



The Prettiest Star

Nina Antonia

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The biographer of Johnny Thunders, New York Dolls and Peter Perrett turns her attention to the heyday of glam rock. As a timid teenager, Antonia weaves her childhood memories of growing up as a glam-obsessed girl in Liverpool, to the time she actually got to meet her idols?Iggy, Thunders et al. A provocative girl's eye view of the boys in make-up.

The Prettiest Star Details

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Nigeyb says

This book was recommended to me by Mark, after we discovered a shared love of (amongst other things) Glam Rock. I was vaguely aware of Brett Smiley because one of his songs, the wonderful "Va Va Va Voom" appears on the equally wonderful compilation album "Velvet Tinmine".

What I did not realise was that Brett had also inspired this book, and that an album he recorded around the same time as "Va Va Va Voom" also finally saw the light of day in 2004 - the same year this book was published.

This is the first book I've read by Nina Antonia, despite being interested in the subjects of her other books (Johnny Thunders, Pete Perrett, and the New York Dolls), and I enjoyed her personal style. She puts herself firmly in the narrative, so much so that it is as much about her own life as Brett Smiley's life. Both stories are compelling.

Brett's brief flirtation with fame started as a child actor in a stage production of "Oliver!". Later, as an 18 year old, he was discovered by Andrew Loog Oldham, which finally resulted in the release of the "Va Va Va Voom" single in the UK. As part of the publicity for the record, Brett appeared on the Russell Harty Show. This can be viewed on YouTube and is well worth watching if anything I have written sounds interesting.

The single did not chart and that was the end of Brett's chances of achieving the fame he assumed was an inevitability. One person who never forgot Brett, or that appearance on Russell Harty, was Nina Antonia. His appearance had a profound effect on her.

Nina's own early life was not easy, and talismanic figures like Brett Smiley helped her to cope. I really enjoyed this interesting and well written book. A lot happens to both Brett and Nina, and both finally attain some hard earned insights and wisdom.

For fans of Glam Rock, Brett's 1970's Glam album "Breathlessly Brett" is wonderful and well worth acquiring. The reissued CD is now very expensive however the album can be downloaded for a far more reasonable price.

Tosh says

Well I finally purchased this rock bio, and it is actually an excellent book. First of all "The Prettiest Star" is both a biography on forgotten glam figure Brett Smiley, but also a memoir by the author. What ties the book together is Nina Antonia's puppy love for Smiley in the early 70's. She was one of the few who saw his appearance on British Tv (now on YouTube, watch it!) and fell in love of sorts with his image when she was 14 or 13 years old.

But Nina had a difficult teenage life, partly goth, but mostly in love with the New York Dolls. In ways, it reminds one of Morrissey and his passion for the Dolls. The Dolls were big for people who felt outside of the mainstream. And Nina and Morrissey (I wonder if they are friends?) fit that role perfectly.

Brett Smiley also had a very difficult life as well. Drugs, drinking, disappointment, and a glam rock album that was recorded in the early 70's and produced by Andrew Loog Oldham, but never came out till two years ago. So he was truly a forgotten glam figure.

But alas, this is what makes the story so emotional and kind of beautiful in a damaged way. Brett's "Space Ace" is a great pop record. Really unique listening experience due that it is dated, but still a powerful kicker of a tune.

Also in the book you get a good look into the life of Johnny Thunders, for whom Atonia wrote a biography on. And basically this is all a good snapshot of the early 70's from the bottom up.

While goofing off on YouTube I found this great footage of The Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham and at the time his new artist: Brett Smiley. Oldham managed and produced his one and only album which was never released called "Breathlessly Brett." About four years the finally realeased this 30 year old album and it's great. Very uber-glam and it sort of reminds me of that other lost 'glam' artist Jobrieth.

Nina Antonia who specializes in writing bios on the lost boys of rock n' roll (Johnny Thunders and Peter Perrett) also wrote a bio on Brett. I can't wait to get my hands on this book. Check Brett on YouTube. A new obsession got a hold on me.

yvonne says

For anyone who might be interested in the overlooked world of 70's glam, this book is a must have. This author has also written books about Peter Perrett, Johnny Thunders, New York Dolls, and Iggy Pop. Needless to say, I'm a fan of most of her books.

I'll give this book a proper review later.
I just wanted to get it on my list.

Andy says

In the early Seventies there was this ad that ran every issue in Rolling Stone Magazine, way back in the Classified Ads Section. It was a photo of a cocky kid in aviator sunglasses looking jaded and stoned with the caption above him reading, "Jay Gatsby is the most wasted boy alive". This thing must have run every issue for a whole year. Nothing really became of him.

Several years later at Rodney's English Disco I used to see silver stickers of a glam boy with severe Garbo cheekbones making orgasm face with the name "Brett Smiley" on them. Again, nothing really became of that, either. The word was that he was Elvis, Garbo, and James Dean all rolled in one, but alas, no music or career to back up the hype. The glam period was like that, littered with hype monsters that never amounted to much: Chuckie Star, Cherry Vanilla, etc.

"The Prettiest Star" captures that period when all you need was hype and not much talent. Brett Smiley at best was a boy Lolita who wrote a few good songs that were brilliantly produced by Andrew Loog Oldham. Nina Antonia has done a wonderful job of capturing the decadence and sleaze that made the Seventies horrifying to those who are unlucky to remember it.

After I read this book I wanted to watch "Andy Warhol's Trash" because it seemed like the perfect companion piece. The book, of course, doesn't really have a happy ending: a quick scan at Smiley's MySpace page shows a drug burn-out who obsessively posts blogs condemning the State of Israel to the point of dementia. His YouTube videos show him playing lackluster guitar in a club playing to an audience walking out on him. As John Mendelsohn once said, "Hollywood can be cruel".
