



Weird Scenes Inside The Canyon: Laurel Canyon, Covert Ops & The Dark Heart Of The Hippie Dream

David McGowan, Nick Bryant (Foreword)

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The very strange but nevertheless true story of the dark underbelly of a 1960s hippie utopia. Laurel Canyon in the 1960s and early 1970s was a magical place where a dizzying array of musical artists congregated to create much of the music that provided the soundtrack to those turbulent times. Members of bands like the Byrds, the Doors, Buffalo Springfield, the Monkees, the Beach Boys, the Turtles, the Eagles, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, Steppenwolf, CSN, Three Dog Night and Love, along with such singer/songwriters as Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, James Taylor and Carole King, lived together and jammed together in the bucolic community nestled in the Hollywood Hills. But there was a dark side to that scene as well. Many didn't make it out alive, and many of those deaths remain shrouded in mystery to this day. Far more integrated into the scene than most would like to admit was a guy by the name of Charles Manson, along with his murderous entourage. Also floating about the periphery were various political operatives, up-and-coming politicians and intelligence personnel – the same sort of people who gave birth to many of the rock stars populating the canyon. And all the canyon's colorful characters – rock stars, hippies, murderers and politicos – happily coexisted alongside a covert military installation.

Weird Scenes Inside The Canyon: Laurel Canyon, Covert Ops & The Dark Heart Of The Hippie Dream Details

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From Reader Review Weird Scenes Inside The Canyon: Laurel Canyon, Covert Ops & The Dark Heart Of The Hippie Dream for online ebook

Red Dirt Report says

Back in the summer of 2008, a few weeks after writing a 40th anniversary review of the psychedelic cult film Head, featuring The Monkees, I got a weird email from a reader who suggested I check out a website by a guy named Dave McGowan and his recently-launched online investigative series Inside the LC: The Strange But Mostly True Story of Laurel Canyon and the Birth of the Hippie Generation.

Naturally curious, I checked it out and fell into the proverbial “rabbit hole” from which I have yet to return. McGowan’s research on the rock music scene that artificially “sprang” from the countercultural Los Angeles-area enclave of Laurel Canyon was absolutely shocking.

“The story of the scene that played out in Laurel Canyon from the mid-1960’s through the end of the 1970’s is an endlessly fascinating one” and that while most folks know about San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury scene, Angelenos, of which McGowan is one, “remain ignorant of the even larger music and counterculture scene that played out in the Hollywood Hills.”

And a 2008 radio interview I conducted with McGowan on a local pirate radio station proved even more revealing for me. Rock stars like Frank Zappa, John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas, Arthur Lee of Love, Jim Morrison of The Doors, Peter Tork of The Monkees, David Crosby (The Byrds) and Stephen Stills (Buffalo Springfield), who collaborated with Crosby, Stills & Nash and many others get a serious look. So do the actors and directors who hung out and lived and partied in Laurel Canyon – a place that also happened to be home to the military’s Lookout Mountain Laboratories, a place that was a studio that created classified motion pictures involving atomic-bomb tests and – likely much more - between 1947 and 1969.

While that may not seem so unusual in the midst of the Cold War, many of the names above were linked or directly involved in the military, through family members or personally.

As McGowan notes: “How is it possible that not one of the musical icons of the Woodstock generation, almost all of them draft age males, was shipped off to slog through the rice paddies of Vietnam? Should we just consider that to be another of those great serendipities? Was it mere luck that kept all of the Laurel Canyon stars out of jail and out of the military during the turbulent decade that was the 1960’s? Not really.”

McGowan suggests that these Sixties-era megastars weren’t touched by “The Establishment” because they proved to be useful tools in their efforts to water-down or co-opt any efforts of a truly grassroots movement that could have emerged and brought real change and an earlier end to the meat grinder in Southeast Asia. Perceived anti-war anthem "For What It's Worth" takes on a whole different meaning - figuratively and literally.

McGowan notes how so few of the Laurel Canyon artists really demanded an end to the war, killing so many of their peers. Jim Morrison? ‘Fraid not. Mr. Mojo Risin’s dad, U.S. Navy Admiral George Stephen Morrison was the man in charge of the naval ship, the U.S.S. Bon Homme Richard, which was involved in the very Gulf of Tonkin incident that led to escalation of the Vietnam War. In fact, McGowan includes a photo of a clean-cut Jim Morrison on the bridge of the infamous ship with his dad in early 1964. Just a few

years later he would be asking the world to ‘break on through to the other side’ and to “light his fire.” All the while, he largely ignored the politics of the day and had seemingly no musical training or interest. How convenient.

