

7-1-2019

Book Review - Party Out of Bounds: The B-52's, R.E.M., and the Kids Who Rocked Athens, Georgia

Stephen Michaels

University of North Georgia, stephen.michaels@ung.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Michaels, S. (2019). Book Review - Party Out of Bounds: The B-52's, R.E.M., and the Kids Who Rocked Athens, Georgia. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 56(3). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol56/iss3/17>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Library Quarterly by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Off the **SHELF**

Party Out of Bounds: The B-52's, R.E.M., and the Kids Who Rocked Athens, Georgia by Roger Lyle Brown (The University of Georgia Press, 2016: ISBN 9780820350400, \$24.95)

By the time Roger Lyle Brown finished writing his chronicle of the birth and early years of the Athens music scene in 1987, the tastemakers and journalists were already looking elsewhere for the next hotbed of game-changing rock music. Considering that the book wasn't published until 1991, it is easy to understand why *Party Out of Bounds* wasn't the bestseller it might have been if published years earlier. Over the years, however, word of mouth renewed interest among people wanting to read the "truest lies" about the unlikely assemblage of some of rock music's most colorful and mysterious players. The demand for high-priced original copies on eBay and print-on-demand copies of the book provoked the publication of this 25th anniversary edition by The University of Georgia Press.

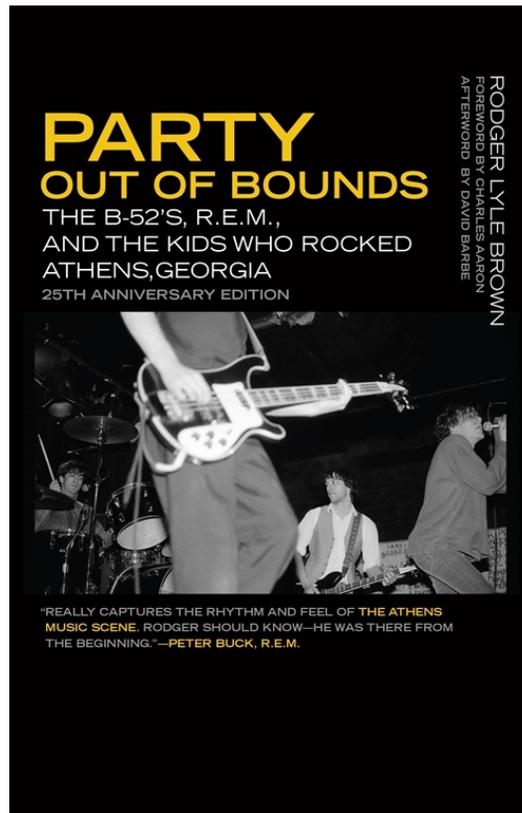
Brown begins with a brief history of the founding of the University of Georgia (UGA) and focuses on the earlier years of the golden age of the Athens music scene, from the mid-70s to the mid-80s. The book is most compelling when it sets the stage for the progenitors of the scene, the B-52's. Taken individually, these short anecdotes of chance meetings and

debaucherous parties can seem little more than the fragmented memories of someone who was there, but Brown manages to provide just enough of a narrative chronology to illustrate how the cultural awakening of the 60s begat the proto-B-52's drag underground "glitter punks" that roamed the streets of Athens in

defiance of the redneck hippie blues rock status quo that still endures. Some of the most memorable passages are those which detail the uneasy coexistence of the hip art crowd and the good ol' boy frat culture. If there is any answer to the central question of the book, "Why Athens?," it is inferred that it has something to do with this convergence of young and old, progressive and conservative.

If you are looking for indisputable facts and accurate timelines, or for an in-depth story about R.E.M., look elsewhere. Many have pointed to Brown's work as being

more concerned with the zeitgeist than a full accounting of events. He positions himself as a fly on the wall at one of the incarnations of the 40 Watt or at the party mansion on Barber Street, while people meet, beers are guzzled, and televisions are thrown from roofs. The resulting chapters roughly follow a chronological thread with occasional call-backs but read much like they were written from a loosely-organized bulleted list. The chapters' matter-of-fact titles (e.g., "Curtis Knapp Comes to Athens—The B-52's Go to New York—Danny



Beard Rides Along”) somewhat make up for a lack of index.

What sets this book apart from other biographies of the bands involved is the insider perspective given by Brown. Brown’s status as someone who was there gives him more leeway to reconstruct conversations and events from memory. Some passages do seem shoehorned in, seemingly for no other reason than to include mention of a particular person (Brown recalls being asked by an editor to drastically cut down the cast of characters) or of some sensational thing someone said.

The new edition’s inclusion of a foreword by former *Spin* journalist and UGA alum Charles Aaron, an afterword by noted Athens musician/producer and director of the UGA Music Business Program David Barbe, and an epilogue by the author help prime and debrief the reader by providing context and filling in some of the gaps left by Brown’s somewhat scattered recollection of events. Recommended for public libraries.

Stephen Michaels is Reference Services Librarian at University of North Georgia