

Victor Rust, *The Shadows Recording Catalogue*.

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A download is available for purchase.

Reviewed by Les Woosey

Rust's latest self-published, so-called "encyclopaedia" [his page 8]: *The Shadows Recording Catalogue* was put together in a remarkably short space of time (just nine months in 2011 — a period sadly including a major family disruption according to the author's own introduction) and this was all forced upon him quite unplanned he says, immediately following a pressurised, injudicious knee-jerk remark that he made whilst broadcasting live on-air over local radio.

As co-author of two of the four — **and make careful note it was *only* four** — Shadows reference books instanced as Rust's source material [his page 5] I found myself reeling at the prospect of what further knowledge and information was soon to be revealed within the pages of his most weighty tome. Here was perhaps an expert indeed and, amazingly, one that I had never come across in my long Cliff/ Shadows journey. Initially, I determined that I would not be put off by Rust's patently limited reference library or by the singularly compact time-frame brought to bear on this extensive subject: plainly, the man must have acquired complete mastery by other means.

From my own standpoint, I knew that it had taken me decades of collecting, annotating and collating many fragments of information in order to build a bigger picture of my favourite group The Shadows and their lead singer — done, I admit, in a somewhat fastidious fashion with the help of many others. Slightly overawed, I read that in a similar time span, Rust had been able to assimilate and address genres as diverse as travel, medicine, fiction, music anthologies and has pumped out two, if not three encyclopaedias. Gee! His father Brian's excellent discography work was known to me from my early (and ongoing) jazz/ skiffle interests in Colyer, Barber and Donegan; perhaps this book was to be a real treat: 'like father, like son'?

When embarking on the task of writing our books, I had first reflected on my limited learning and, even after so much effort — half a lifetime even — I realised that my accumulated knowledge was seriously deficient. Having met most of the group members over the years, I knew I had not actually interviewed or discussed puzzling facts with the Shadows themselves — I needed to turn to and digest the experiences of other more fortunate fans that had done so, in order that I might get at the truth. I also found the pressing need to visit and access session information held in the archives of EMI/Columbia, acquire music newspaper articles from the British Library, search out off-air recordings to find the true facts before I could then assimilate, distil and interpret all that these sources could offer.

In the early to mid-1960s one could devour the content of the first British *Shadows Fan Club magazine*, a publication followed later by the eighteen year reign of *SCOFA* (the Australian fanzine) printed from October 1982. January 1989 saw the launch of

the amazing *Pipeline* (Instrumental) magazine and then in 1995, to use and further cement my accumulated knowledge, I was the prime-mover in encouraging Tony Hoffman the owner of the best dedicated fan magazine, *Shadsfax*, to publish. It was our rapid friendship, joint ideas, personal collections and shared enthusiasm that got the whole show on the road. Astonishingly, Rust makes no (original) mention or reference to the wealth of material to be found in ANY of these publications. One must doubt that he has ever heard of them let alone subscribed to or read the content of these fascinating documents. Instead, his favoured source it seems is Wikipedia: a somewhat lazy and wholly unsuitable way to collect together the sort of information he claims to have located and then subsequently presented. Frankly, the detail contained in our Shadows books simply isn't to be found there!

In my own case, as the years rolled by, I also realised that I did not have immediate access to the ever-growing wall-to-wall international vinyl collections possessed by some, so I needed to search these people out, build relationships and cajole my new friends to share with me the information that I wanted. On the other hand, it was easy enough to just buy new CDs in a record shop (before these all disappeared) but I soon realised that acquiring and listening to every single disc from around the world would require superhuman effort and cost, not to mention time. Years of work were needed, but again, others became friends in this endeavour and helped in my search for completeness. Beyond that, there was the translation of foreign books, record sleeves and liner notes — my Japanese, Polish and Norwegian simply wasn't up to par, but some people could, and did, help when directed to the problem. Eventually, my hobby and interests all came together when I was asked if I would like to contribute to some books for fans, by fans. Heaven!

Our books eventually took a good number of expert people many years of work each (so then, perhaps as much as *ten man-years* in total) before anyone saw fit to publish our collective observations, opinions and facts — little wonder then, that Rust observed that he had found his last **nine months** arduous at times! How on earth could one man have done it all so quickly?

On closer inspection, I was at first puzzled and then alarmed to see the wholesale reuse (with quite unconvincing light paraphrasing) of the core-content of our books in Rust's A to Z, put over as if they were his original findings. Swathes of detail, opinion and facts that I had personally assembled with the extremely kind (and closely credited) help of others was simply being regurgitated, turned around and re-ordered; minor mistakes and all!