And while Peter Tork, for instance, worked the coffeehouse folk scene in Greenwich Village and was friends with folkie Stephen “The Sarge” Stills, a guy who boasted he had spent time in Vietnam, likely before troops were sent there in the mid-1960’s.

And Tork? What was he allegedly doing before landing a gig as a doltish, bass-playing Monkee on the hit NBC TV series in 1966?

Tork, writes McGowan, “migrated to Connecticut then Venezuela,’ which was, I suppose, a typical migratory route for folkies in those days.”

I looked into this and sure enough, Tork (then known as Peter Thorkelson) was in South America for a month or so, allegedly visiting family. But was he really? Or was he on some sort of “secret mission” as his pal Stills has implied in the past? Oddly, I have found no official biographical book on Tork and he is decidedly the most mysterious Monkee of the quartet.

And while the mid-20th century spawned many creative people who came from military-linked families, primarily due to the World Wars and the ongoing Cold War, it is strange to see how many of these Laurel Canyon musicians (Zappa, Stills, Phillips and others) and actors (Dennis Hopper, Jack Nicholson, Bruce Dern, Peter Fonda and others) directly descended not only from military families from the East Coast but in some cases from elite families who first settled early America and/or were involved in secret societies.

And sure, we’ve heard rumors about Charles Manson and his songwriting abilities. All true. And members of the Beach Boys (primarily surfer/drummer Dennis Wilson) were among Charlie’s besties. This Wilson brother would die under mysterious circumstances as well, dying while swimming in 1983. Indeed, the canyon has some dark and winding roads – many of them leading to mysterious “suicides.”

... or possible human sacrifices to the Dark Lord. McGowan, in his chapters “Vito and His Freakers: The Sinister Roots of Hippie Culture” and “The Death of Godo Paulekas: Anger’s Infant Lucifer,” we are introduced to debauched guru and self-described “Freak” Vito Paulekas, along with his wife Szou and his disturbing companion Carl Franzoni. These guys helped get The Byrds (a largely untested, musically-limited band which was as much or more of a manufactured act than the derided Monkees, at least in the early years) off the ground by doing spasmodic, freakish dance moves on the dance floors of clubs that sprouted overnight on the Sunset Strip. That freewheelin’ behavior cloaked something far more ominous.

Paulekas shows up in the underground film *Mondo Hollywood* and likely had allowed Satanist and suspected snuff-film creator Kenneth Anger to feature the three-year old Godo as his “Lucifer” in a film he was working on. It is then that Mansonite and former Grass Roots (a different “Grass Roots,” later renamed Love) guitarist Bobby “Cupid” Beausoleil becomes the Luciferian replacement.

“Calling themselves Freaks, they lived a semi-communal life and engaged in sex orgies and free-form dancing whenever they could,” writes McGowan, describing Vito and the Freakers.

And when Vito split, Manson happened to show up in his place, because, as McGowan writes, “It makes perfect sense, in retrospect, that Charles Manson and his Family came calling just as Vito fled the scene, and that a Mansonite replaced the freak child (doomed Godo Paulekas, said to have died after falling through a

skylight while tripping on acid) as the embodiment of Lucifer. For the truth, you see, is that in many significant ways, Charles Manson was little more than a younger version of Vito Paulekas."

Hollywood being Hollywood, is it really all that much of a surprise that all the signs point to the Laurel Canyon "peace and love" folk-rock and singer-songwriter scene was likely entirely manufactured? We know drugs were rampant, occult activity commonplace and a bloody trail of corpses that shocks to the core.

Chapters on The Byrds' troubled Gene Clark and (later) Gram Parsons, along with iron-fisted tyrants like Frank Zappa, Stephen Stills, Arthur Lee and Captain Beefheart; and sex maniacs (and likely incestuous pedophiles) including various Beach Boys and "Papa" John Phillips, all seem to point to something much more hidden and sinister going on in Laurel Canyon. After all, these perceived peaceful hippies had a rather violent, authoritarian streak about them - quite counter to the image one usually conjures when imagining the happy vibes emanating from the Mamas and the Papas as they perform "California Dreamin'" on a TV variety show.

