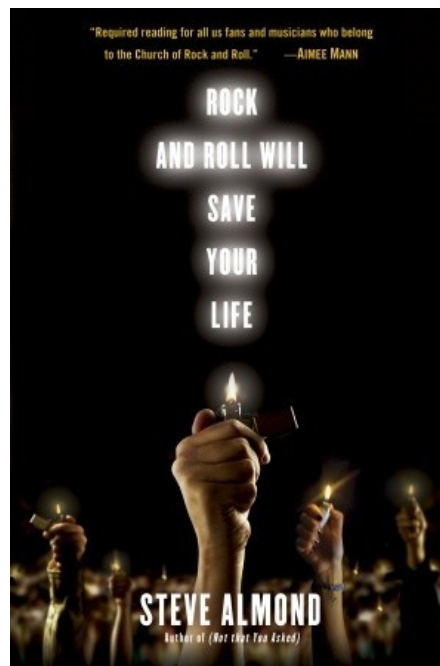




## Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life: A Book by and for the Fanatics Among Us

*Steve Almond*

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# Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life: A Book by and for the Fanatics Among Us

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## **Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life: A Book by and for the Fanatics Among Us** Steve Almond

Drooling fanatic, n. 1. One who drools in the presence of beloved rock stars. 2. Any of a genus of rock-and-roll wannabes/geeks who walk around with songs constantly ringing in their ears, own more than 3,000 albums, and fall in love with at least one record per week.

With a life that's spanned the phonographic era and the digital age, Steve Almond lives to Rawk. Like you, he's secretly longed to live the life of a rock star, complete with insane talent, famous friends, and hotel rooms to be trashed. Also like you, he's content (sort of) to live the life of a rabid fan, one who has converted his unrequited desires into a (sort of) noble obsession.

**Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life** traces Almond's passion from his earliest (and most wretched) rock criticism to his eventual discovery of a music-crazed soul mate and their subsequent production of two little superfans. Along the way, Almond reflects on the delusional power of songs, the awkward mating habits of drooling fanatics, and why Depression Songs actually make us feel so much better. The book also includes:

- sometimes drunken interviews with America's finest songwriters
- a recap of the author's terrifying visit to Graceland while stoned
- a vigorous and credibility-shattering endorsement of Styx's Paradise Theater
- recommendations you will often choose to ignore
- a reluctant exegesis of the Toto song "Africa"
- obnoxious lists sure to piss off rock critics

But wait, there's more. Readers will also be able to listen to a special free mix designed by the author, available online at [www.stevenalmond.com](http://www.stevenalmond.com), for the express purpose of eliciting your drool. For those about to rock—we salute you!

## **Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life: A Book by and for the Fanatics Among Us Details**

Date : Published April 13th 2010 by Random House (first published January 1st 2010)

ISBN : 9781400066209

Author : Steve Almond

Format : Hardcover 240 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Humor, Writing, Essays, Culture, Pop Culture

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## Among Us Steve Almond

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## From Reader Review Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life: A Book by and for the Fanatics Among Us for online ebook

### Topher says

Wow, this was actually painful. I'm not quite sure who this book is for. My estimation is that it's for people who don't particularly care much about rock and roll or writing. Imagine if the particular part of Chuck Klosterman's brain responsible for his musical taste, pop culture sensibilities, and knack for weaving both into an engaging narrative, was somehow lobotomized. Or, pretend the passion and heartfelt connection to tunes, no matter how (arguably) cheesy, that make Rob Sheffield's books so often touching, was somehow ripped out. That should give you a general feel for Steve Almond's book.

I guess it's not entirely Almond's fault. He grew up in California and then went right to college in Connecticut. So, (music cognizance-wise) he never really had a chance. In general, I don't dislike Almond as a writer; his early collections of short stories are actually quite good. What he's done with "Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life", however, is create something not only bad, but downright dangerous for anyone young enough to be musically impressionable.

