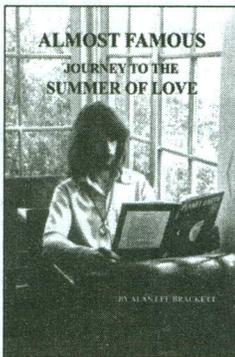




ALMOST FAMOUS: JOURNEY TO THE SUMMER OF LOVE by Alan Lee Brackett (One For the Road, US; 2017; 195 pages)

Alan Brackett's "Journey to the Summer of Love" took him from teenage hootenannies to the US Marine Corps to the lysergic liquid lightshow hallucinations of the Peanut Butter Conspiracy. His self-published memoir is a sharp-eyed, clear-headed, candid chronicle from someone who was right there on the front lines of the revolution, from the first snare crack of '50s rock 'n' roll, through the folk music boom, electric folk-rock innovation, and the earth-shaking tremors of the West Coast psychedelic experience.



Born in Los Angeles in 1944, Brackett grew up in idyllic Santa Barbara where he developed an aptitude for creativity and entrepreneurship. As children, he and his older brother Roy started their own radio station, KBRA, which transmitted for a distance of a few hundred yards, and attracted a small listenership among their elderly neighbors. The station even had an in-house newspaper, which they produced on their own hand-cranked mimeograph machine. "For our radio station broadcasts, Roy created 'The Alan Brackett Show' live from the Brackett Auditorium (our bedroom) and wrote the scripts I would have to read and act out with him," he writes. "He would make me sing songs a cappella on my show. That got me used to being 'on' at a very young age."

Brackett started his first band, the Rockets, in the late 1950s when he was in junior high, at first playing drums and then piano. An adept drummer, the teenage Brackett even backed Jan & Dean at a local concert. He also began honing his harmony skills singing in a doo-wop group, and by high school had begun writing his own songs. By the early '60s he'd been swept up by the folk music movement, and toured across the country with his group, the Hillside Singers, playing everywhere from coffeehouses to Carnegie Hall. Their adventures on the road are memorably recounted here, as is Brackett's

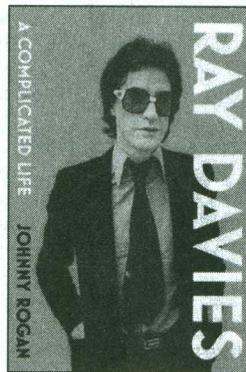
stint in the US Marine Corps, which began in 1964.

After his initial six-month stretch as a Marine, Brackett relocated to Los Angeles where he teamed up with John Merrill, took up the bass, and formed the Young Swingers, who then became the Beau Jacks (sometimes Beau-jax), playing primarily British Invasion material. After adding singer Barbara Robison and drummer Spencer Dryden in 1965, they made their final transition to folk-rock as the Ashes. The Ashes scattered after Dryden was lured away to replace Skip Spence in the Jefferson Airplane, but Brackett, Merrill and Robison eventually reconfigured, recruiting lead guitarist Lance Fent and drummer Jim Voigt to form the Peanut Butter Conspiracy. Their three-year run, through the Summer of Love and up until the end of the decade takes up the final section of the book. Their songwriting, recording, and touring experiences are well-described here, along with their interactions with other artists, including Robbie "The Werewolf" Robison, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Frank Zappa, Jimi Hendrix, and even Elvis Presley, who Alan spent some time with in 1969 ("I actually sat down at the piano with him and we sang oldies but goodies together").

Almost Famous: Journey to the Summer of Love delivers on every level. The writing is solid and entertaining, rich in period detail, and refreshing free of either bitterness or self-aggrandizement—a rare quality in any autobiographical work. Brackett was one of the few who was able to not only live *through* the sixties, but to live every moment of it to the fullest, and emerge from the experience not only unscarred, but as a wiser and more complete human being. We're fortunate that's he's shared his story with us. (MS)

RAY DAVIES: A COMPLICATED LIFE by Johnny Rogan (The Bodley Head, London, 2015; 756 pages)

Although this book came out nearly two years ago, I didn't finish reading it until earlier this year. This book almost got by me in that it came out with no real hype or press and I actually got my copy as a surprise Christmas present, otherwise I may not have been aware of it, at least for a spell. I am assuming this happened with other people as well. "Another Ray Davies book?" was my initial reaction when I first paged through it and glanced upon the rather drab '80s new wave-looking cover. If you have all the other numerous Kinks books that have been issued over the years (like I do) you might think twice before buying it, but after soaking in the 634 in-depth pages (756 pages counting the credits, bibliography et al, it takes awhile to get through, seriously) it is



definitely one to have—in fact, it's possibly the best book ever written about Ray Davies. Unlike Jon Savage's excellent *Official Kinks Biography* (released in 1984) which has an instant visual appeal, glossy pages, scrapbook-style photo layout that accompanies the story line, easy reading, this looks and reads like a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica. I recommend the hardcover edition as the paperback looks like a brick and the minimal sliver of black & white glossy photo pages quickly comes unglued after two reads.

Although Ray has personally done two separate autobiographies (1994's abstract *X-Ray*, which was oddly written in the third person, and 2013's chronically challenged and difficult to read *Americana*) this book is essential in that it bares all. Anyone who is familiar with any of Rogan's work knows how in-depth and well researched his books are, and that is clearly the case here. Whereas Ray keeps up his guard to a degree in his own bios, Rogan, obviously a fan, is not biased in his writing and takes a full swing at reality, no candy coloring, just the facts. No stone is left unturned with Ray's personal background, which includes his many stormy marriages and relationships as well as his dysfunctional relationships with his children. Rogan's detailed storyline and varied comments and interviews with those who were a part of Ray's world paint the picture of him as a sensitive and somewhat fragile personality with an alternate side unseen by most, as an uncaring, domineering control freak who stomps on those who work for and with him or who are closely related to him, most notably his brother Dave. Most UT readers may be familiar with the excellent FX television series *Feud* (first outing was Bette Davis vs Joan Crawford, more 'Feuds' to come as the series progresses) Rogan's book could serve well as the script for such a series concerning Ray and Dave Davies. You also find yourself feeling sorry for poor long-time member/drummer Mick Avory as he always ends up in the midst of the Ray vs Dave tug-of-war and the target of both of their unwarranted wrath. It makes you wonder why he stayed with them for so long.

Alas, fear not, the book isn't all depressingly serious gloom and doom. It provides a lot of insight on how Ray came up with some of his most memorable songs, and how he managed to stay sane through the most turbulent times in the Kinks' career. A must read. (Greg Prevost)

THE KINKS: A THOROUGHLY ENGLISH PHENOMENON by Carey Fleiner (Rowman & Littlefield, US; 2017; 217 pages)

The esteemed founder of this publication has commented that Kinks fans are rather smart people, which is kind of him to say. A *Thoroughly English Phenomenon* is by Carey Fleiner, a senior lecturer in classical studies and early medieval history at the University of Winchester (UK), which qualifies her as being a rather Smart Person indeed. She did mention my name in the foreword as one of the participants in a survey of Kinks fans she made via a Kinks website in preparation of writing this