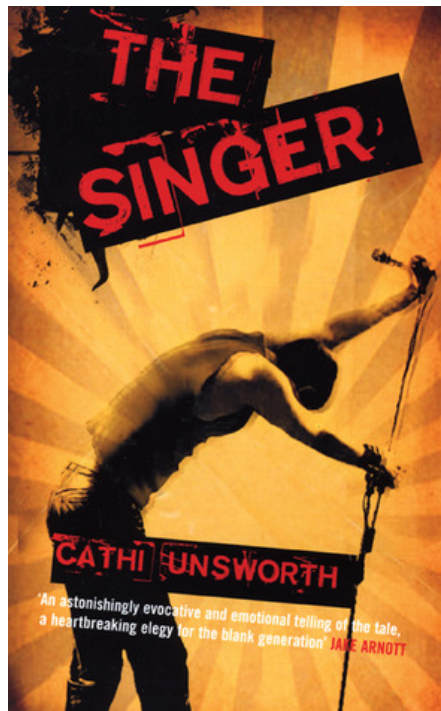




The Singer

Cathi Unsworth

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The legend goes like this: Vincent Smith met bandmates Stevie Mullin and Lynton Powell at a Sex Pistols concert, where he tried to kiss Sid Vicious? guitar and got a bloody nose. Together they formed Blood Simple, and for a while they made a lot of noise, a bit of money and caused a sensation wherever they went. Then Vincent eloped with Sylvana, singer for the ethereal Mood Violet, and it all went wrong. Six months later Sylvana committed suicide, the band fell apart, and Vincent disappeared. That was 1981 and twenty years on, journalist Eddie Bracknell hopes the story of Blood Simple will be the making of him. He?s got a book contract and the right contacts, it?s just that he can?t get the different stories he?s heard to fit together, never mind trying to work out what happened to Vincent. A compelling crime novel and a very modern fable, The Singer brings the intoxicating days of punk back onstage, with all its noisy creativity and explosive violence.

The Singer Details

Date : Published June 7th 2007 by Serpent's Tail (first published February 1st 2007)

ISBN : 9781852429331

Author : Cathi Unsworth

Format : Paperback 480 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Noir, Music, Crime, Punk

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From Reader Review The Singer for online ebook

Eva says

Oh man what a story! the noir! the punk! the music! vince! donna! sylvana! eddie! what a tangle web Unsworth weaved. Set between modern times and the early 1980s this tells the story of two up & coming bands in the early English punk scene and Eddie a modern day music journalist pinning for a scene he was never part off. Eddie is trying to write about the mysterious disappearance of Vince a charismatic singer of Blood Truth along the way he discovers a whole lot of truth and then some. The end is a real kicker. I have to say Unsworth has a real knack for creating characters that are so raw and real and just jump at you. I just loved Vince a bad-boy incarnate, a lover incarnate, a real sonvabitch incarnate. I was completely mesmerized by Vince even till the very end, even after I knew all he had done. I like bad-boys and I loved Vince Smith. Which brings me to Donna, Donna was also dynamite character. She was smart, driven and gutsy. She totally imploded after her encounter with that sonvabitch Smith but all the while it was a total show. Plus, at the very end she just got me good she is so damn awesome. I just found her to be so relatable because she was deeply flawed, and she was driven, she wanted a career but she was derailed. This book is a must read and I must say I have become a fan of Ms. Unsowrth. Also any book that makes references to and quotes from Goodfellas is a win.

Sophie Carsenat says

I am blown away by Cathi Unsworth. Dark, deeply authentic, intense crimewriting. I've just ordered all her books and cannot wait to read them!

Simon says

Originally reviewed as part of a 5 book round up.