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### Chris says

If you're going to use a promise as your title, you'd better deliver. In his sixth book, "Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life: A Book by and for the Fanatics Among Us (With Bitchin' Soundtrack)," Steve Almond presents a memoir wrapped in a collection of observations about music and packaged as a source of salvation. The book is a rock fan bildungsroman in which Almond offers personal anecdotes related to his lifelong love of music. His story is interwoven with some cultural analysis of what it means to be a "Drooling Fanatic" in the face of "That Which We Worship With Irrational and Perhaps Head-Banging Glee." It is the fanaticism itself that is offered as a means to redemption.

As Almond comes of age, he discovers music and then how to make money from it. He describes the life of a nomadic music journalist, moving between cities such as El Paso and Miami, trying to scrape together a living. Almond's stories often revolve around the pure joy that a fan experiences when touched by a song or an artist. His book also includes clever classifications of fandom and various forms of short interjection: gratuitous lists, interludes and the occasional "reluctant exegesis."

The Drooling Fanatic, or DF, is the true audience for this book. DFs will recognize themselves in Almond's definitions and classifications with a mixture of revelation and embarrassment. Yes! I also believe "the only thing wrong with music ... is that you cannot eat it." Yes! I also "spent several thousand dollars to create an ultra convenient digital library with the sound quality of a 1958 transistor radio." But seriously, did you need to bring up the ridiculous name of my DJ spot?

Almond spends a fair amount of time splitting hairs as he outlines the DF "ghettos" and what they are definitively not: Concert queens are not groupies, collectors are not music snobs. Yet after all this taxonomy, he argues that we are all DFs. Astute analysis is sacrificed to a play for a more generic readership. Sweeping generalizations about music's relationship to the culture at large also tend to fail. As early as Page 10, Almond tries to conflate American popular culture, capitalism, consumption and porn in one long, unfocused paragraph.

Almond is much more successful when he focuses on the merry exegesis of songs by the likes of Toto ("Africa") and Air Supply ("All Out of Love"). These are so entertaining that one wishes he'd sprung for

rights to use more lyrics in full. The thing is, Almond can be very funny. It may be snarky to describe an MC Hammer concert as similar to "watching an ad for a delicious soda that makes people want to commit murder," but other observations are sharp: "I can't remember when cassettes displaced vinyl, but it happened quick and mean, like most everything else in the eighties."

This witty commentary is compelling until, in the last several chapters, the book hits a snag; these chapters are a series of idolatries or, as Almond would put it in one case, "man crushes." These tales suffer for two reasons: They are basically all the same story — Almond uses his journalist cred to score a disillusioning interview — and they are all too much about the writer (usually playing the fool) and not enough about the musician. This reclamation project portrays "guys who had twice the talent necessary to be stars, but who remained essentially neglected figures": Nil Lara, Gil Scott-Heron, Ike Reilly, Boris McCutcheon, Bob Schneider and, for good measure, a female, Dayna Kurtz.

Almond admits the gender bias apparent in his profiles, but he does a solid job of including women among his DFs. As he recounts his courtship of his wife and previous romantic disasters, it becomes obvious that for Almond, music and women are inextricably bound, as love objects and song subjects, but also as active partners in the joy of shared music.

Being a DF is a "spiritual condition" — early on, Almond makes a distinction between the DF and the Professional Music Critic, with the critic not focused enough on how the music makes you feel. An added bonus of this book for the DF is the steady stream of mostly unpretentious references to bands and songs from the last 30 years or so. There is a lack of snobbery in the style because, as the author points out, "There is no sin in the realm of taste.... We all have a Styx in our closet."

Perhaps rescuing unashamed pleasure from the guilt bin is how rock and roll will save our lives.

Originally reviewed for the LA Times - April 29, 2010

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### **Hannah Jo Parker says**

Of course I'm giving it 5 stars. It's funny. It's heartfelt. And, it's about rock and roll. Or, more precisely, drooling rock and roll fanatics. Like me!

If you get a chance to see Steve Almond read in person, do it. I saw him at Elliott Bay Books last Friday and he was fabulous. I will be suggesting this book to many library patrons, and buying it for friends, I'm sure.

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### **paula says**

Apparently all my contemporaries are writing right now. I just found out, for example, that Carrie Bradshaw (and, one assumes, Candace Bushnell) is/are just about exactly my age. In her book "The Carrie Diaries," she references Jimmy Carter and the Gremlin.

