

Book? Cover? Judge?

Contributed by Steve Walsh
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As it will become clear shortly, there's an apparent grand design beginning to creep into these columns in so far as I find myself once again plundering last months effort for at least the starting point of this one. This may appear to be part of some elaborately thought out, post-post modern strategy that works itself out as some kind of thematic loop that eventually resolves itself sometime in 2015 with the revelation that it was all, like, connected, man, y'know? Or that it was all some master plan to provide the basis for my first book. No. Up to now this has quite definitely been a strategy based on expediency and desperation. Put simply, the internal monologue goes something like this - "Oh chuff, here's the deadline.....again! What am I going to write about? I haven't got anything to write about! Oh, bugger. What did I write about last time.....er.....er, OK, I'll use that". Although, if this does actually turn out to be a proper strategy that does eventually form the basis of a book that sells several million copies, then of course it was deliberate all along! I'll just have to make sure this intro is excised from the record, of course.

So, anyway, the "that" for this month is my ever increasing pile of unread books that I alluded to in passing last month.

There are two significant things to note here; one, I have not bought any new books since I wrote my last column, and I have also finished one that has been lying around for at least a year! Huzzah! This represents not only a halting in the relentless growth of the pile, but an actual reduction in its volume. Which is a step in the right direction by anyone's estimation. The book in question was Re-make/Re-model, Michael Bracewell's eye-opening account of the social, cultural and artistic trends in Britain in the 1950's and 60's that fed into the making of Roxy Music, one of the key bands of post-war popular music. I was so intrigued by the book that I bought the hardback edition as soon as it came out (although it was on offer as I recall). I've always been totally overawed by the strange, otherworldliness of the first two Roxy Music albums and equally perplexed by the steady decline into abject commercial mediocrity that set in almost as soon as 'For Your Pleasure's coda of 'Tara's' had faded to nothingness. Apart from introducing me to some hitherto unknown figures and aspects of the 60's British art scene, the book expertly explains just why the first two albums were so strange and wonderful and at the same time why the roots of the bands decline were almost cruelly hardwired into its very beginnings. The oddest thing about the book, though, is that its narrative stops just as the band are about to be catapulted into fame and fortune. In other words, the point at which most band biographies actually start.

I would recommend the book wholeheartedly. Although beware the paperback edition, just published. This is actually called Roxy - The Band That Invented an Era and when I first saw it I thought it was actually the sequel to Re-make/Re-model, so heavily does its cover and remodeled title present the band as the object of its study. The thing that startled me most, though, and here we arrive at the true point of this column, is the insight the radically different cover design gives into publishers views on the different markets hardback and paperback editions are aimed at. The hardback market, apparently, have no problem with a title that cleverly references a key Roxy song while presenting an ever so slightly "versioned" image of the still iconic photo of model Kari-Ann reclining, pouting from the first album cover. Paperback buyers, evidently, need to be led by the nose, although in this case down the wrong road. A more accurate alternative title would have been Roxy - The Era That Invented the Band, but I guess, in the mind of the publisher, this would have been far too ambiguous for the market demographic to cope with.

Steve Walsh

Re-make/Re-model Becoming Roxy Music by Michael Bracewell is published by Da Capo Press Inc.