifa to Count Basie, Madonna to Monk, *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music* traces popular music back to its roots in jazz, blues, country, and gospel through the rise in rock 'n' roll and the emergence of heavy metal, punk, and rap. Yet despite the vigor and balance of these musical origins, Martha Bayles argues, something has gone seriously wrong, both with the sound of popular music and the sensibility it expresses.

Bayles defends the tough, affirmative spirit of Afro-American music against the strain of artistic modernism she calls 'perverse.' She describes how perverse modernism was grafted onto popular music in the late 1960s, and argues that the result has been a cult of brutality and obscenity that is profoundly anti-musical.

Unlike other recent critics of popular music, Bayles does not blame the problem on commerce. She argues that culture shapes the market and not the other way around. Finding censorship of popular music "both a practical and a constitutional impossibility," Bayles insists that "an informed shift in public tastes may be our only hope of reversing the current malignant mood."

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