But Carrie Bradshaw listens to Aztec Two-Step, and right then and there I knew she could never be my friend.

Steve Almond knows what I'm saying here. Steve Almond gave up on a woman after a weekend of bananas sex because she listened to Air Supply on purpose.

I know that Steve Almond is also just exactly my age, because HE references Aztec Camera, whose song "Oblivious" remains one of the most incandescent pop songs I know. It's got that androgynous 80's croon but on top of friendly, jangly guitars - and then you notice the line, "I see you crying and I want to kill your friends" and you start paying a little more attention.\*

And that makes Steve Almond and I the same age because Aztec Camera was not together for terribly long, had one or two little MTV hits, and is one of the VERY few acts of that era who have not regrouped and gone on tour. Presumably, groups like The Jesus and Mary Chain, who were so charming to begin with\*\*, have realized in their maturity that the world NEEDS their music, and they have a DUTY to provide it. One doesn't like to assume that they are back together, rather, because the tattered college students who liked them in 1983 now have the cash to fly to Iceland to see them play.\*\*\*

Steve Almond's new book, in case you had not intuited this, is footnoted and rambling and studded - no, packed - with pithy little insights, analyses, and summations of bands and artists.

"...let me cite Duke Ellington, who once famously declared that 'there are only two kinds of music: good music and bad music. And by bad music I mean specifically the song "(I Bless the Rains Down In) Africa" by Toto.' Ellington died two years before Toto formed as a band, which speaks to his prescience."

But the book isn't about music. No? Whoops now I've pissed you off. No, ok, it's about music. But it's about how music affects us, and by us I mean the kind of repressed kids who have fallen between the generations - boys who weren't supposed to have emotions until times changed and all of a sudden they were expected to. Or girls who grew up on a feminism that couldn't yet incorporate vulnerability.

Steve doesn't oversimplify people in this way - I did that. Steve takes it from the other angle - he has noticed that the people most fanatical about popular music are the ones who have trouble integrating their emotions into their life. He posits that people who slam on the headphones and squeeze their eyes tight to hear every breath of Carolina Chocolate Drops doing "Hit 'Em Up Style" are looking for an intensity that they wish existed but fear to attempt.

Huh. Sounds pretty accurate, if memory serves. I would suggest to our boy Steve that he have a kid, but he's done that. His daughter was two at the time of publication - unless he's seriously emotionally retarded, I suspect that if he had waited a couple years he would not have been able to write this book except as a nostalgia piece. Kids allow one to access one's emotions with some fair expedience. In fact, it's probably the birth of his daughter that allowed him to express the ways that music has fulfilled his needs all these years.

All right, I think I'm done here. I laughed out loud at this book. There are some crystalline memories, some song references that bring me RIGHT THERE alongside him, some entertaining swearing, and - I hate to admit it because ok, emotion-y things still make me itchy - some insights that beat anything I learned in therapy.

Still not completely sold on Bob Schneider though.\*\*\*\*

\*Don't believe me about Aztec Camera? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM3mB6...>

\*\*I "saw" them in Cleveland, behind a veil of chemical smoke so thick that I had to watch the show from a crouch. They played their entire set with their backs to the audience, I guess so that they could see their instruments.

\*\*\*I don't, but my friend Eric did, to see the Flaming Lips whom yes I realize have been together the whole

time but let's face it most people lost track of them between the Vaseline song and "Do You Realize" showing up in a Mitsubishi commercial.

\*\*\*\*Steve's massive mancrush, also the mancrush of my friend Leslie Miller, who may actually BE Steve - they like all the same music, and where Steve wrote a book about candy, she wrote one about cake (the delightful dessert, not the unpleasant band). Although Bob Schneider is ALSO exactly my age, and undeniably attractive, so I guess if we need a new Loudon Wainwright III, Bob could be it, because Rufus kind of isn't.

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## Superstition Review says

"This is what songs do, even dumb pop songs: they remind us that emotions are not an inconvenient and vaguely embarrassing aspect of the human enterprise but its central purpose. They make us feel specific things we might never have felt otherwise."

*Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life* is a book that targets the fanatical love each person has inside them, regardless of whether the love is for music, like Almond's, or for movies, knitting, cooking, or anything really. Tied together with humorous, endearing, and sometimes downright unbelievable anecdotes, Almond paints a picture of a love and passion for something that makes life worth living, or at least a little more exciting.

Everyone has something they are or have been borderline obsessed with during their lifetime, and the book's satirical, self-help format reminds those people that they are not alone in their fanatical love. This novel has the ability to bring together millions of people, all with different lives and loves, based on the fact that they have all *been there*, been *that person* waiting in line for hours hoping to glimpse an idol, spending more money than is probably sane on paraphernalia only other fanatics would understand, and, occasionally, lying to their boss for the chance to interview a rock legend.

Almond assures the reader that being a "Drooling Fanatic" is not necessarily bad, despite what family and friends might think, and it can make for some pretty amazing experiences. His stories, tips, and lessons covering everything from his years as a music critic, to his thoughts on Toto's "Africa" remind the reader there is no harm in loving something as much as he loves music. Love, after all, keeps life interesting.

By Lindsey Bosak

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## Tina Hamilton says

By now, many of you know that one of my favorite books is "Candy Freak" by Steve Almond (he visits independent candy makers throughout the United States). A must read, especially if you like candy.

This book does not disappoint. Much of Almond's young adulthood and adulthood has revolved around candy and music. He is a self-described "Drooling Fanatic" when it comes to certain bands. He's DJ'd, written for many music mags, gone on the road with bands, and so on. Many of the bands he loves and follows I do not know, but it does not matter. Who hasn't listened over and over again to a favorite album/cd or song and found new meaning each time? A quick read as it is broken in chronological chapters, one in which he meets his future wife (a punk guitar player).

## Peri Dotty says

Bleah.

I wish I'd realized that this was more of a ~memoir. I'd read Almond's *Candy Freak* and enjoyed it enough to seek out his other books. I was expecting something like that. Oops!

Apparently women who like music are all sex-starved groupies and men who like music are the 'true' fans. Taste in music is realized through older brothers and if you don't have one, you're SOL. Only teenage boys can be the genuine arbiters of which sorts of music are "good."

In the few chapters I managed to get through, Almond whinges about both getting laid and not getting laid (mostly this one); how he lied throughout his journalistic career; how musically talentless, lazy schmoes like himself should also somehow be rich and famous. Mmmkay. He lost me at women only pretend to like music because they wanna bang the musicians. Follow that up with some explicit racial slurs and this book went right into the literal recycle bin. Seriously. No one should be subjected to these entitled whinings from a tryhard comic.

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## Jeff says

Given what I do for a living, I should probably dislike this book for no reason other than Almond's early insistence that rock criticism is impossible and useless. I see his point, though I disagree -- but more importantly, the rest of the book is full of funny, touching stories about Almond's life as a so-called Drooling Fanatic, including passionate essays about some of his favorite musicians (many of whom are on my own list).

Bottom line -- if you love music, Steve Almond comes across as the kind of guy you'd love to be friends with. He'll remind you of the joy of discovery, and he might even reignite your passion for great music. I didn't want this book to end.

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## Sarah says

I have never laughed out loud at a book the way I did at this one. It's about music, and growing up, and culture, and writing. And awkwardness and oversharing. Also, it's a bit, well, raunchy.

But so, so funny and true.

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## Malbadeen says

It's hard for me to be objective about this book because I love so much about Steve Almond. For me it's a 5 because everything that I thought maybe didn't exactly work, I forgave due to his fanaticism, which is what the book is about so how do you judge him for that?

Unlike My Life in Heavy Metal (his first and probably forever my favorite book) I wasn't grabbing for an underlining pencil but I was saying a sometimes silent and frequently loud "yes!" to page after page. I was reminiscing and giggling at my own silly moments of being a "drooling fan".