Last but not least on the holiday reading is The Singer By Cathi Unsworth who I bought it from at the Suarez Seance at the Horse Hospital a few months ago a night celebrating Derek Raymond this is a great London Rock and Roll Mystery roll of a book that was hard to put down and follows the story of two fictional bands Blood Truth and Mood Violet who its claimed within this book are in Blood Truths case the founding fathers of Goth and come not from Leeds but from Hull and formed after meeting at a Sex Pistols gig and who at the height of there fame and notoriety the singer dissappears after his wife the singer of mood Violet dies of an OD in Paris, 20 years goes by and over too many drinks in too many familiar london haunts that I have drunk in our intrepid reporter pieces together the whole story. Its a great rivetting read that

blends reality with fiction to make a totally believable story written by an author who worked on all the music papers worth reading when I was younger from Sounds to NME etc.. If you like great Rock and roll fiction this is a must.

Leigh says

Not even close to being as good as Unsworth's Weirido book. Sort of disappointed since I loved Weirido.

Ian Mapp says

They do suggest that you write about what you know.

And Cathi Unsworth - ex music journalist - knows her late seventies, early 80s music.

This book is simply superb. Best I've read for a long time and will be my book of 2016, I'm sure.

A split time narrative shows a music journalist in 2001 investigating the short career of a fictional punk band, Blood Truth, and their enigmatic front man, Vince.

There's a lot of fun to be had as fact and fiction merge. The real bands bring back memories but part of the joy is working out who the fictional characters are based on.

Here's my thoughts on a few...

Vince has to be Nick Cave
Sylvana and her band have to be Liz Frazier and the Cocteau Twins
Donna - could she be Julie Burchill?

Great fun.

There's also a real story here - the seventies punk scene is wonderfully evoked. Modern Day Camden is addressed and a lot of references to places made me smile. The characters are superbly drawn - with back stories making them very believable.

Strangely enough the book reads like gothic / horror fiction and this works well. The book very much reminded me of the film Angel Heart - which is no bad thing. You wonder how it's going to end and I'll give nothing away but say that it ends unexpectedly and very, very well.

Can't recommend this one highly enough. You should read it.

Svein says

A nice noir novel set in England's punk/goth scene in the late 70's. Being into punk rock it was good reading

a crime novel set in an environment I already know something about, but I would recommend it to all who like crime fiction.

Adam says

Cathi Unsworth's *The Singer* is an epic of the punk era mixed with a detective story and a little bit of the gothic (with a conclusion straight out of Poe and Wilde). In many ways this is not a crime story (or doesn't feel like one for most of the story) but a story of the dreamers and the damned (pun intended as that band features quite a bit in the book) of the punk generation, but Unsworth always writes like a crime novelist focusing on a street level view of history filled with grit and grime and sense of place from Punk era London and a scary America in the 70's to early 2000's "murder capitol" Camden and sleazy, debauched Lisbon. This is a really despairing book in the end (and most of the time up until then) but Unsworth proves her wholehearted love for the music, so you will want some Sex Pistols, The Damned, Birthday Party, and Siouxsie and The Banshees around to blare loudly when your done.

Manda says

Ex-music journo Cathi Unsworth may have written the best crime novel I've read all year with *The Singer*. It's like Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming* meets *Velvet Goldmine* meets *Cold Case* with a chilling shocker of an ending, and I absolutely could not put it down.

the gift says

she knows her era and subculture, though the way the plot unfolds is long, slow, dense, with familiar cliches of the rock-and-roll lifestyle, with weird chemistry of the band and always, always, the woman who becomes the focus of their dissolution. and she is the sole sympathetic character. i could have enjoyed it more if only half as long. definitely, a punk ending.

Kathy Adams says

The characters were brought to life in this story. I felt transported to the late seventies punk rock movement in Britain. The dialogue was spot on, and I found myself regurgitating British phrases in everyday life while reading this novel. I was captivated by the story telling and enjoyed the intriguing back and forth: present searching into the past and past moving towards the future to move the story along. The ending derailed the whole story and I feel compelled to reread the entire book as the main character did not turn out as I'd hoped. Perhaps I should have seen the end coming, but I always want to believe that people are inherently good despite evidence to the contrary.

Chris says

A vast improvement on her debut novel - this has real depth and moved along at pace. Some great characters

drawn from the UK 80s underground music scene. A good few seem very familiar as they appear to drawn from the pages of Sounds / NME.

