



Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work (Refiguring American music)

Matt Stahl

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In *Unfree Masters*, Matt Stahl examines recording artists' labor in the music industry as a form of creative work. He argues that the widespread perception of singers and musicians as free individuals doing enjoyable and fulfilling work obscures the realities of their occupation. Stahl begins by considering the television show *American Idol* and the rockumentary *Dig!* (2004), tracing how narratives of popular music making in contemporary America highlight musicians' negotiations of the limits of autonomy and mobility in creative cultural-industrial work.

Turning to struggles between recording artists and record companies over the laws that govern their contractual relationships, Stahl reveals other tensions and contradictions in this form of work. He contends that contract and copyright disputes between musicians and music industry executives, as well as media narratives of music making, contribute to American socioeconomic discourse and expose basic tensions between the democratic principles of individual autonomy and responsibility and the power of employers to control labor and appropriate its products. Stahl maintains that attention to the labor and property issues that he discloses in relation to musicians and the music industry can stimulate insights about the political, economic, and imaginative challenges currently facing all working people.

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