One of my favorite things about Almond is his unapologetic enthusiasm about stuff (candy, music, his kids) I mean he can be morose as hell but he's just as willing to gush about the silly affirming aspects of life.

also, watch this clip "steve Almond and Toto"! It's a side note-ish essay in his book that he read in Portland and I think it will at least partially allow you to see why I love him so much:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b2aGe...>

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## Sarah says

Steve Almond is a good writer. He chooses his words and his images carefully. And I wouldn't care about it one bit if he hadn't also managed to squeeze such truthy truth into this book. It's a pretty introspective book. Even though the title says save *your* life, the examples he uses are highly personal. A lot of the bands and musicians he name-checks are people who never reached the type of fame that would make them accessible as examples. For that reason, the online soundtrack is an excellent accessory to the book. But even without that, I would have appreciated them, thanks to his vivid descriptions. That and I love hearing about the local musicians who never made it out of a particular scene but had such an influence on this one guy that he was compelled to write a book about them, mostly because I am that local musician, still hoping my music has made that kind of connection with somebody.

Almond's chapter on listening to music made some great observations: "'Music has become more pervasive and portable than ever. But it feels less precious in the bargain. I don't want to confuse artistic and commercial value, but it's just a fact that some kid who rips an album for free isn't going to give it the same attention he would if it cost him ten bucks. At what point does convenience become spiritual indolence? I realize this makes me sound like an old fart, but sometimes I get nostalgic for the days when the universe of recorded sound wasn't at our fingertips, when we had to hunt and wait and - horror of horrors - do without, when our longing for a particular record or song made it feel sacred."

I also really enjoyed the section "How Writers Sing," about the similarities and differences between writing songs and prose, since I do both. "...The connection being that in my head all language began in song and that the best stories inevitably return to song, to a state of rapture. For years, I had assumed that throwing beautiful words at the page would make my prose feel true. But I had the process exactly backward. It was truth that lifted the language into beauty and toward song. It was a matter of doing what Joe Henry did, of pursuing characters into moments of emotional truth and slowing down. The result was a compression of sensual and psychological detail that released the rhythm and melody in language itself, what Longfellow called "the happy accidents of language."

Toward the end, he lost me a bit, as he began to muse -and I don't think this is a spoiler - that listening to music may be a purer joy than making it. I know where he's coming from - he's seen the hard work behind the recordings now, and the ugly bits - but though he finds himself in studios and near stages, he never finds himself in the middle of the live creation of a song, with amps turned up and his own fingers and voice physically wresting the music from an instrument. I'm glad there are Drooling Fanatics like him in the world to appreciate musicians, but I think he underestimates how making music - even badly, even in a closet with the lights off - can be as transformative as listening. Or maybe that's a different book.

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## RandomAnthony says

I know guys like Steve Almond. They kind of wear me out. These guys go to concerts on *weeknights* and read Pitchfork every morning. I do not, under any circumstances, want to engage in conversation with Steve Almond and his brethren about anything but especially not about music. I'd rather read the book he wrote about the topic and enjoy the freedom to hit the pause button whenever I want rather than pretend I have to pee when his beery breakdown of why Captain Beefheart is more important than Pere Ubu reaches a fever pitch and starts to scare the rest of the bar patrons, most of whom are at least ten years younger than us and feeling sorry for our pathetic asses. I'll stay home.

Almond, the author of the far superior *Candyfreak* and the way worse *Not That You Asked*, mines the "I'm a complete music nerd" territory explored by Klosterman et al (Did I use "et al" correctly? I'm never quite sure.). He frames the "drooling fanatic" as a kind of a harmless, exuberant dog, like a St. Bernard standing in the back of the concert hall meticulously recording the set list in a notebook so he can compare tonight's performance with the one the band did in Munich in 1992. These "Dfs" refuse to grow up and exasperate their ever-patient girlfriends and colleagues. The Dfs relentlessly attend gigs and fall in love with the records that can express what the Dfs can't say themselves. I can respect that; God knows I needed The Smiths and Husker Du to articulate what I didn't even know I was feeling back when I was a teenager. Much of Almond's book is funny (e.g. his brilliant analysis of Toto's "Africa") but there's a sense of desperation that's well, kind of *not* funny, either. He talks about his wonderful wife when he drives to his friend's house at two in the morning to talk about Bruce Springsteen records. Uh, buddy, you might want to think twice about those midnight excursions because I wouldn't be surprised if she's on the phone to her sister the second you leave about who exactly might be the best divorce lawyer in Boston and when she can get an appointment because you're going to sleep until noon again while she's up with the kids at six. It's one thing for an eight year old to want a star player's autograph, but that guy pushing forty doing the same looks like a little sad and creepy. Maybe Almond gives more power to his fanaticism for effect, but I liked his more laid-back approach to candy in part because the topic seemed less important to him than music and I didn't feel as if he was constantly reaching to project meaning on candy. So this book is ok but if you ask me to speak intelligently about it in a year I will probably only remember that Almond visited, as part of his research, Libertyville, Illinois, where I got lost in a rainstorm on 8/8/88, a fact I can recall because I remember that was the day of the first Cubs night game ever. I might also say Almond mentions Bob Schneider, too, but that's mostly because I remember Mr. Schneider once dated Sandra Bullock and there was a guy named Jim Schneider in my elementary school. I guess *Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life* is an easy, occasionally entertaining read, but were Mr. Almond to ask me to go see Drive-By Truckers with him I'd make sure I drove myself because I'm sure he'd want to go out after the show and I'd already be tired of him.

