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Rod: The Autobiography

ROD | THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
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Synopsis

Rod Stewart was born the working class son of a Scottish plumber in north London. Despite some early close shaves with a number of diverse career paths ranging from gravedigging to professional soccer, it was music that truly captured his heart - and he never looked back. Rod started out in the early 1960s playing the clubs on London's R&B scene before his distinctively raspy voice caught the ear of the iconic front man Long John Baldry, who approached him while he was busking one night on a railway platform. Stints with pioneering acts like the Hoochie Coochie Men, Steampacket, and the Jeff Beck Group soon followed, paving the way into a raucous five years with the Faces, the rock star's rock band, whose onstage and offstage antics with alcohol, wrecked hotel rooms, partying, and groupies have become the stuff of legend. And during all this, he found a spare moment to write "Maggie May", among a few other tunes, and launch a solo career that has seen him sell in excess of 200 million records, be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame twice, and play the world's largest-ever concert. Not bad, as he says, for a guy with a frog in his throat. And then there is his not-so-private life: marriages, divorces, and affairs with some of the world's most beautiful women - Bond girls, movie stars, and supermodels - a struggle with steroids, and a brush with cancer, in which he almost saw it all slip away. Rod's is an incredible life, and here - thrillingly and for the first time - he tells the entire thing, leaving no knickers under the bed. A rollicking rock 'n' roll adventure that is at times deeply moving, this is the remarkable journey of a guy with one hell of a voice - and one hell of a head of hair.

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Customer Reviews

Way back in the 1970's, I saw Rod Stewart acting like a petulant prima donna on a British TV program, and for a long time thereafter had him pegged as an immature twit, albeit one with a great voice. As someone who went to university in London in the mid-70's and saw just about every rock band that was worth seeing - plus a fair number who weren't - I was never a great Rod Stewart fan. I liked some of his songs - I would have absolutely killed to see the Faces play "Stay With Me" in concert - and appreciated his unique voice, but I never jumped wholeheartedly onto the Stewart bandwagon. All of which somehow makes this autobiography all the more of a delightful surprise. It's lightly written, funny and informative. It's also charmingly self-deprecating; here is the voice of a former Bad Boy of Rock and Roll, all grown up and now looking back with the balance and wisdom of his later years. The book is full of good behind-the-scenes stories that tell of bands, songs and relationships. We learn of Stewart's humble origins, his unsteady progress as a singer and harmonica player (he notes wryly that he was playing the latter badly for a year before someone pointed out that you could actually play the instrument by sucking as well as blowing into it), and the ups and downs of various bands and albums before fame and commercial success finally sunk their hooks into him for good. This happened in part because of his classic song Maggie May, which Stewart almost discarded from the Every Picture Tells A Story album because he didn't think much of it: "When the Beatles finished 'Please Please Me', George Martin allegedly clicked on the talkback and said, 'Congratulations, boys, you've just recorded your first number one.' What would I have said had I spoken to the studio after finishing Maggie May? Probably, 'Well, that's sort of OK, I suppose. Drink, anyone?'" Originally released as the B side of a single, Maggie May was played widely by radio DJs in the States, and then in Britain, and this finally catapulted both the song and the album to number 1 at the same time in both countries (a feat which, Stewart notes, not even Elvis or the Beatles had managed). Stewart avoids the temptation to use his autobiography to settle scores, and usually describes conflicts tactfully, despite telling us that, "as everyone in the business of rock'n'roll knows, the rule is as follows: in bands, there's always one c**t who no one gets on with." (won't allow the c word to be printed, even though it's a quote from the book). That he was a horrible and terminally unfaithful partner to his various wives and girlfriends he openly admits. The caricatured life of a star - literally sex, drugs and rock and roll - was too good to pass up, and Stewart indulged unceasingly and head first. At one point he confesses to spending a week in a prime hotel suite in the south of France, literally flying in one girl after another (his manager would drop off one girl at the airport and then head over to Arrivals to pick up the next to arrive). And on the positive side, we get some great stories about his closest friends in the business; the tales of his

long relationship with Elton John, including their constant practical jokes and one-upmanship, are particularly amusing. Not to mention the so-called Sex Police: members of the band who tried their best to stop any other band member from having sex with whatever groupie he'd brought back to the hotel after a concert. In one case, this involved removing every last piece of furniture from a musician's hotel suite and replacing it with live chickens. The afflicted band member duly returned and, acting as if nothing was amiss, proceeded to enjoy his girl anyway... as Stewart notes, the important thing was not to give your friends the satisfaction of seeing you inconvenienced or annoyed. Along the way, we get amusing digressions on various topics ranging from his love of cars to Rod Stewart impersonators to the staggering amount of work involved in creating his hairdo... all of this related in a tone that makes it clear he never takes himself too seriously. Viewed superficially, Stewart could be written off - as some have done - as a pretty boy with a good voice. But that does him a disservice: it's very clear from this book that a genuine love of great music was there from the beginning, and he has both appreciated and embraced genres that ranged widely from folk to blues to hard-core rock. Indeed, reading this book made me go back and listen to a "Best of" album (I highly recommend *The Definitive Rod Stewart*, a two-CD set that includes most of his best songs); in doing so, I recognized many of these influences, sometimes woven together to give a richer whole. Above it all, of course, is that famous raspy voice which, at its best, reflects Stewart's emotional investment in the lyrics (listen to his heartfelt rendering of Tom Waits' wonderful song *Tom Traubert's Blues*). But overall, you don't have to love the guy to enjoy this book; it's a very entertaining romp through his career, and along the way it provides a highly readable history of the musical era in which he became famous. And Rod Stewart - at least in his maturity - turns out to be a nice guy after all.

