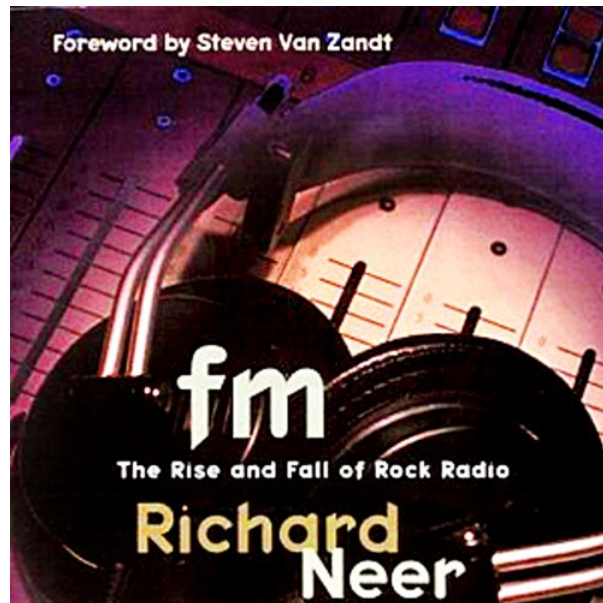
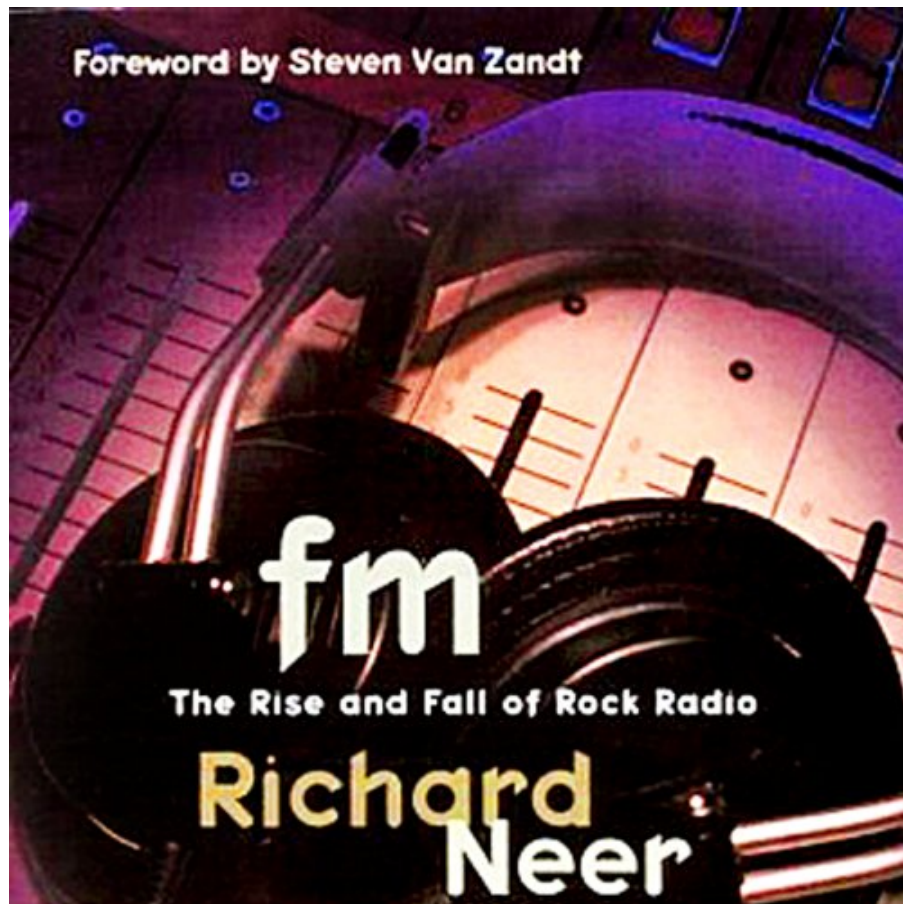