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## Neil says

This started off so well...

Almond writes hilariously in defining the Drooling Fanatic, the obsessive rock music nut. He breaks down the lyrics of famous songs like Toto's Africa and Air Supply's All Out of Love, showing their stunning silliness. I loved the section where he talks about being moved by songs that you know are tripe. I loved his chronology of the different music formats and how they have affected the DF. I loved the section about music that you love one day, hate later. The early lists: "Ten Things You Can Say to Piss Off a Music Critic" and "rock's Biggest Assholes" were also hysterical. Even his early sections about his own journey becoming a music critic, connecting with his wife, and "Five Really Stupid Things I've Done as a Drooling Fanatic" are good.

But then Almond gets into his own story too much. It becomes a memoir about his devotion to various acts

that never really made it. It's highly unlikely that you've heard of these lost gods of rock and roll and Almond becomes shrill and crass in trying to build them up. He brags too much about his sexual escapades. This goes on for the final two-thirds of the book with a much lower laugh quotient and nothing very profound to say. So first third: five stars: last two-thirds: two stars at best. This is a capable writer. I'll try other thing by him and remember the part of this book that I liked, but I wish I had just put it down at about page 85.

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## Ed Wagemann says

Here is a letter I recently sent to the publisher of a book called Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life:

Hi, I just finished reading your book Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life and I'd like to review it for my blog: Rockism101. Before I write my review I'd like to share some of my thoughts about your book with you and give you a chance to comment on these thoughts.

For the first 100 plus pages or so I had a hard time trying to figure out what the point of this book was. Maybe I was confused by the title, which is very misleading. In fact, until you explained where you got the title from—a Boris McClutheon show you put on—I was wondering/expecting whether this book was some kind of hipster parody of a self-help book like “I’m Ok, you’re Ok” or “How to win friends and influence people.” Maybe it should have dawned on me earlier, but this book was about you, Steve Almond, not about “you” the reader who wants to have his life saved by Rock and Roll. I understand that writers have to conjure up intriguing titles to draw the prospective reader’s attention, but I couldn’t help but feel a bit cynical and that this title choice might have been a slick trick on your part. This slick trick though, ties in well with what I think the real theme of your book is. You aren’t a famous celebrity—and you address this in the book—so why would anyone want to read a book that is essentially a lengthy memoir of one aspect of your personal development as it relates to Rock and Roll? Maybe there are some fans out there who have read your stuff before or who know of you, but that is small fries, I image. You certainly aren’t a Chuck Klusterfuck, I mean. So the title of this book revealed to me that you think that Rock and Roll can save your life.

