

Robert Fripp



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A case could easily be made against the widespread cultural abuse of music. From muzak in its many and more "progressive" forms to advertising jingles to radio and clubs, music has been enslaved to commerce, to celebrity and to perpetuating fairly vacuous states of mind among listeners. (Someone still has to prove that a majority of people actually listen to music instead of simply "hear" it). It's also become clear that, even considering the popular music press, we approach our understanding of music in a purely colloquial way. Reviewers resolutely do not take on music as music, they simply describe it through metaphor and excessive use of the word "like". Listeners seem to accept this. Through the wordless collusion of the industry, the publications and even the artists themselves, current popular musical culture is essentially illiterate, bigoted and unable to imagine any other future for itself.

Eric Tamm's book on the work of Robert Fripp is precisely the sort of cure music needs. The book actually manages to combine a musician whose work and music strives to change both the business and the audience with a writer whose own musical credentials are up to the task specifically because the author's perspective on the work and on the man is one that remains open, receptive and critical. This is not a book about being a fan. This is not a book for fans. This is a book about how music can shape and guide us to a more profound view of the lives we live by giving the practice of music the importance and attention it actually deserves.

Mr. Tamm is eloquent on both the music and the meanings which Fripp seems to intend. The author never lapses into a false certainty about what he hears and what he understands, giving the book the right sense of investigation and learning. He manages to tell us things that matter about the music in musical terms. Fripp's propensity for odd meters are made intelligible. Some fundamentals on scales are also very helpful. The writing does not descend into a parochial tone accessible only to those who have studied music theory. The facts of the music are made quite clear and are readily graspable by anyone interested in getting at the content of what he or she happens to be listening to. Besides, it's never a bad idea to read a little over your head.

But beyond the recorded catalog of Fripp's work, Mr. Tamm is eloquent in his presentation of time spent in Fripp's Guitar Craft classes. These pages provide a glimpse of how music might function among artists and audience, free of the preoccupations of the industry. And, as we can at least assume Fripp intends, Guitar Craft goes further, to connect principals of music with principals of life. Reading it lets us ask a question about what the practice of music can really be about, and how the pursuit of music can ultimately affect our lives and our thinking about the world. If you care about music it's worth the effort to find this book.

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