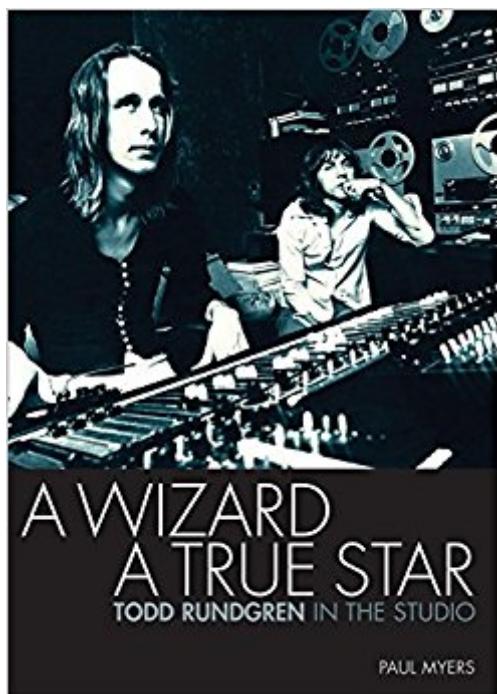


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A Wizard A True Star: Todd Rundgren In The Studio



Synopsis

"If you know what you want, I'll get it for you. If you don't know what you want, I'll do it for you." Few record producers possess the musical facility to back up such a bold promise, but in over forty-plus years behind the glass, Todd Rundgren has willed himself into becoming a not only a rock guitar virtuoso, an accomplished lead vocalist and vocal arranger and visionary keyboard player, not to mention a serviceable drummer. But arguably, Rundgren's greatest instrument of all is the recording studio itself. After learning his craft with Nazz, Rundgren engineered The Band's *Stage Fright* album and soon became the producer of a string of noteworthy albums for Sparks, Grand Funk, The New York Dolls, Badfinger, Hall & Oates, Meat Loaf, Patti Smith Group, Cheap Trick, The Psychedelic Furs and XTC. Meanwhile, Rundgren played almost every instrument on his solo albums such as *Something/Anything?*, *A Wizard A True Star* and *Hermit Of Mink Hollow* while collaborating on a series of albums by his band, Utopia. *A Wizard A True Star: Todd Rundgren In The Studio* by Paul Myers is a fascinating and authoritative trip through the land of flickering red lights inhabited by a studio wizard - and true star - who has rarely enjoyed a proper victory lap along the many trails that he has blazed. Researched and written with the participation and cooperation of Rundgren himself.

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Customer Reviews

Paul Myers is the author of the critically acclaimed biography, *It Ain't Easy: Long John Baldry and the Birth of the British Blues*, which garnered rave reviews in *Mojo*, *Ugly Things* and *Goldmine* and the Canadian national paper, *The Globe And Mail*. Myers was also nominated for a Gemini Award (the Canadian Emmy) for writing the Bravo TV/ BBC 4 television documentary program *Long John*

Baldry: In The Shadow Of The Blues, based upon his book.

I could just babble on about Todd Rundgren, the genius and visionary. But instead I'll stick to discussing this terrific book by Paul Myers, which is a history of Rundgren's activities as producer of other artists and of his own music over four decades. If you've ever heard, or simply heard of, any of the albums or artists discussed herein, you're going to find something worthwhile between its covers, even if you're not familiar with Rundgren's work per se. Myers' reputation as a journalist obviously preceded him, because he acquired first-person access to everyone whose work is discussed in the book. This includes Patti Smith, David Johansen, the members of XTC, Cheap Trick, the Tubes, Grand Funk and others. In addition, Myers had the full participation of Rundgren and his wife Michele. So we get lots of facts and details covering everything from what recording techniques and equipment were used on a session, to how the bands felt about Rundgren and vice-versa, to the historical and musical contexts in which these records came to be. Myers does not sugarcoat anything, so we learn what it was really like to make a record with a brilliant and idiosyncratic guy like Todd. A picture of the man emerges: he worked fast, his level of musical and technical proficiency matched or exceeded all the musicians on his sessions, his creativity was boundless, his capacity to work hard was daunting, and he could utilize a Zen master's cleverness in getting great performances out of his clients. But he could also be impatient, arrogant and sarcastic. Most of the musicians interviewed feel his mixing skills were poor and they were often horrified by the mixes he put together after the sessions ended, because Todd tended to mix with the radio in mind. All those opinions are balanced by comments from Todd himself. But it's not about creating controversy. Myers gives everybody his or her say, and lets it go at that. Tellingly, just about every chapter ends with the artist whose album is being discussed saying something like: "looking back, Todd was the best producer we ever had." The results speak for themselves, and one of the fun things about this book is reading about a project and then listening to the songs again (or for the first time) with the added benefit of the information gleaned from its pages. Written in an accessible, clear and entertaining style, *A WIZARD* never alienated me from the material. I'm not a technophile and I barely know my woofer from my tweeter, and none of the information put me off. If you're a fan of 20th century rock and pop you have probably heard one or more of the albums discussed herein, for instance, *WAVE* (Patti Smith), *BAT OUT OF HELL* (Meat Loaf), *SKYLARKING* (XTC), *STAGE FRIGHT* (The Band) and *WAR BABIES* (Hall & Oates). You'll learn new and fascinating things about them. For instance, I didn't know that "Wave" was Patti Smith's tribute to Pope John Paul I, who had just died. *A WIZARD* also provides a fairly complete history of Rundgren

