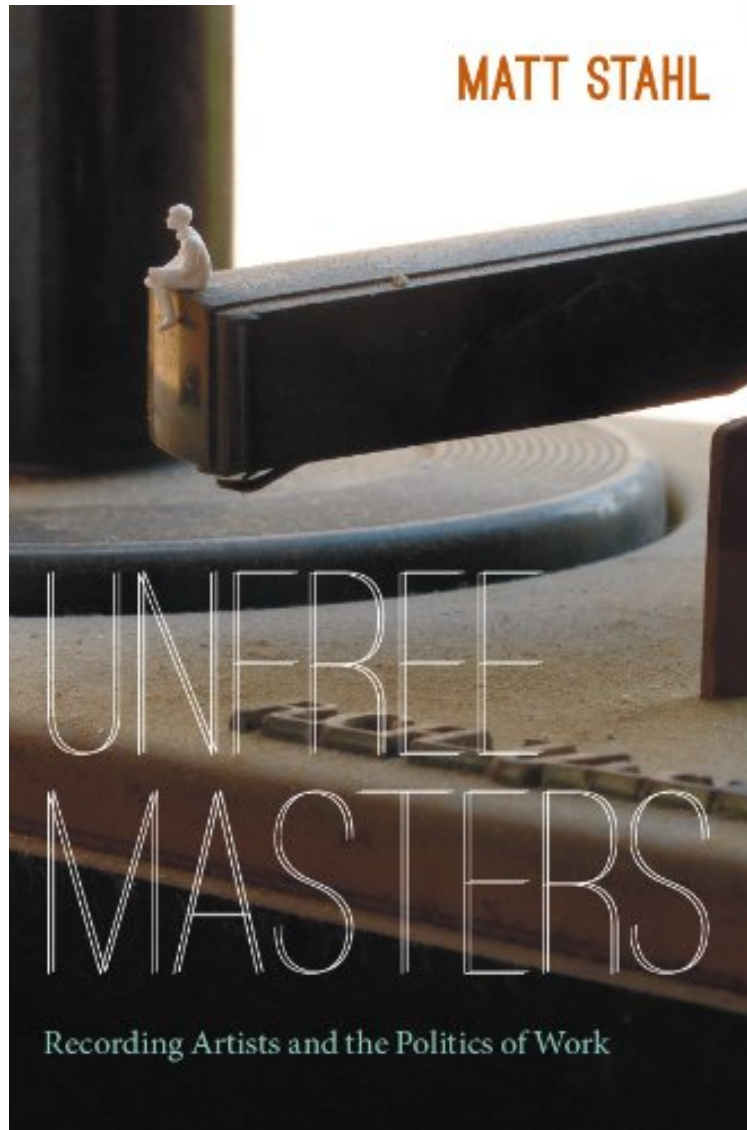


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Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work (Refiguring American music)

Matt Stahl

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Matt Stahl : Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work (Refiguring American music) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work (Refiguring American music):

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.

“Here is a book that does several things at once. It explains the current status of recording artists, both as subordinated employees and as free entrepreneurs who license rights to intellectual property, namely their music compositions and recordings. It also shows how, from the standpoint of labour politics, these cultural workers are not so different from other workers in a neoliberal political economy: competing individually while dreaming of autonomy, and contractually tied to a record company that snaps up their creative output for exploitation and keeps them indebted while offering little security.”