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David Bowie's Low (33 1/3 Series)



Synopsis

Low is a kaleidoscope in which Bowie's obsessions and traits explode into fragments and reform in a new pattern. Sonically, it is hugely adventurous: combining a driving R&B rhythm section with the experimental soundscapes of Brian Eno, it evolves a whole new musical language. Thematically, it's the sound of a man struggling to get well. Bowie has often talked about his fear of insanity. Despite - or because of - this, he drugged himself into a state that looked very much like schizophrenia, and then recorded an album that structurally reflected the illness.

Hugo Wilcken is Paris-based, Australian-born writer and translator. His first novel, *The Execution*, was published to critical acclaim by HarperCollins in 2002. His next, *Colony*, was published in 2006.

33 1/3 is a new series of short books about critically acclaimed and much-loved albums of the last 40 years. Focusing on one album rather than an artist's entire output, the books dispense with the standard biographical background that fans know already, and cut to the heart of the music on each album. The authors provide fresh, original perspectives - often through their access to and relationships with the key figures involved in the recording of these albums. By turns obsessive, passionate, creative, and informed, the books in this series demonstrate many different ways of writing about music. (A task which can be, as Elvis Costello famously observed, as tricky as dancing about architecture.) What binds this series together, and what brings it to life, is that all of the authors - musicians, scholars, and writers - are deeply in love with the album they have chosen. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Low" is by far my favorite David Bowie album, and maybe my favorite album of all-time. Wilcken's book is short, but packs more of a punch than many (actually all) of the larger volumes about this specific period in the mercurial musician's development. This book is jam-packed with info about Bowie's descent into cocaine-fueled madness during his "Thin White Duke" period, on into his miraculous recovery and redefinition of himself and his sound in Berlin. There is a lot of good technical info about how Tony Visconti achieved those beautifully distorted drum sounds on songs like "Speed of Life" and "Sound and Vision," as well as some choice nuggets about minimalist maestro Brian Eno. The writing is rich without being too self-indulgent, which is always a risk with music journalism (see Lester Bangs). Highest recommendation.

There are a few things I'd expect from a book like this: a description of the way the album was made, detailed but not concerned with trivia; analysis of the music itself, detailed but not overblown; biography of the artist, at least enough to understand where the album came from. This book has all of that. It's difficult for an entire book about a single album to be intriguing from start to finish, but this mostly manages. Highlights included: a solid description of just where Bowie was, mentally, when he made the album (a description which does a lot to explain the album's unique mood). Explanation of the album's influences, with focus on acts like Kraftwerk and Neu!, as well as the ways the album connects to its predecessor, Station to Station. And track-by-track analysis which actually feels justified: not drawn-out or unnecessary (although not of much interest to anyone but the committed fan), but not clipped or peremptory. It's a book-length analysis of a brilliant album. If you're a hardcore David Bowie fan, a lot of it is already familiar to you; if you love the album but don't know anything about its history, it's a must-read. There's nothing "ambitious" about the book--it's no more or less than the story of Low--but it does its job well.

This is a smart little book about David Bowie's album Low, which is one of his finest and strangest records (recently winning an online poll among Bowie fans ranking Bowie's best albums). In a hundred-odd pocket-sized pages, Hugo Wilcken covers the recording of the album in appropriate detail and takes the time to talk about each individual song. He also explores the lead-up to Low, starting with Bowie's previous album, Station to Station, as well as the Iggy Pop album The Idiot, which Bowie produced and co-wrote (and first experimented with some of the sounds used on Low). For such a small book, there's a wealth of information in these pages, and Wilcken writes it all in a clear, easy-to-follow style. Highly recommended. And if you like this one, other books in the 33 1/3

series I've read and recommend are: Geeta Dayal's book on Brian Eno's Another Green World
Brian Eno's Another Green World (3 1/3 series)
Jonathan Lethem's book on Talking Heads' Fear of Music
Talking Heads' Fear of Music (3 1/3)
Mark Polizzotti's book on Bob Dylan's Highway 61 Revisited
Bob Dylan's Highway 61 Revisited (3 1/3)

I completely recommend this book along with the "Pushing Ahead of The Dame" blog if you want to know more about Bowie and arguably the finest and most significant of all his albums. It's a light but engaging read that can be done with in an afternoon and that's part of my only complaint really, I wish it was still more explicit about the working process and credits but it does pretty much covers everything.

Excellent look at both the making and meaning of Bowie's Low album, but also a peek at the significance of the record in predicting the future of rock music. Well-written and well-worth reading for a fan of Bowie or of rock history in general.

This book will stir you up and get you excited about the artistic creative process. It reads like a novel and there is not a boring moment in the book. Outstanding. Check out Brian Eno's new album Lux as a companion to reading this book. Along with Low of course. Both masterpieces.

This is perhaps the finest, most detailed analysis of Bowie's work I've ever read, and I earnestly entreat the author to consider taking on the remainder of the Berlin trilogy albums. In spite of the minor error or three (that's Walter Tevis who wrote The Man Who Fell To Earth, not Travis), this book answers so many questions I've always wanted to ask about "Low"-- which is saying a lot, as this has remained one of the most important albums of all time to my own musical work. Great stuff!

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