

# The Decline Of The UK Music Press

By *Alexander Baron* - Jul 8, 2015

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January 1926 saw the launch of the monthly magazine *Melody Maker*, which as you might suspect from its title, was aimed at musicians and those interested in music. On its front page it informed its readers “In this, our first issue, we are indebted to the famous British composer, Mr. Horatio Nicholls, for allowing us the privilege of publishing his photograph”.

That was indeed a *privilege*, because on page 3 was an advertisement for *ARABY* by the same gentleman, “THE WORLD’S GREATEST POPULAR COMPOSER”, this was described as “THE MOST HAUNTING REFRAIN EVER WRITTEN”.

If you are wondering why this newspaper spoke so highly of Horatio Nicholls it is because it was founded by Lawrence Wright. Also known as Horatio Nicholls.



*Horatio Nicholls*

Mr Wright was a tireless self-publicist, but he did pen one truly great song, *Among My Souvenirs* (with his American collaborator, lyricist Edgar Leslie). Alas, when he died in 1964, he was long forgotten by the monthly magazine he had founded – which was by then a weekly newspaper – no obituary for the great man appeared therein.

*Melody Maker* is now long gone too; its final issue was published 15 years ago. Also long gone is *Sounds*, which began publishing only in 1970 but was while it lasted an influential and at times entertaining publication. It was wound up in 1991.

Then there was *New Musical Express* (later *NME*); founded in 1952, this was the paper that carried the first official UK singles chart, and for the record, the first official number 1 was *Here In My Heart* by Al Martino, which was also number 1 in America.



When *Melody Maker* ceased publication it was technically absorbed by *NME*. There were and are other music publications, but it would be fair to say that *NME* is the last of its kind, catering largely to a younger readership from heavy metal and punk to music that is easier on the ear.

An on-line version of *NME* was launched way back in 1996, but the paper itself has seen a steady decline in its readership. How can that be so if music is more popular than it has ever been? The simple answer is another question, why should anyone buy a newspaper when he can get all his news – including music news, reviews, classified ads, etc – free on-line?

No, *NME* is not going to fold, it has taken what has been called “**the last throw of the dice**” by changing from a paid newspaper with a circulation of around 15,000 to a freesheet with a print run of 300,000. Like the London *Evening Standard*, *Metro* and similar publications it is hoped it will survive off the advertising revenue. A large number of local newspapers have folded in the past few years for the same reason, falling circulation. This has led to calls for them to be subsidised; this is not the answer, but whether or not the new look *NME* succeeds, we should look to **other ways of funding newspapers**, be they local, regional or national.

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