as recording artist and techno/computer visionary. For Todd fans, this book is a serious must-have. Every album he made starting with Nazz, as a soloist or with Utopia is discussed in detail. We hear a lot from the Utopia regulars, Kasim Sulton, Roger Powell and Willie Wilcox. (Along the way a few key personal facts are included, but the focus is really the music.) The fact that Todd managed to write and record individually and with Utopia, tour, produce albums for other people at the same time, seemingly in a non-stop fashion, and by the way, have girlfriends and eventually a wife, and produce three children, begs the question: did the guy ever sleep? Did he nap? Is he even (nearly) human? I recommend this book for all lovers of 20th century pop and rock music, not just TR fans. In fact, if you're not a TR fan, all the more reason to read *A WIZARD A TRUE STAR: TODD RUNDGREN IN THE STUDIO*. There's no excuse in 2012 not to know who Todd is. He's perhaps the most underappreciated and underrated musical genius of the era. Because Todd's need for artistic control is absolute, he has worked outside the system as much as possible and paid zero attention to the commercial trends of the day unless they happened to coincide with his personal artistic interests. (However, it should be noted that he helped to create some of the major commercial trends of the day, such as music videos and advanced electronic recording techniques.) He had no time for the glitz and glamour of the music business, and kept his personal problems to himself, thereby insuring that gossip columnists would look elsewhere for fodder. Fortunately, his superb and ongoing body of work as artist and producer is available for all to enjoy, and Paul Myers' labor of literary love is as good a place as any to kick start that enjoyment. Bravo, Mr. Myers. Very well done.

Not much I can add to the other reviews. I've been a TR fanatic since 1973, after being knocked out by the one-two punch of "Wizard" & "Something/Anything?" (I actually heard "Wizard" first, therefore that's the way the 2 records stay in my mind). Since then, it's been a never ending cycle of being amazed at the new ground he breaks & being frustrated because he won't do another album like S/A. Tough it out, fans, he never promised us it would be easy. Having read other reviews before downloading, I knew not to expect a lot of personal details...which is fine with me. All the gossip & innuendo are available elsewhere; I wanted to see what makes this man tick as an artist & producer, & this is probably the best we can hope for. It's almost always a good thing when you come to the last page & wish there were more.

Kudos to author Paul Myers for his incisive and informative new work, "A Wizard, A True Star," which, as the subtitle indicates, focuses primarily on Rundgren's production career. This is no

techno-garbled, casual-fans-not-apply book, however: interspersed within the production stories (all fascinating and non-technical) are biographical snippets which will come as revelations to fans. As a 30-year follower myself, I discovered facts about Rundgren which I had not known up until reading this book. Myers' style is succinct and to the point which makes for a quick and entertaining read. Moreover, the book is esthetically well-made with quality binding and excellent photographs prefacing the text which, again, are new to me as a bona fide Rundgren fanatic and will be welcome viewing to all TR fans. My only complaint---and it is a minor one---is the speed with which Myers seems to close the book: the last few years of Rundgren's career are dashed off rapidly with little emphasis put on his production efforts with Jill Sobule, Splender, 12 Rods and Bad Religion or his own solo works. Also noticeably absent is any reference to the aborted TR-produced project by Julie Christensen. These are small quibbles, however. The coverage of more well-known TR productions (Meat Loaf, Badfinger, Psychedelic Furs, Grand Funk, Patti Smith) are well worth the price of the book alone. "A Wizard, A True Star" is quite excellent and informative. If you are a Todd Rundgren fan---or a rock music buff---this work belongs in your collection.

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