Over the last few years now, my co-authors and I have been pleased to receive news of errors and updates in our writing — one mistake as an example, concerns the reversal of applied stereo on certain CD releases from across the globe. We were very quickly (but gently) reprimanded when it was pointed out that the problems had arisen in the UK more than a decade earlier on UK vinyl! How did we miss that? I can find no updating by Rust of any of the facts that we got wrong five years ago — incorrect information has simply been incorporated blindly without any further research or questioning in what seems to have been a rush to publish and get the whole bothersome thing done and finished with!

Attempting to save weight (equating to cost) the type-face in Rust's publication is extremely small throughout and most hard to read, but it perhaps serves — erroneously — to suggest that there may be much that is new and valuable in the closely-packed content. Furthermore, and avoiding considerable costs that we accepted, you find no illustrations whatsoever making for a dreary and off-putting appearance. The book's main claim to fame seems to be that it is ordered

alphabetically rather than in the more illuminating — with regard to musical development — chronological way that serves to reflect an artist's life-influences. The final sixth of the book is given over to appendices that provide even more opportunity for the repetition necessary to address the initial wrong-headed alphabetical approach.

In the body of his book Rust has re-arranged — and of alphabetical necessity, duplicated — facts almost exclusively abstracted from his listed, but **very** limited, source database [our books]. By way of giving an appearance of added value however, he has been inevitably corralled into searching for spurious splinters and supplementing his entries by simply adding layer upon layer of ever tenuous and peripheral factoids. For astronomers, it is essential to explore the outer edges of the universe in an attempt to make sense of our place on a minor planet — with regard to the output of a group of musicians however, the return for doing this is distracting and pretty limited: **and** mightily boring!

One has to be warned that the close text is also littered with factual errors of a sloppy kind, many plainly engendered by the tedium born of slavish and unthinking abstraction of detail from original documents into some secondary database. One reviewer (giving only three stars) on Amazon picked up on this worrying aspect of accuracy and it is prudent to ask the question whether this book can be regarded as anything approaching a reliable reference work.

Lastly, there is the important question of trust and respect with regard to the content of any book, and indeed for its writer. Respect can only be earned by action and deed and I know that my co-authors and information-providers are without doubt the most worthy recipients of respect. I greatly value their informed opinions and experience and have great trust in their inherent sense of fair play. I can think of no individual involved with our books who works professionally within the music business; they are just faithful fans, hobbyists or wannabe Hanks and they all did it for pleasure without profit.

It is said that everyone has a book in them. Some of the contributors to our Shadows Guides and Pocket Handbook would have never aspired to a book — and good on them — others simply felt the need to share and looked for an outlet. More importantly, many wouldn't have taken the financial risk or outlay in what was always going to be at best, a self-financed, break-even project. However, everybody pulled together and helped to build up the collected body of knowledge that now represents the minutiae of The Shadows output to date. We then published that concentrated, refined material (the plain facts) for the benefit of fans of Shadows' music and, in a small way, for posterity too. The outcome of the concerted efforts of so many people was not a work of fiction — facts are just plain facts and it was as close to the truth as anybody could reasonably get. Subjectively, we elected to present the facts with an element, a mere frisson, of self-opinion. I am genuinely saddened here because I find it extremely difficult to determine any merit when the previous hard work of so many people is brazenly plundered, rehashed, and then pompously presented as something new in an overtly self-important fashion. I am wholly disappointed with Rust's approach and with the end-result of his effort. Not to put too fine a point on it, I've read it all before: many, many times and almost word for word while proof-reading our own books!

Foul! By definition, it is a flagrant or outrageous contravention of the rules of any game incorporating normal good sportsmanship. In my professional line of work as a Chartered Civil Engineer dealing with sewage treatment and sewerage, the term also relates to something unseemly, often malodorous; something that one should steer well clear of.

Equally in life, these descriptions give overall guidance to what might generally be considered right or wrong and good or bad. I also happen to think that the principles should be applied to the all-important *approach* needed when putting together a book for publication and, most significantly, subsequently claiming one's copyright over the content. When authorship follows the proper pathway, due trust, acclaim and respect *may* ensue. The opposite — censure and opprobrium — can be the outcome if one falls short.

Foul! Yes, I feel that just about sums it up. I wish it had not been necessary to condemn Rust's book quite so roundly, but the rushed working, the thinly disguised paraphrasing and the mock-scholarly tenor leave little to endear it. I cannot claim to be an academic, but if I was, then personally I would not be awarding anything for original research or effort here because this pretend thesis, put over so pretentiously, cannot be said to add particularly to the overall body of existing knowledge or further illuminate the situation for the reader. It can indeed be argued that the book could readily misinform or derail future researchers.

A fact: Rust's book is arguably the biggest book on the bookshelf — well, it is if you ignore most of those German books: none of which are noted by Rust! And here's an observation that an experienced librarian once related to me in confidence:

“So often the uninitiated will just pick up the biggest book on the assumption that it will be the best.

*You can always spot the **discerning** reader though.”*