I knew Rod Stewart back in the day and the poor old guy, one year older than me, is either suffering from memory loss or choosing to forget. I was not a groupie. I worked for these bands. I have the photos/negatives to prove it. Let's take the Shotgun Express, whom I watched from the side of the stage in England, 1967, as I was friend of Peter Bardens.

Rod's current version is much less of a disaster than the true story but, suffice it to say, Peter and Rod ended up hating each other until the bitter end. Jeff Beck was always nice to me and very gentlemanly. We had lovely long talks in the dressing rooms, mostly about cars. Two things from this period: Rod did not have a driving license (1. He told himself in 1968, 2. It made the papers and magazines when he got it during the summer of 1970) and the last concert was 26 July 1969 at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit, Michigan. They were supposed to play the 25th, as

well, but Jeff cancelled, however he did play the next day. His memories of Ron Wood during the Beck era are very faulty. And, no, I haven't read Ronnie's autobiography, yet. I was surprised that Rod never mentioned Ron's slide guitar. He profusely carried on about "my Ron being the world's greatest slide guitar player." When The Faces played the Eastown Theatre in Detroit, Rod would proudly introduce Ron for his solo and then come down into the crowd to watch Ron from the front. One night he took my camera and walked around taking photos of just Ron. (Rod, also, gave my camera to another girl when he finished, but I promptly went and got it back.) On the next trip, Rod demanded to see the photos of Ron. Every one was blurred and Rod was very angry. In all the parties, I worked for The Faces, there were no drugs of any kind, only alcohol. The first night I was hired, my business partners and I went back to the hotel and there was a party with weed. Rod and I did not smoke. Ron did. There was always alcohol, and for the parties we were in charge of, there was only Boone's Farm Apple Wine with only one complaint from Ian McLagan, who wanted Courvoisier, but he didn't get it. Plus, we had to keep cartons of milk for Rod in the ice-filled bathtub, as he had an ulcer and needed the milk to soothe his stomach after a night of drinking. The rest of the band drank milk, too. Plus a friend just put my over 500 negatives on a DVD and in the onstage photos, Mac was never wearing a flower, nor was there any cocaine use, period. However, this may have started after they began playing the arenas and I was no longer working for them. That would be 1975. Rod makes it sound like this happened from the get-go. I will make one comment here in defense of Rod: The Faces were playing Cobo Hall in Detroit and they were billeted in the Pontchartrain Hotel across the street. Looking out Rod's window the huge marquee read, ROD STEWART AND THE FACES. Rod demanded that it be taken down. Cobo Hall said that it was too much work, the concert was only a few hours away, and it was staying. Rod was stuck looking at it. At another venue in Lansing, Michigan, Rod (and later the rest of the band) was so nice to the university kids working at the Holiday Inn that they ran out and put, WELCOME FROM ENGLAND THE FACES on their sign. (A side note: Jefferson Airplane were headlining the festival and when Grace Slick threw a temper tantrum and said they should be on the sign and the kids refused, they left completely making The Faces the headlining act!) During the Jeff Beck Group days, they were driving themselves across country and to gigs in the U.S., at least. In The Faces, Rod had a room to himself at all times and, even when there was a limo, he would put the groupie-for-the-night in the back, close the door, and march over to us for his ride. Even to the airport, we got stuck with the world's worst backseat driver (although he sat in the

front) and was constantly worried about the speed we were driving. He liked it slow and timed the lights and was on constant lookout for any hazards, especially the possibility of children running into the street. His love of flash cars was never mentioned, although it is possible he was driving in England. Jeff said he, himself, often used his middle name, which was his father's name, when getting tickets, so he would only have half as many speeding tickets. Poor Mr. Arnold Beck! And you did NOT want to see Ron Wood driving, although Rod felt fine letting him drive. The only Rod woman I met, besides the groupies, was Britt Ekland. She told me Rod was sleeping and couldn't see anyone. I had things to give him and a paper to sign. I went back later and she told me the same. When she left, Ron Wood was the happiest camper in the world and hugged Rod to bits, and Rod yelled at me for not bringing the stuff earlier and defended Britt, saying she wouldn't have done that. It happens with bands, you deal with it. Rod was very tight with money. He would have me run down to the store for various toiletries and tell me to get a receipt. If the total was \$19.99, he would go to Billy Gaff or one of the lads and borrow the money to the penny. Never a twenty and keep the change. (Britt did write of the same thing happening to her in True Britt, how Rod didn't carry a wallet and she had to pay for everything when they were out, however, he always paid her back, to the penny.) The band did, indeed, get paid cash for all the gigs in the early days. Reason? Checks bounced! Get your money after the ticket sales! Gaff would have to put the money in the hotel/motel safe until the next day when he could get to the bank. Oh, and in Detroit, my business partners and I invented the ledge walk to scare the daylights out of Ron Wood. It worked! Rod nickered to it and told us to stop it! And, in those days, Peter Buckland was great fun, but not insane. Plus cake icing, when artfully added with a plastic knife, greatly enhances flowers on paintings. And, although I saw many a little man peeking over and out of things in a Kilroy Was Here manner, I never saw a penis, so this must also have started during the arena tours in 1975. After early 1975, I lost permanent touch with Rod, so the rest of the book proved interesting, but taken with a grain of salt by me. I will say that Rod's rules of raising children did, indeed, reflect his life of the road. Many a time I had to use the combo of first and middle name to get a naughty person's attention and adapt the art of smacking the back of hands to stop them from, as an example, throwing rolls at each other in restaurants. The mom's approach worked with all the bands as, on the road, they are a bunch of little boys. So, if you find Rod's rules a bit appalling (the bucket can also fall with the water and do a head injury), it was just that Rod was never a man, he will always be a boy.

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