Even the death-obsessed and positively evil Process Church of the Final Judgment played a role in Laurel Canyon and surrounding areas. Just ask one-time cape-wearing David Crosby or any number of lesser-known "musicians" who came even later. For all the ocean breezes, bikini babes and daisies and so forth, the ever-present Southern California sunshine couldn't possibly pierce the darkness hanging over Laurel Canyon.

Later chapters touch upon New Wave and punk music's Copeland brothers (which includes Police drummer Stewart Copeland) and the family's connection with intelligence agencies and another (inexplicably, perhaps) going into illusionist Harry Houdini's possible link to the early days of Laurel Canyon.

Sure, there could be a lot of coincidences (the writer of The Association's '66 cult-and-drug-flavored hit "Along Comes Mary," Tandy Almer, just so happens to split L.A. and die in the spooky D.C. suburb of McLean, Virginia, where Morrison, John Phillips, Mama Cass Elliot, Peter Tork and others hung out in their early years), with all these covert ops, serial killers running around and funding that seems to come from nowhere. After all, who paid for all of this for so many years?

McGowan, I should note, is a very personable writer with a breezy and even humorous writing style. I would be giving *Weird Scenes Inside the Canyon* an excellent rating if it were not for a few editing and spelling errors. I did like the inclusion of a foreword from conspiracy writer Nick Bryant (*The Franklin Scandal*) and his comments on this book having a healthy sprinkling of the "military/intelligence complex."

And McGowan puts you there in the canyon. I only wish all the photographs he used in his online series, featured at The Center for an Informed America, were here as well. While I was quite familiar with McGowan's wide body of conspiracy research and I had already read a lot of this Laurel Canyon information before, reading it again – and some new nuggets – was well worth it, particularly as I continue my research on my book focusing on the rock music created and/or released in 1966.

To learn more - and I mean more - go to www.davesweb.cnghost.com. And like me, you'll tumble into a rabbit hole from which you will likely never return.

- See more at: <http://www.reddirtreport.com/rustys-r...>

Marti says

As strange as this book reads, the surface details are all true. But what is overall message? Though it goes through many strange twists and turns to get there; as far as I can tell, it is that the musicians who congregated in Laurel Canyon did so for reasons that did not really have anything to do with music. Instead, they tended to come from extremely privileged backgrounds and parents who were high ranking military officials who were also likely involved in espionage (people like Stephen Stills and Peter Tork who happened to find themselves in Latin American countries at a time just before democratically elected leaders were toppled by the CIA -- and Stills was in Vietnam before the war there escalated).

He seems to be suggesting that the wild lifestyles promoted by these artists (many of whom did not actually play on their records) was an attempt by the CIA to exert mind control over young people in an effort to divert them away from more serious anti-war efforts. David Crosby (descended from original Dutch Settlers to New York as well as John Jay and Alexander Hamilton), Peter Fonda (whose family came over with Crosby's Van Rensselaer ancestors on the same boat) and Jim Morrison (son of a high ranking Naval officer who displayed no interest in music until he became a rock star) also exemplify this theory.

And yes, a large number of these people died or were murdered in mysterious circumstances or the houses where these happenings took place burned down. I might not have trouble believing they were assassinated by our government if there had been more proof (the author suggests that they may have known too much and their deaths made to look like suicide or murder/suicide). If true, it would be easy to see why nobody would want to talk about this stuff. Therefore, all we have are a series of documented facts that point to a pattern of sinister influence in Laurel Canyon. There was no shortage of macabre and disreputable people around including Vito and the Freaks, Charles Manson, "The Process" (an EST-like cult) and a whole host of Crowley-esque disciples. What is less well known is that Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld were in residence at a RAND corporation think-tank located on a secluded hillside in the midst of all this (and supposedly J. Edgar Hoover was a customer at a gay brothel located nearby).

There is also much made of certain dates which have occult significance like the fact that Tom Mix died on October 12, Alistair Crowley's Birthday. Mix had once owned the "Log Cabin" (future home of Frank Zappa) and Spahn Ranch (where the Manson Family lived). The Log Cabin burned down on Halloween, 1981. This was 22 years to the day after Houdini's estate located nearby burned down. Houdini himself also died on Halloween in 1926. Spooky! Parts of it also read like a giant game of "Six Degrees of Separation." For instance, how to connect comedian Phil Hartman and Charles Manson? Well...Hartman designed the CSNY Logo and was the brother of John Hartman, a label exec with David Geffen. John Hartman got his start in the music business with Colonel Tom Parker. Tom Parker worked with Tom Mix in the 1940s. In addition to the aforementioned Spahn Ranch connection, Phil Hartman also attended high school with Squeaky Fromme.