So Rock and Roll is the vehicle through which you have chosen to gain a larger audience—and gaining a larger audience (gaining celebrity if you will) will make you happy and in the end save your life. Throughout the book then there are a series of musicians who you have come to worship: Nil Lara, Joe Henry, Ike Reilly, Boris Mccutcheon, Bob Schneider, Chuck Prophet, the Strawze. But none of these artists made it big, either because they wouldn’t or couldn’t compromise. Their commercial failure seemed to make them appear lesser and unhappy beings (from your perspective) and the lessons you gleaned from them was that being a creative genius (something that you admittedly aren’t) wasn’t all it is cracked up to be. In the end in fact, it is Dave Grohl, a Commercial Pop Hack (in my opinion), who is your role model. Grohl is the best example of someone who is happy and famous at the same time. And somehow that inspires you to conclude that you might be able to be perfectly happy being a “midlist toiler”. But honestly, after all that has come before that, I find that epiphany a bit hard to swallow. The more believable point of your book seems to be that if you (and by you I mean Steve Almond) want to be happy, you have to be successful. And to be successful (since you aren’t a creative genius) you have to be a Commercial Pop Hack—which is why you have written this book.

Not that there is any shame in that, for being a Commercial Pop Hack isn’t easy—it takes hard work, a little luck, etc. Still though it seems a million times easier than doing the heavy lifting, soul searching and hard living it takes to become a tortured creative genius. Which is why, in the end, you will still be a Drooling Fanatic.

With that said, I'd like to throw you a compliment. While reading your book I was also reading another book called Bandalism by Julian Ridgway. This book was incredibly terrible. In fact after about a half dozen pages I decided to just skip around and I skim through it hoping to find at least one nugget of something that seemed the least bit entertaining or interesting. And I found nothing. This poor sap Ridgway doesn't even have the skills/ability to be a Commerical Pop Hack. I have no idea what kind of moron would want to buy this book (I get all of my books for free through my library by the way) so I'm not even going to make an attempt to describe how terrible this book was (mainly I just want to forget about it). Maybe you can pick it up for yourself if you are truly curious. But my point is that even being a commercial Pop Hack takes some talent. And there were definitely parts of your book that were very good. Early in the book you described how listening to the Cars "Moving In Stereo" on a walk man transformed the people around you, making them appear deeper, etc. I thought that was a great insight/description. I read a book or two a week, and I have a low threshold for mediocre writing, and it was little gems like that which were enough to keep my interest. One of my favorite sections from the first part of your book was when you described the listening process, from vinyl to 8-tracks to cassettes to cds and to digital files. This one section convinced me that you were worth continued reading. There were times that I would skip a paragraph or two, or even a page or two, but overall I ended up reading about 98% of the book. The end of the book (beginning with the chapter about Ike Reilly) was a lot better than the start of the book. I think you have a real talent for capturing the interesting lives of the musicians you covered.

To end with, I want to nitpick one minor thing that really irks me, and that is when people include hip hop as part of Rock. If you are going to include hip hop in your narrative, then you are talking about Pop music—not Rock. Rock has a history, an evolution, an ethos, etc that is an entirely different animal than hip hop. Talking of Rock and talking of hip hop as if they are of the same ilk is likely to not only piss off Rock fans, but piss off hip hop fans as well. And again, it makes the title of your book appear disingenuous. If you need to include Hip Hop in your story, then maybe a better title would have been "Commerical Pop Will Save My Life."

I hope to hear from you soon.

Read more: <http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fu...>

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### **Tyler Jones says**

Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life (Which, for the sake of brevity, shall be henceforth referred to here as RRWSYL) is Steve Almonds' highly personal account of being a musical "drooling fanatic" - a person to whom the soundtrack of life is so important that life itself often has to pause until the right tune is found. What makes RRWSYL so much better than merely a passionate, heartfelt examination of the power of music is that Almond examines his feelings with such exactitude and honesty that he reaches some rather amazing conclusions about music in general. I was impressed at the depth and originality of his thought, although he tries hard to mask his genius behind an immature fascination with naughty words and behavior. But isn't rock and roll also about naughty words and behavior?

I do realize that my personal liking of the book does not mean that everyone will enjoy it as much as I did.

The fact that I am a male North American, born in the mid-sixties, who spent most of my teenage years listening to music in my room, automatically puts me close to a Steve-Almond-Point-of-View. Your chances of liking this book are best if you were born, say, between 1965 and 1980. Your chances of liking this book are also greatly increased if you can forgive the author his almost sad need to mention every girl he ever slept with and every person he wishes he could have slept with. Related to this, your chances of liking RRWSYL will be greater if you are not easily offended by crude language. Folks, this is a book about rock and roll, and if that subject is going to be dealt with honestly then a certain amount (meaning "a whole lot") of crudeness comes with the territory. What I'm saying is, "Mom, please don't read this book. Ok?"

