

Review of *Played Out on the Strip: The Rise and Fall of Las Vegas Casino Bands* by Janis L. McKay

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McKay's new book is a short and easy read that neatly details the story of live music on the Vegas strip. The book itself contains little critical commentary and reads as a historical narrative. However, McKay's methodology and source material are the real gem of the story. Working with her news journalist father, she meticulously compiled a wealth of oral histories from those who lived through the events described in this book. The oral histories were compiled by her father through interviews, and McKay then used newspapers and other primary and secondary sources to cross check and fill in the history.

Played Out on the Strip is generally organized by decade, with each chapter covering the history of that decade. The emphasis is on things that changed, things that did not, and the reasons for change or stasis. The event with the most coverage is the strike of 1989, which is its own chapter. McKay and her interviewees identify this as a critical moment in the history of music on the strip. This was the moment when the musicians union ultimately failed to prevent the hotels and casinos from firing musicians and switching to prerecorded sound. As such, it marked the end of the live music boom in Las Vegas.

Based on her research and interviews, McKay seems to identify the switch from mob to corporate hotel ownership as one of the most important factors that necessitated the strike of 1989. Most of her interviewees remember the days of mob ownership fondly, since the owners did not mind losing money on musical acts, managed with a more personal touch, and were willing to do business on a handshake. McKay briefly discusses some of the downsides to mob ownership, but in all, the book seems to paint a rather rosy picture of Las Vegas under the mob. This may be the result of relying on the memories of the musicians who thrived under the mob. It is always tempting to look at history with "rose colored glasses," but McKay does not seem to provide enough critical commentary to explain why the musicians only remember the good aspects of mob rule. This lack of critical commentary is in part due to the memoir-like nature of the book.

In sum, *Played Out on the Strip* is a fun and interesting read for anyone studying the history of Vegas, cover bands, live music, and the like. However, McKay's really scholarly contribution lies in the collected interviews. One would hope that at some point in the future these interviews may find their way into an archive and be preserved for future research. *Played out on the Strip* is available from the University of Nevada Press.