

## Book review: "In the Studio with Michael Jackson" by Bruce Swedien

Written by Terri Schlichenmeyer

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You know it by the first five notes. Within three seconds of hearing that beat, you know you're listening to "Billy Jean" or "Thriller". There's no doubt "Off the Wall" has started or "Beat It" will make you want to dance.

And there's no doubt that Michael Jackson had talent. But while he sang those songs and made up those moves, he didn't do those million-selling albums by himself. In the new book "In the Studio with Michael Jackson" by Bruce Swedien, you'll find out how those blockbusters happened and who was involved.

Studio engineer Bruce Swedien met Quincy Jones in 1959 and he considered Jones as a brother. So when Q called Swedien one Sunday in 1977 and asked if he'd like to go to New York to work on a musical, Swedien jumped at the chance.

It turned out to be a career-altering decision.

The movie Jones was working on was *The Wiz*, starring Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, and others. Swedien's work there began a long-time friendship and eventual partnership with Michael Jackson, whose music Swedien recorded and enhanced.

Swedien recalls, for instance, working on "Off the Wall", which he believes was Michael Jackson's first grown-up album.

"Michael is always totally prepared!" enthuses Swedien. (Note: because this book was penned before Jackson's death, everything is written in the present tense).

Swedien answers fans' questions (the sob at the end of "She's Out of My Life" was an accident-on-purpose) and he gives insights (Jackson always said "please" and "thank you"). Swedien also writes about the technical aspects of recording with Michael Jackson, including his brainstorm of putting microphones around a wooden platform on which Jackson would dance, thus recording taps, snaps, and sounds that made every Michael Jackson song so memorable.

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Let me start out by saying that, despite the scattershot way in which this book is presented, I liked it.

I liked it a lot. But I had issues with it, too.

First of all, despite the title of this book, much of it is about author Bruce Swedien: his methods, praise from pals, kudos from people who learned from him, his studio equipment, his discographies, and so on. This is all quite interesting (particularly if you’re a sound engineer), but it doesn’t totally match the title and it’s probably not what readers will be looking for when buying this book.

Secondly, while the first half of “In the Studio with Michael Jackson” has some wonderful stories and delightful little memories of working with The King of Pop, the latter half of this book is often identical (sometimes word-for-word) to the first half.

Lastly, while Swedien’s writing is sweet in a star-struck-fan sort of way, I found the! overabundance! of exclamation points! to be!! extremely! distracting!!

And now that I’ve ranted, let me say this: if you’re devouring every smidgen of Michael Jackson information you can find, you must get “In the Studio with Michael Jackson”, too, because it’s a peek you won’t get anywhere else. For you, this book is definitely worth noting.

“In the Studio with Michael Jackson” by Bruce Swedien, forewords by Quincy Jones and Rod Temperton | c.2008, 2009, Hal Leonard Corp. | \$24.99 / \$29.95 Canada | 272 pages