FM: THE RISE AND FALL OF ROCK RADIO BY RICHARD NEER



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"It was all so honest, before the end of our collective innocence. Top-40 jocks screamed and yelled and sounded mightier than God on millions of transistor radios. But on FM radio it was all spun out for only you. On a golden web by a master weaver driven by 50,000 magical watts of crystal clear power...before the days of trashy, hedonistic dumbpeak and disposable three-minute ditties...in the days where rock lived at many addresses in many cities." (from FM)

As a young man, Richard Neer dreamed of landing a job at WNEW in New York - one of the revolutionary FM stations across the country that were changing the face of radio by rejecting strict formatting and letting disc jockeys play whatever they wanted. He felt that when he got there, he'd have made the big time. Little did he know he'd have shaped rock history as well.

FM: The Rise and Fall of Rock Radio chronicles the birth, growth, and death of free-form rock-and-roll radio through the stories of the movement's flagship stations. In the late '60s and early seventies - at stations like KSAN in San Francisco, WBCN in Boston, WMMR in Philadelphia, KMET in Los Angeles, WNEW, and others - disc jockeys became the gatekeepers, critics, and gurus of new music. Jocks like Scott Muni, Vin Scelsa, Jonathan Schwartz, and Neer developed loyal followings and had incredible influence on their listeners and on the early careers of artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Genesis, the Cars, and many others.

Full of fascinating firsthand stories, FM documents the commodification of an iconoclastic phenomenon, revealing how counterculture was coopted and consumed by the mainstream. Richard Neer was an eyewitness to, and participant in, this history. FM is the tale of his exhilarating ride.

- Sales Rank: #105862 in Audible
- Published on: 2014-02-25
- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 846 minutes

Most helpful customer reviews

34 of 37 people found the following review helpful.

A Voice of Reason

By lb136

From the hours of 6:00-10:00 a.m. on Saturdays, the tumult and the shouting pauses on New York City's sports talk station WFAN. Host Richard Neer, known to his regular callers as "The Voice of Reason," is presiding, and sanity reigns, if only for a short while.

Of course, New Yorkers have been getting up with Mr. Neer for a long time. Before his present gig as a sports talk host, the author was affiliated with the legendary aor FM station, WNEW, and it's that station's story he tells here, in his usual understated fashion.

Neer was music director, program director, overnight jock, and did two stints as the morning man in his 28 years with the station (he stayed to turn out the lights) and in that time he knew and tells us about, such legendary jocks as Jonathan Schwartz, Bill (Rosko) Mercer, Scott Muni (who he seems to admire the most), and Alison Steele ("The Nightbird"). He also knows Bruce Springsteen and devotes a chapter to him, and another to the night John Lennon died. But the heart of the book deals with dumb station managers and dumber consultants. And it deals with them better than they probably deserve: As gracious on his pages as he is on the air, Neer deals fairly even with the people who've treated him poorly.

If you've been wondering why your favorite music station doesn't seem to sound quite the same as it did the week before, you may be quite sure it's changed program directors and/or general managers. Again. And Neer tells you how and why that keeps happening. (You won't be surprised to learn that ratings and profits something to do with the constant flux.)

Although the author takes pains to discuss FM radio across the country, his emphasis, naturally, is on his own New York experiences at WNEW, and the book will have special meaning for New Yorkers (of which I am one), but you don't have to be from New York to appreciate this well done tale written by a man who's been there, done that. It's a good informative, rant-free read.

20 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

FM: A Book For Progressive Rock Music and Radio Lovers

By Allan M. Sniffen

Richard Neer's book "FM: The Rise and Fall of Rock Radio" is a book I would recommend to anyone who has an interest in New York City's WNEW-FM and Progressive Rock Radio in general. It's a big picture story, not a discussion of minutia. If you're looking for a compendium of who worked when at WNEW-FM then this isn't the place to find it. Instead, Neer's purpose is to paint a picture of what he believes built WNEW-FM, what sustained it and what ultimately destroyed it. It is a book about the forest, not a book about the trees in it.