That said, RRWSYL is infectious in it's passion. It has inspired me to reconnect with fresh, inventive music and discover some of the great artists I have ignored over the last decade or two, and I'm sure it will affect many others the same way.

As an added bonus, you can listen to many of the songs Steve raves about on his website: [www.stevenalmond.com](http://www.stevenalmond.com) (click on "Bitchin' Soundtrack")

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to listen to "Commie Drives a Nova" ten times in a row.

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### **Myfanwy says**

A gorgeously honest coming-of-(middle)age for Generation X. Yes, it's a book about music, but more than that it is a love story--a love of lyrics and emotion and a love of those the people who share the love of certain songs with us. Simply put: a great read.

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### **Valarie says**

Not intended to be taken terribly seriously, but it is truly written by a drooling fanatic. Lists and all. The book paralleled my life except for the inescapable fact that I have a chicken feathers' width worth of humility and shame and Almond clearly doesn't. But then none of the pieces I've written delved into the lives of my subjects like his does, so I guess that's the trade-off.

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### **Alison says**

I'm stuck (again) between three and four stars: on the one hand, I'd give four stars for the writer's funny self-deprecating voice, which he employs at the same time as writing some very beautiful, literary descriptions (he's also an accomplished fiction writer); for the subject matter itself (because I, too, am the kind of Drooling Fanatic he describes in the book); and for the painfully hilarious relatability of certain specific sections (such as the Chapter 4, which details the span of musical configuration of my own time, from the LP to the Mp3; the explication of the ridiculous lyrics in "I Blessed the Rains Down in Africa"; and the visit to Dave Grohl's house.)

At the same time, however, despite how deeply I relate to his intense love for music and his even-more-

intense desire to be able to create or experience something as transcendent, I was a little disappointed by the fact that almost half the book is devoted to singer/songwriters I've never heard of (Ike Reilly, Boris McCutcheon, Dayna Kurtz...). This is the point, of course; Almond is fanatical about these (worthy-sounding) artists and wants you to understand, through this writing, how great they are. But I'm a bigger sucker for great writing about music that I already know. (Maybe I'm just getting old and cranky and want what's already familiar.)

Also, I have to detract a half-star, at least, for the fact that Almond mentions, in a footnote, that he once had a "brief and disastrous sexual relationship" with Lionel Richie's daughter. The fact that he was ever involved with her in the first place--and that he mentions this in a footnote, as if we are already supposed to have known about said celebutante dalliance--made me question the author's integrity for at least the next few minutes. (His mention of liking Concrete Blonde, however, redeemed him in my eyes, almost.)

Overall, I love and respect any writer who can explicate cheesy Top 40 songs from their childhood, (like Toto's "Africa,") while not too good to admit how much they loved it at the time, and might still love it, despite "knowing better," today.

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### **Colleen Wainwright says**

Wonderful writing and a memoir using music as a lens is brilliant. I suspect that our musical experiences vary enough that I had trouble identifying with a lot of this. (But I checked out a few of his "desert island" albums and we have at least some areas of overlap.) Probably a perfect read for a music-head who loves articulate, honest writing that's self-revelatory.

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### **Ted says**

The first half of this book was quite good, but Almond got bogged down in chapters that were more solipsistic than informative. Almond is clearly a bright guy (having completed an advanced degree and taught writing at the college level), but his own writing tends to bounce between low and high brow suggesting he's having trouble reconciling his younger, more rebellious self with his more mature, analytic side. Also, while I really enjoyed his reflections on the music industry, love of certain songs, and the role of the critic in the age of the Internet, I found his frequent forays into his personal life rather boring. I know we all struggle emotionally in life, but I really didn't care to read how, at times, this book was really a thinly veiled attempt to show how he's matured as a person. Nevertheless, the book is well worth reading, but if you're wary of authors who use their work to help them chronicle their awkward years until they've settled into a more satisfying middle age, then you may want to skip a few chapters.

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