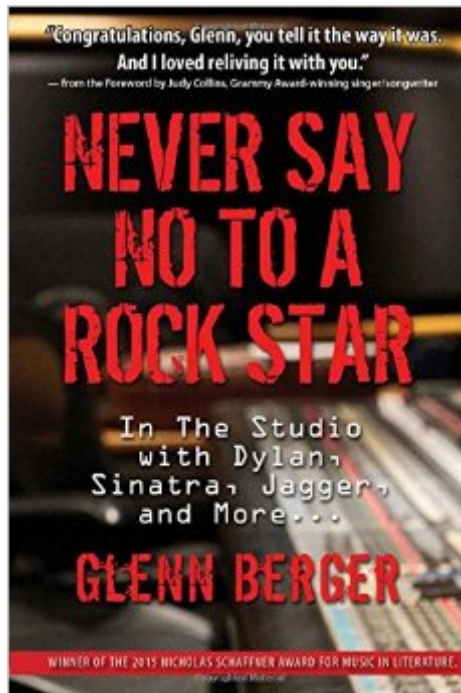


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Never Say No To A Rock Star: In The Studio With Dylan, Sinatra, Jagger And More...



Synopsis

In 1974, at the age of seventeen, author Glenn Berger served as a "schlepper" and apprentice to the legendary recording engineer Phil Ramone at New York City's A&R Studios, and was witness to music history on an almost daily and nightly basis as pop and rock icons such as Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger, Frank Sinatra, Burt Bacharach, Bette Midler, and James Brown performed their hit-making magic, honed their sound, strutted their stuff, bared their souls, and threw epic tantrums. In this memoir, full of revelatory and previously unknown anecdotal observations of these musical giants, Glenn recounts how he quickly learned the ropes to move up from schlepperhood to assistant to the tyrannical Ramone, and eventually, to become a recording engineer superstar himself. Not only is *Never Say No to A Rock Star* a fascinating, hilarious and poignant behind-the-scenes look of this musical Mecca, but Berger, now a prominent psychologist, looking back through the prism of his youthful experience and his years working as a counselor and therapist, provides a telling and honest examination of the nature of fame and success and the corollaries between creativity, madness and self-destruction.

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Customer Reviews

Author Glenn Berger is now a psychotherapist, but when a patient plays him a song it transports him back to 1972 when he was just seventeen and starting out as an intern at the famous A&R Recording Studios on 52nd Street, New York. Berger was all too aware that his father felt he had achieved little in his life and was determined to be a success. He imagined glamour and glitz and found shabby decor and a studio located six floors above a Community College packed with

studentsâ He also found a working environment packed with characters whose lives were committed to making music â and making the artists who provided the raw material happy. Berger was quickly told that there were only two rules in his new job. Rule number one was to be virtually invisible and keep his mouth shut. Rule number two was never to say no. The only right answer to any request was âyes.â On the first day he was asked if he wanted a share of cocaine being passed around. Remembering instructions, of course he said, âyes,â and was thus initiated into the strange life of a recording studio. Although Berger spent ages in the bowels of the building, working in the tape library and then trudging through the dangerous streets of a near bankrupt city, transporting those tapes between buildings, he always dreamt of a life in the recording studio. His chance eventually comes when the volatile genius Phil Ramone, a legendary recording engineer, plucks him from obscurity when he has just turned eighteen as his assistant. So unfolds the stories that Glenn has to offer. His time working with Paul Simon, whose âliveâ album is not quite as âliveâ as Glenn imagines. Simon it seems was (at that time at least) dour, taciturn, insensitive and generally difficult.

I was privileged to have received an advance copy of this book via NetGalley in return for my fair and honest review. The synopsis of this book lured me in with its promise of inside recording studio dish from the 70's, the era I also grew up in. It reminded me of the excellent book "The Longest Cocktail Party" about The Beatles' Apple business entity, written by the "House Hippie" turned apprentice Beatles' Press Officer Richard DiLello. Much like DiLello, at the tender age of 17 Glenn Berger found himself surrounded by titans in the music industry with the opportunity to learn and succeed on his own. At the present time Mr. Berger is a psychotherapist, married and adoptive father of two. As the book begins, we find him with said children feeling the nostalgic pull of the reel to reel tape machine in the attic. Locating some tapes of outtakes purloined from A&R Studios' library, Mr. Berger launches the long-silenced machine and here begins the recounting of his earlier career as a "schlepper," assistant engineer, and later engineer and producer. It all began in NYC in the 70's at A&R Studios under the auspices of legendary producer Phil Ramone. Mr. Berger's technical details of studio setups with equipment such as microphone placement, headphones, the soundboard and tape decks were both fascinating and oftentimes went over my head, but I appreciated his efforts in describing his craft. His writing style is excellent: free-flowing and lovingly descriptive. It was a pleasure to read. The thrill and wonder of his encounters with musical icons such as Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger and Frank Sinatra were something to be shared vicariously with Glenn as he puts you right there with him in the studio.

Part of me wanted to give this one star but it is well written and has some interesting stories and details about the 70s in rock music so to be fair I gave it three. But I stopped reading early and doubt I'll finish the book. I was willing to believe that Paul Simon was "cold" and that Berger's bosses mistreated and abused him, but he lost me in the Dylan chapter. Berger, who was an 18 year old rookie and knowing basically nothing, felt qualified to judge the way Bob Dylan interacted with the studio musicians, and the way he recorded, which newcomer Berger called "sloppy." Then at the end of the three day sessions when Dylan unexpectedly turned to the guys in the control room and said sarcastically, "was that sincere enough?" Berger reacted as if the world had ended. He had vertigo. He wanted to puke. He compares Dylan to a psychopath and concludes he was a phony, "totally full of sh*t." Then he says he was so disillusioned by Dylan's comment that he would spend the next twenty years of his life lost on a "dark journey!" How ridiculous to blame Bob Dylan for twenty years of his life. How melodramatic. I can't see that Berger has the good judgment I'd expect from a psychotherapist, which apparently he is today. I don't know why Dylan made a sarcastic comment and neither does the author, but he really should get over himself. It could have meant anything. He then goes on to knock Dylan for "panicking" and re-recording some of the tracks elsewhere, tracks that Berger calls "bouncy little jingles." He does admit later that Blood On The Tracks is regarded as one of the best rock albums ever made and confesses that he himself has often been a "major jerk" and has "never made anything immortal like these guys.

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