Andy says

Currently reading the Kindle preview of The Singer and I'm enjoying it. It's a pretty good punk crime novel about the dissolution of rock and roll dreams and the quiet disappearance of a popular punk singer following an explosive run at the height of The 1977 Roxy Club scene. Unsworth writes in a tight, tough prose style that fits the action inside. Give this one a tumble.

Nigeyb says

David Peace, on the back cover, describes The Singer as "the Great Punk Novel". As a man who is passionate about music, and lived through, and loved, the punk era, this augured very well.

The book is firmly based within the UK punk, and post-punk eras, so plenty of real bands and songs feature in the story. Part of the fun of the book, for those steeped in the musical history of the era, is trying to work out who Cathi Unsworth modelled some of the fictional characters and bands on. For example there's a photographer who appears to be a combination of Kevin Cummings and Anton Corbijn, and one of the main bands draws heavily on 1980s indie favourites The Cocteau Twins, whilst another has elements of The Birthday Party, amongst others.

At first The Singer felt enjoyable if a little hackneyed, however as the story progressed, flipping between the early 2000s and the late 1970s/early 1980s, it became progressively more compelling, and by the end I was racing through the book's 450 pages keen to find out how it all ended.

A strength of the book is the range of diverse and distinctive characters, all of whom, to one degree or another are looking back at the past, many damaged by their personal histories, and bringing their own interpretation of what happened and why.

Cathi Unsworth evokes the punk era very powerfully and also convincingly places the tale in a range of places which include Camden, Portobello Road, Little Venice, Stoke Newington, Pigalle, Montmartre, and Bairro Alto. I know all of these places and she does a great job of describing each location.

Ultimately The Singer is a genre piece, and part of the grand tradition of crime fiction, although that said the book's conclusion owes more to gothic horror. Cathi Unsworth's dark tale convincingly evokes the punk era (and early 2000s) via an exciting, original and unexpected story.

After I'd finished I reflected on some of the more implausible aspects of the story, and how some of the writing felt rushed, but to dwell on that is to downplay the book's many strengths. This was a great read, my first book by Cathi Unsworth, and not my last. I will be reading more very soon. 4/5

Thanks to GoodReads hombre Mark for another interesting recommendation (over at TPHAS).

Reb says

This book is utterly brilliant and I will definitely be buying her other books.

Eric says

I thought it started off decently but then it hit a long patch where I felt like I was better off abandoning the book rather than finishing it.

Then I got to the section about the New Year's party and everything started clicking.

And then...that ending.

The beginning and middle parts really kept this from being the four star book. I'd say 3.5 but still, for a book about punk (post-punk really) it does an admirable job in not embarrassing itself.

Rachel Pollock says

This is a placeholder for a more lengthy review to come, but in short this was a fun read, a nostalgia trip for this former DJ, and thank EVERY DAMN STAR IN HEAVEN that the twos at the end was not "surprise he's a vampire!"

ETA: Review here: <http://www.stillweirdzine.com/2016/01...>

Dj says

best novel i've read with music (punk rock) as the axis of the story.

Cori says

It took me till the end to really figure out the mystery.

catechism says

Probably more of a 4.5 (a few typos and some odd POV shifts), but I'm rounding up because man, I thought this was great. It's the story of a journalist who gets obsessed with an early British punk band whose lead singer disappeared off the face of the earth 20 years ago. The journalist decides to write a book about the band and the search for the singer, and the book switches back and forth between the first-person POV of the journalist and an occasionally strange third-person POV flashback, from the various characters on the scene at the time. I saw the ending coming, but that was really interested in how the hell we'd get there, and the

twists and turns the story took didn't disappoint.

Denali says

Rated solely on how many times it made me miss my bus stop. A mystery/thriller/music history/cultural commentary/story of fan/fame/romantic obsession. A well told story with interesting characters and a great series of revolving points of view held together by a modern day narrator who serves as a great reader surrogate.