So what does all this prove? Well, nothing really. But if true, all these coincidences are strange. Then again, we are talking about California (where there are frequent wild fires and houses burn down all the time). There are other perfectly plausible explanations as to why all these people would end up in the entertainment capital of the United States and why those living in the fast lane tend to turn up dead a lot.

I don't know whether to give this book 1 star for lack of proof that would really tie all this stuff together or 5 stars. After all, this was one hell of a page-turner (to paraphrase Austin Powers, conspiracy theories ARE my bag). There are obviously a lot of things left out of this review, but off the top of my head, I wondered why Danny Sugarman, who lived on Wonderland Avenue and later married Fawn Hall (who was Oliver

North's secretary) and Rodney Bingenheimer (who knew everyone mentioned in this book) were left out of this saga.

I am definitely adding it to my "Classic Trash" shelf along with my Brian Jones conspiracy books and Hollywood Babylon.

Dina says

I avoided getting this book for a while because "conspiracy theories" really aren't my cup of tea...I actually groan when I hear the words "conspiracy theory", and this book suggests that there may be something conspiratorially suspicious in that the major stars of the 1960's Laurel Canyon music scene all had family members or other close connections to the US military and CIA, and there were many "mysterious" and "suspicious" deaths among them. So why did I read the book and give it a pretty good review? The true crime buff in me couldn't resist. Two infamous crimes in California, even US history were rooted in Laurel Canyon, the Wonderland murders and the Manson murders. There did seem to be a dark undercurrent in the Laurel Canyon music scene and I was always interested in the role Charles Manson played before the murders, where there were stories and whispers that he rubbed shoulders with some of the biggest stars like John Phillips, Mama Cass, etc., and everyone tried to minimize their involvement with him after the murders.

I got this book because I was curious to read the stories and anecdotes about the people who made up the 1960's Laurel Canyon scene and in this respect the book really delivers. While I'm taking the conspiracy theory with a grain of salt, the individual stories are very interesting, it covers famous figures like the Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, John and Michelle Phillips, Dennis Hopper, Mama Cass, Dennis Wilson Terry Melcher, and also darker figures like Vito Paulekas and his troupe, Charles Manson, and the Wonderland gang, among many others. While some of the Laurel Canyon deaths are suspicious and pretty freakish, like Bobby Fuller and also Duane Allman-Berry Oakley, many were legitimate suicides like Donald Cammel and Graham Bond, without anything suspicious behind them.

All in all though, this is a very interesting book. If, like me, you're not a conspiracy theorist, you can take the conspiracy aspects with a grain of salt, but the stories and anecdotes of the individuals, their trajectories to fame, their rise, and sometimes fall...some of it is sad, some of it is dark, some of it is unbelievable...makes for interesting reading, especially if you're interested in the Laurel Canyon scene. And if you are a conspiracy theorist, I'm sure you'll love this book.

Tom Fogleman says

This is an outstanding book. I first read the story online at the beginning of 2014. I purchased the book as soon as it came out. Most books covering the Laurel Canyon music scene give a glorified, idealistic setting to the burgeoning hippie scene. This book doesn't. It shines a light on the many unsavory aspects of the developing scene. It highlights items that get glossed over or underreported. For example, how many people would guess the scene had numerous military connections? How many people would know of Charles Manson's presence throughout the scene? Probably not many. McGowan doesn't tell what to think about it. He gives the reader the information allows you to come to some of your own conclusions. He peppers his story with dry humor and a touch of sarcasm when something seems unusual. Many of these stars are major names. Quite a number of them are in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Sure, it's a bit of a lurid tale of sex,

drugs and rock 'n' roll. It also shows some of the darker aspects of that lifestyle, like death, pedophilia and the occult. Subjects that aren't typical of what people think of that lifestyle. An outstanding if unknown account of an important juncture in both pop culture and American history.

Eryn says

Highly recommended!! Excellent study on the dark side of the Aquarian Age (circa 1960's). Blown away by the ties he makes and some of the research here. A must read for anyone into this era of history!!

