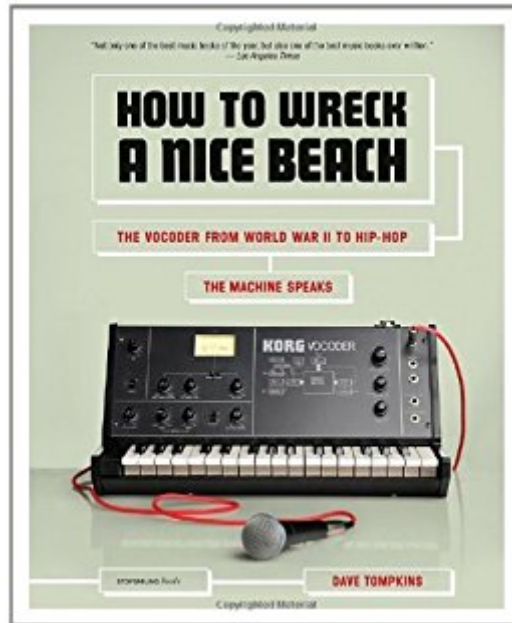# How To Wreck A Nice Beach: The Vocoder From World War II To Hip-Hop, The Machine Speaks

Synopsis

The history of the vocoder: how popular music hijacked the Pentagon's speech scrambling weaponThe vocoder, invented by Bell Labs in 1928, once guarded phones from eavesdroppers during World War II; by the Vietnam War, it was repurposed as a voice-altering tool for musicians, and is now the ubiquitous voice of popular music. In How to Wreck a Nice Beachâ "from a mis-hearing of the vocoder-rendered phrase â œhow to recognize speechâ •â "music journalist Dave Tompkins traces the history of electronic voices from Nazi research labs to Stalinâ ™s gulags, from the 1939 Worldâ ™s Fair to Hiroshima, from artificial larynges to Auto-Tune. We see the vocoder brush up against FDR, JFK, Stanley Kubrick, Stevie Wonder, Neil Young, Kraftwerk, the Cylons, Henry Kissinger, and Winston Churchill, who boomed, when vocoderized on V-E Day, â œWe must go off!â • And now vocoder technology is a cell phone standard, allowing a digital replica of your voice to sound human. From T-Mobile to T-Pain, How to Wreck a Nice Beach is a riveting saga of technology and culture, illuminating the work of some of musicâ ™s most provocative innovators.From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I don't think that before I read _How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip-Hop: The Machine Speaks_ (Stop Smiling Books / Melville House Publishing) that I even knew what a vocoder was. After reading it, I am convinced vocoders must be everywhere. They seem to have been a foundation of Dave Tompkins's life. He has written this quirky book over a period spanning more than a decade, with some of the interviews going back more than ten years ago. Since he is an accomplished music columnist, mostly covering hip-hop and other popular music, most of the book is about the vocoder's use for entertainment, though it does cover the history of the device as a military tool. The vocoder helped win WWII, and even if you never appreciated it for that, and even if you aren't much of a pop music fan, you have probably heard its work when the movies needed a robot voice. _Colossus: The Forbin Project_ (1970) featured "the first paranoid supercomputer to speak through a vocoder." It has made cameo appearances in _Battlestar Galactica_ and _Tron_. It formed the words for the minimalist lyrics of Kraftwerk's _Autobahn_, and did the synthesized chorus for the electronic version of Beethoven's Ninth in _Clockwork Orange_. It was the basis for the vocals in the Christmas album _Zoot Zoot Zoot, Here Comes Santa in His New Space Suit_. OK, you don't know that one, and nobody is going to get all of Tompkins's astonishingly scattershot cultural references, but still, this hyper-illustrated, zingily-written historical tribute to Tompkins's favorite gadget is an amusing and in-depth examination of a particular and peculiar bit of technology and culture.It is no surprise that the vocoder invented in 1928 is nothing like the vocoder now.

The writing, frankly, is indulgent beyond belief, and often diffuses what he is trying to say. You have to pick through unclear convolutions and winking references you either get or you don't (it's like a Simpsons episode, except more distracting than entertaining) to get at the meat. To boot, he often throws in fictional elements to further pursue our admiration for his "flash" style. For instance, in setting a scene, he mentions that a cow is yawning and a food cart worker is stealing money while someone is onstage at a state fair with their vocoder...in the eighties. Pretty sure that didn't turn up in his research. That would be fine for a novel, but this ain't that. The cow is a harmless enough detail, but the result of telling me someone stole money while the band played--because you think it reads cool--is I am often wondering if more ambiguous details are fact or fiction. Bad news for a history of anything, even the vocoder. There were a lot of things I took with a grain of salt; you certainly couldn't cite this book as a source for research! (If you were even completely sure of what was being said in the first place.) The style is basically what someone might use trying to get

attention and look clever in a 100-word blurb review in a magazine, stretched out over a book. I finally packed it in and am just skimming now. Check this one out from the library if you want to read about the vocoder, don't buy. I generally don't review things on ...once every couple of years...but this book is so off-putting I wanted to warn people.

How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip-Hop, The Machine Speaks Love & Hip Hop: Unsung All Exclusive Access: New York Atlanta Hollywood Unauthorized Version (Love & Hip Hop, Vh1 Love & Hip Hop WEDDING, Love & Hip Hop ... Season 1 2 3 4 5 6 DVD Prime Instant Video) Hip Hop Rhyming Dictionary: The Extensive Hip Hop & Rap Rhyming Dictionary for Rappers, Mcs,Poets,Slam Artist and lyricists: Hip Hop & Rap Rhyming Dictionary And General Rhyming Dictionary Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat (A Poetry Speaks Experience) Hip Hop Illuminati Book 2: Hip Hop's Role in the New World Order The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation Eminem (Hip Hop) (Hip Hop (Mason Crest Paperback)) Dr. Dre (Hip Hop) (Hip Hop (Mason Crest Paperback)) Eminem (Hip-Hop Stars) (Hip-Hop Stars (Hardcover)) MCs: A Children's Guide to the Origins of Hip Hop (The Five Elements of Hip Hop) (Volume 4) Hip-Hop History (Hip-hop USA) DJs: A Children's Guide to the Origins of Hip Hop (The Five Elements of Hip Hop Book 1) Graffiti: A Children's Guide to the Origins of Hip Hop (The Five Elements of Hip Hop Book 4) MCs: A Children's Guide to the Origins of Hip Hop (The Five Elements of Hip Hop Book 3) Hip-Hop: A Short History (Superstars of Hip-Hop) Hip Hop Family Tree Book 4: 1984-1985 (Vol. 4) (Hip Hop Family Tree) Hip Hop Family Tree Book 1: 1970s-1981 (Hip Hop Family Tree) Wreck-It Ralph Little Golden Book (Disney Wreck-it Ralph) Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office: Unconscious Mistakes Women Make That Sabotage Their Careers (A NICE GIRLS Book)