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The Beast in Its Tracks

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Todd Rundgren's 'State' is a Tasty Musical Stew (Album Review)

April 2013 by [Phyllis Pollack](#)



After reveling in Todd Rundgren's 23 previous albums, including *The Hermit of Mink Hollow*, *Faithful*,

Todd, and his other classic works, every Rundgren fan has been wondering where the “Wizard And True Star” could possibly go next.

Well, the answer is: all over.

Like a country without borders, Rundgren’s 24th solo album *State* is a musical concoction with everything brewing in the pot, including metal, electronica, funk, soul, dance, and even a trip through Synth City. Consciously or not, Rundgren seems to be making a point of letting the listener experience a heaping bowlful of musical diversity. ([Pick up *State* in our Online Store here](#)).

With *State*, Rundgren again proves his mastery, not only with his writing and playing, but also when it comes to creating his unique computer-generated soundscapes.

When listening to *State*, it is as if there is a subliminal backwards message on the album, saying, “Hey, if you are a recording artist, regardless of genre, I could produce your album more effectively than you could.”

Those few listeners who may only know Rundgren from his iconic 1972 single, *Hello, It’s Me*, might typecast him as merely a good singer/songwriter – a term that can’t in any way capture his achievements in the studio.

Rundgren’s work as a record producer has resulted in the sales of millions of albums, including Meat Loaf’s 1977 release *Bat Out Of Hell*. 36 years after its release, it remains one of the top-selling albums of all time.

As a legendary studio producer and engineer Rundgren has been at the helm for countless other releases from a diverse range of artists: Patti Smith, Cheap Trick, XTC, Rick Derringer, The Band, Alice Cooper, The Psychedelic Furs, Bad Religion and the Electric Light Orchestra.

On *State*, Rundgren not only takes time out to flaunt his heavily potent guitar chops, he also goes into overdrive, showing his proficiency in as far as what can be done in the studio with computer technology.

Rundgren’s diversity is even more pronounced on his new album than on any other work of his; the veritable musical *mélange* quietly screams within each individual track.

Rundgren’s approach to sound on *State* is far different from the purity and earthiness heard in his recordings that were more dependent on solely playing instruments, than on the use of computers and software. *State* is from another time and place, in which Rundgren again ventures into the future with experimenting, not only technically, but musically as well.

Opening track *Imagination* is arguably the most enticing track on the album. Rundgren lets us know that he’s still one of the true “heavy metal kids” – as the brooding Black Sabbath-esque guitar work and keyboards will get the listener hooked.

Rundgren soon throws the listener off, with a demure vocal melody line, as it continues with an alluring trail of computerized wizardry. We then hear his keyboards layered under computerized sounds, and then his stunning rock guitar, playing through a chunk of chord changes. If there is a drawback to this track it’s that it leaves the listener wanting far more of his tasteful lead guitar playing.

The album’s song sequence potpourri continues:

* *Serious* starts out as a funk number that would make Prince turn his head and take note.

* *In My Mouth* is a quiet storm, soul jam track, including the lyrical innuendo, “*There is something in mouth for you.*”

* By the time the *Ping Me* begins, all bets are off as far as what will be heard next. Dramatic keyboards open a song that gives yet more evidence to Rundgren’s reputation for being a prolific singer/songwriter with this ballad - destined to become known as one of Rundgren classics.

* *Angry Bird* shows what happens when you take a bass riff that’s in your head, go into a trance, and turn it into an eclectic, computerized creation, with a few subtle guitar licks, drums and keyboards.

* Then *Smoke* arises: synthed out, tweaked out and freaked out, this track delves into polyrhythmic layers under Rundgren’s vocals - “*Burned, I’m a bit wiser. And it all went up in smoke.*” The music heard in this specter of Rundgren’s songwriting pallet is one that his fans are well familiar with, and that they have long venerated.

“One of the best songs on the album is “Something From Nothing.” Rundgren sings, “I create something from nothing,” in this duet with Rachel Haden. It is in this track that Rundgren’s voice sounds at its best on the album.

Despite all the studio tricks and computerized amenities, Rundgren’s relentlessly expertise when it comes to his songwriting ability is blatant. While flaunting his studio wizardry more than ever on *State*, Rundgren shows there is nowhere that he can or won’t go musically.

(Note: [read our new interview with Rundgren by clicking this link](#)).

Rating: 4.5 out of 5



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