Crabby McGrouchpants says

Great for if you live in this world, and want to know more about Jim Morrison's dad being the naval commander behind the Gulf of Tonkin incident (yes, *that* one!). Great help if you *weren't* aware of all the ties the Manson family had -- not just with Dennis Wilson, either -- with all these hippie-dippy folks, most of whom carried guns (like David Crosby) or at least liked them a lot (like David Crosby). Read about "Papa" John Phillip and the other kids of the Complex who descended on Laurel Canyon when there wasn't much there and made all this stuff happen ... on the bright side, Bob Dylan comes off good 'cause he isn't even *mentioned*. It's a weird world.

Curt says

I love a good conspiracy theory, however this is not a good one. Conjecture and coincidence do not make a theory. Disjointed and reaching. There were many interesting ideas but no real connections and where were the covert-ops promised in the subtitle.

Avis Black says

Somewhat amusing, but the author should have done more research. He assumes that the fact that a lot of Laurel Canyon musicians in the 1960s had fathers who had been in the military is a conspiracy. Actually, this has to do with the fact that the US Army drafted 10 million American men for World War II, and when these men formed families and had their first wave of kids, these kids were born in the 1940s, and hit adulthood in the late 1960s. These were, as you likely guessed, the first wave of the Baby Boomers. A LOT of the older Baby Boomers had fathers who had been in the military because of Uncle Sam, not a conspiracy. Of COURSE a lot of rock musicians had fathers who had been military, because a huge amount of other young people their age--who were not rock musicians--did too. It's demographics, not a conspiracy.

Secondly, the author thinks it's a conspiracy that some of these rock and roll fathers were in intelligence. Sorry to say this, but average men with average intelligence, upon being drafted by the US military, tend to end up as grunts in the ranks. The US military is not a democracy. They give you tests to assess your innate ability, and if you have brains, you tend to be given the smart guy jobs, such as working in intelligence. Many well-known rock musicians have a higher-than-average IQ and creativity, and it's likely their fathers did too. Other jobs reserved for smart guys are staff jobs, but the army has always

liked to reserve these for West Point graduates so the army gets staffers who know what they're doing from day one. Intelligence is where you tend to end up if you're a smart guy who has no previous military training, in other words, a recent civilian draftee.

Thirdly, the author thinks it's a conspiracy that so many of these rock musicians ended up in Los Angeles. Well, many of them were brought there by their fathers, who moved there either during or after World War II. During the war, LA had a major population expansion because it was the most important US mainland military base for the Pacific War. As the war geared up, LA became the equivalent of a great big company town with the US government as the main employer. Los Angeles was also, in the late 1940s, seen as a wonderful place to live and raise your children. It was still cheap and a not overgrown place to live, had good weather, and an aura of glamour because of Hollywood. Many ex-servicemen, after having had a taste of the place, decided to stay there after the war to raise their families. Again, this is not a conspiracy, but demographics.

The author does give you a bit of interesting musical history, if you can ignore his constant harping on his hobbyhorses. One of these is the fact that a lot of the 1960s musicians did not play their own instruments, but were mainly vocal groups supported by the Wrecking Crew, a bunch of studio musicians employed by the major labels. Well, guess what, this is still true today. From the beginnings of rock and roll until now, many of the biggest names and sellers are basically singers with studio back-up musicians. We even have rap, in which the 'musicians' don't even sing, much less play an instrument. Playing an instrument well needs good genes and hard work, and it's not a accident there are many singers out there who have not mastered one. Real talent in music, finding a lone musician who plays well, sings well, and who can write good songs, is incredibly rare.

McGowan says a lot of the 1960s groups sounded fine in the studio, but tended to suck on stage, and from what I've found while prowling old videos on YouTube, this is true. In the beginning of the book McGowan says he became disillusioned by many of his 1960s idols the more he learned about them. It's not too surprising to find your idols are made of sand and fall apart at the first touch, but wiser people realize it's smarter not to mindlessly worship idols at all.

Bill LaBrie says

The most controversial parts of this book touch little on the central question it asks: Was the culture of the time we know as the "Sixties" really just one massive government psy-op intended to derail opposition to the Vietnam War and popular calls for real social change?

If the answer is "yes," this book would be a shocking revelation suggesting our entire world isn't what we've long thought it to be. *Bummer.*

But far more likely to offend are McGowan's assertions that bands like The Doors and The Byrds weren't real bands at all, and almost none of the musical "greats" of that era were substantially different from those fakiest of all fakers, The Monkees. Ultimate outsiders like Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart were undercover toadies working for the status quo. Most of the legendary bands sucked at live performance, and owed their popularity to a troupe of outrageous dancers paid to show up at gigs.