It basically has three parts. In the first, Neer talks about getting his first job in commercial radio at WLIR on Long Island, how he became lifelong friends with Michael Harrison (now of Talkers Magazine) and how he fell in love with WNEW-FM just by listening to it. He describes the station's genesis from the remains of WOR-FM's foray into Progressive Radio and how people like Scott Muni, Bill "Rosko" Mercer, and Allison Steele were visionaries in creating this new format. He acknowledges listening to Top 40 radio as a young child but claims the seed for its destruction was clear by 1965. He admires people like Dan Ingram and Cousin Brucie but they're not his heroes. People like Scott Muni are.

Neer very accurately describes the musical artistry of Progressive Radio as well as the circumstances that allowed that artistry to prosper. Stations like WNEW-FM came to be in an era of political unrest (the Vietnam War) where young people were looking for an alternative to anything "establishment" and the decidedly leftward politics of most everyone doing Progressive Radio further endeared it to its audience. That combined with FM's infancy and the need for corporate broadcasting to find alternative formats for a slice of radio spectrum it had little use for, allowed the inmates to take over the asylum (so to speak). Neer argues that was a good thing because it allowed an art form to grow under circumstances where its founders had the freedom to make something special without worrying about real world issues of running a business to make a profit.

At the same time, Neer doesn't have rose-colored glasses on. For example, the book is very blunt in its description of how drugs played a big part in the lives of many (not all) of those doing Progressive Radio. He does not celebrate that. Instead he notes the influence of it and also points out how destructive it could be to many of those in the business.

The second part of the book describes what life at WNEW-FM was like in the seventies when the station reached its peak influence. Neer writes about the concerts, the promotions, the personalities and the perks of that era. He enthusiastically describes the experience of working with virtually no format demands and how great it was to be able to play pretty much whatever you wanted to as a disk jockey. He discusses the

stewardship of Scott Muni with humor but also with admiration.

Neer speaks of his time as WNEW-FM's program director and the difficult time he had trying to steer the station toward economic reality as FM grew. He acknowledges that no longer could the station function without some kind of format. But he claims that even his most minimal efforts to focus the station were met with resistance. He writes of the difficulty he had in trying to rein in friends who now suspected him of betraying them to upper management and how that foreshadowed what would follow as outsiders came in to manage the station.

The last part of the book describes WNEW-FM's eventual downfall. Neer goes through a long list of program directors and general managers who came and went and their influence (or lack of it) as the station struggled to find its way in the new and more competitive world of FM radio in the 80's and 90's.

The strength of this book is Richard Neer's true passion for what he loved about Progressive Rock Radio. At the end of the book you truly feel sad that it's gone. The weakness is perspective. For all that was good about this kind of radio, the reality is that it existed in a vacuum of economic reality. Neer alludes to that but I don't think he truly puts it into context. For all its success as artistry, it was a failure in appealing to a mass audience. Those who loved it really did have a home -- but there were too few of them.

There are a couple of minor factual errors concerning WNEW-FM's chief competitor, WPLJ, but the negatives are minor if you're reading the book to get a feel for how it felt to get a job and then work at WNEW-FM. Whether you're a fan of this kind of radio or not, you come away with an understanding of what made it great to those who loved and worked in it. You also get a feel for what brought it down and how the station might have succeeded into the future had it been more willing to reinvent itself.

This is not a book for those looking for radio trivia. It's a book for those looking for some insight and understanding of the big picture of what made WNEW-FM work -- and then what made it fail.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Good book for anyone interested in rock or FM radio

By Ronald Brown

I enjoyed this book about the history of FM rock radio. I live in the New York metro area and grew up listening to WNEW (Richard Neer's station) and WPLJ (the biggest competitor). So many of the characters (mostly the DJs) were familiar to me. Richard Neer does a good job of intertwining his story with the larger story of the FM radio and rock music industries. He does tell us about many of the people of the industry and sometimes it is a little much to keep track of all. All-in-all recommended for anyone with any interest in rock music or the NYC radio scene.

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