BOOKED IN
REVIEWS BAZ BLAKENEY, CORINNA HENTE & PHIL BROWN

MUSIC
Incomplete & Utter History of Classical Music
Stephen Fry
Pan Macmillan, $27.99

When Stephen Fry writes about something other than Stephen Fry, he can be terribly amusing. His weighty tomes of autobiography (yes, three) make good doorstops, but here he has dipped his quill to enlighten us on one of his great enthusiasms, the history of classical music. And what Mr Fry does not know about classical music would fill a very slim volume indeed. He takes the reader on a lively jaunt from mankind’s earliest attempts at co-ordinated noise, to the plainsong of the medieval church, through the Renaissance, Baroque and Classical periods and onto the modernists and avant-garde.
Verdict: Good vibrations

CRIME
Before it breaks
Dave Werner
Fremantle Press, $29.99

Det-InsP Dan Clement has found himself back in his home town of Broome, not happy about it but prepared to go anywhere that keeps him close to his young daughter and estranged wife. The work’s not exciting, and the people he’s working with don’t impress him much. And there’s a cyclone on the way. The first dead body is an ageing, German hermit, found by a remote waterhole, just where a big croc might have got to him if he hadn’t been found. When the next body’s found, Clement finds the clues point to drugs, but links to the first victim’s past in Germany keep turning up. As the cyclone threatens to move in, the tension in the scattered community steadily increases.
Verdict: Gratuitously gripping

HISTORY
First Fleet Surgeon
David Hill
NLA Publishing, $44.99

How wonderful to be allowed to let your inner history nerd run wild. In recent years former ABC boss David Hill has given his boyish sense of wonder about our past free reign. He came here as an immigrant from England like many of the folks he has written about in his recent histories. This time he turns his attention to surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth, who spent two-and-a-half years sailing with the First Fleet from England to Australia and back. The good thing is he kept a diary – a single volume of 238 unlined pages of parchment which showed him to be a frank, articulate and observant writer. David Hill mines this diary to bring to life the voyage of the Lady Penrhyn and the early months of settlement at Port Jackson through Bowes Smyth’s colourful language and frank anecdotes.
Verdict: Ripping reading