What GAUL! Who the hell does he think he is? It was a legendary time of peace and freedom, man! The Doors! The Doors! I could hear the baby boomers keeling over and falling on their favorite bongs as I paged

through the most provocative chapters.

It was with some personal interest I read this tapestry of biographical sketches, historical vignettes, digressions, and leading questions asked with dramatically-raised eyebrows. My mother and father were almost -- though not quite -- part of the "scene." They were living only one canyon over from Laurel when I was born in 1968. They long remembered the massive influx of unwashed and drug-addled young searchers and the resulting Sunset Boulevard riots in '66. At the time, my father was an impresario trying to get a young ingenue (my mother) into the LA music free-for-all. They spent time in the clubs McGowan profiles -- places like Whiskey a Go-Go and Pandora's. Hell, they might have crossed paths with some unsavory characters like Vito Paulekas and Elmer Valentine -- or even Charles Manson himself. It was a wild time, though the real wildness lasted for only two years or so.

What McGowan does best is dig. Here, he's dug up a stunning set of coincidences where bloodlines and story arcs intersect in stupefying ways. What's the likelihood so many of the heroes of that scene came from patrician families with backgrounds in military intelligence and weapons research? Why were obvious murders swept under the carpet as suicides? Why no major drug busts in the Canyon? Why so many home fires conveniently destroying all evidence? Who was paying the bills for the extremely-rough or even talentless before they rose almost inexplicably to near-instant fame? How did the "counterculture" get national TV and radio exposure during a time when media was at least as tightly controlled as it is today, and at least as beholden to "the establishment?" Why so many "activist" figures who toted handguns and had a history of traveling from one global hot-spot to another before suddenly picking up guitars and singing about peace and love?

McGowan's assertion: This can't all be explained away with the dreamy word "serendipity." It was all too weird. Someone -- or a group of someones -- was pulling the strings, and with some end in mind.

Weird Scenes is a document of a time when an unprecedented convocation of young people from elite military and intelligence backgrounds gathered with their poorly-tuned guitars in one small part of Southern California, concentrated in a single canyon beneath mountaintop covered by a secret, self-contained government movie studio, and changed the music world forever. This much we know to be objectively true. And in itself, it's stranger than fiction.

Some annoyances: McGowan uses satire and sarcasm to excess. It's enough to undermine his serious argument. There are too many *Oh yeah. Right. Uh-huh. Surrrrre . . .* flourishes in response to the "official" accounts. Such things are at best seasonings, not a full course. He tends compare the artists' lifestyles to that of an average American-Joe strawman. Musicians aren't average Joes. Even the ones who aren't presumed CIA assets tend to do things Middle-America would see as "weird." Also, McGowan's digressions are charming and entertaining but often don't really support the main premise. What they really do is add page count. It's OK, Dave: As a fellow author I've been there myself.

Nowadays -- just as back then -- all of mass media is an ad for something. The sudden, inexplicable rise of the Laurel Canyon phenomenon should force anyone to question what it was really advertising, and who was paying the tab.

I'd recommend *Weird Scenes* to the conspiracy-minded as well as those interested in the culture and music of the time, though readers in the latter group should be prepared to witness a few sacred cows slaughtered.

Bob Schnell says

Do you like classic rock, conspiracies, Hollywood, UFOs, serial killers, the occult, spy stories and militarized mind control? Then this is the book for you. "Weird Scenes Inside the Canyon" takes an interesting approach to those strange years between the 1960s and 70s, especially as they played out in the area of Los Angeles known as Laurel Canyon. The problem with this book is that it tells a lot of stories of mysterious and macabre happenings but shrouds everything in accusatory tones that never manage to accuse anyone. Every suicide is "alleged", every cause of death is "reported to be" and all events are "supposedly" what happened. Information sources for this book include emails from people David McGowan never met, anonymous postings on his website, a lot of rock musician biographies and even movies such as "The Trip" and "Head". Not exactly the usual criteria for a non-fiction book. Maybe we should call it "speculative non-fiction".

What really got my goat was that the author never even attempted to contact the survivors of that scene to get their take on it. He mentions people like Peter Tork, Michelle Phillips, Eric Burdon and John Kay often enough but there isn't a single interview with them. He could have also consulted the LAPD or the local archives for material but no mention is made of those sources. What Mr. McGowan has is a collection of facts, a lot of coincidences and hearsay but no conclusion to tie it all together. I enjoyed it as a book of stories about people and places that interest me, but whatever journalistic leanings the author had just left me shaking my head.

UPDATE: I just discovered that the author passed away from cancer last month. I will not say "allegedly" or hint at any nefarious machinations, though he most certainly would have done so himself. RIP Mr. McGowan, I hope you've found the truth you were seeking.

Greg Latanick says

I've been following the author's website for several years, so this read is an extension of his article on there for me. I already have a strong background in the source material. If a reader does not, the barrage of dates and names might be overwhelming. This is definitely a conspiracy book, albeit a very good one. I follow up on a lot of the author's claims to check the facts. I don't believe everything he lays out, but I believe enough for this read to be engaging and disturbing. Particularly a fact McGowan gets undeniably correct is that virtually every famous rock star of the LA scene in the 60s and 70s were direct scions of wealthy and powerful military families. This is very fascinating, and easy to corroborate. I am a jaded reviewer, I have been following these sordid tales for many years. I would definitely recommend this book over others of its ilk.

Aaron Singleton says

This is a book every fan of rock 'n roll music from the 60's and 70's in particular should read. It is a history of sorts, a hidden history of murder, torture, mind control, sex, drugs, the occult, gov't spooks, and money, all within the cozy confines of Laurel Canyon.

From the very first page you are presented with facts you will doubt. Once you verify they ARE facts, you'll be off and running, sometimes scared. McGowan paints a picture of the LA music scene of the 60's you have never seen before; one crawling with government "agents" and snitches, with musicians who come from a long line of career military families or American royalty. You will be shocked to learn that many of your favorite hippy musicians were gun-toting control freaks or in possession of an alternate personality who believes he is a gov't assassin, or... Well, you get the picture.

I have to say that after reading this book, I was a bit melancholy. I suppose that knowing many of your heroes were fakes and plants will do that to one.

Besides the music industry and its strange ties to gov't agencies like the CIA, Dave also explores the strange history of Hollywood from the silent era and Houdini to the Manson family. The connections are endless, baffling. Do yourself a favor and read this book. And by all means verify what is written therein independently. Only then will you understand the power of the dark side...

Update: The writer and researcher Dave McGowan died recently from cancer. He was an original thinker, a man who could find the weak point of any argument in seconds, a meticulous researcher, a father, a brother, a son. I did not know the man, but I got to know him through his work and felt a kinship. So, Rest in Peace, Dave, and thank you for your work.

Elizabeth says

I think the most basic idea presented here is true: that media and entertainment are (and have always been) orchestrated by hidden, powerful influences far more than we know. I read this book while taking McGowan's ideas with a grain of salt; for me, some of his points fell flat, some were bordering on nonsense, and some were intriguing (and convincing) enough to have me thinking about them for days. Could have benefited from a little more explanation and a little less snark - at times I couldn't quite get the point that was being made with a particular explanation, no matter how many times the author danced around it with "Coincidence? I THINK NOT." Overall an enjoyably unnerving read, especially for those who are interested in the 60s counterculture and LA music scene.

Angie and the Daily Book Dose says

I started reading this guys blog posts several years before the book was published. The book itself is full of interesting facts and anecdotes about the area surrounding Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles. The book is a fun read if you are a lover of history, conspiracy, and musical biography. At times the author jumps around a little. The book might have benefited from a little more editing, but over all for what it's worth I really did enjoy the conspiracy aspect of it all. For all things to converge in one place and one time, kinda interesting, kinda creepy.

I am waiting for a definitive book on the Wonderland Murders, which are mentioned several times in the book. Someone out there write one!

Karen says

I don't believe I've said OMG so many times while reading a book. It's well written and easy to read. His little humorous, sarcastic quips make it fun. There is a lot of information in this book to digest. David McGowan has connected all the dots and leaves the reader to decide what to believe. There seems to have been many strange things happening in the hippie/music culture in Laurel Canyon during the 60's and 70's. The only thing that would have improved the book would have been photos & documents. I'll be going through the selected bibliography and filmography looking for more good reads. I hope the research will be continued. Check out the author's website: Center for an Informed America
<http://www.davesweb.cnchost.com/>
