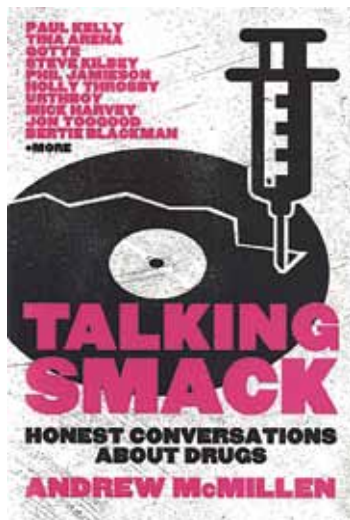


TALKING SMACK: HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DRUGS

BY ANDREW MCMILLEN

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There's something refreshingly honest and low-key about Andrew McMillen's conversations with musicians about their attitude toward and use of drugs. Though they make up one half of the musical cliché of 'sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll', and are a *de rigueur* feature in every rock 'n' roll memoir, this prevalent aspect of the music industry - drug-taking - is rarely discussed in an open and frank way. McMillen's 14 interview/profiles - including Steve Kilby, Paul Kelly, Bertie Blackman, Holly Throsby, Mick Harvey, Gotye, Lindy Morrison, Spencer P Jones - canvas a broad array of responses: drug-taking as an aid to creativity; as a means of staying buzzed during an exhausting tour; as a way of combatting stage-fright; or as just plain out-and-out addiction. It is to McMillen's credit that none of his subjects appear to hold back, as they reminisce about the role various substances have played in their music, both legal (nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, prescription drugs) and illegal (cannabis, cocaine, heroin). There are a few misfires - Tina Arena is as dull as we might have imagined - but the majority of subjects provide engaging accounts of the role drugs have played in their lives. In canvassing the positives and negatives - and make no bones, there are plenty of dark tales here - McMillen's non-judgmental book opens up new perspectives on the oft-cited but rarely talked about relationship between drugs and music. **R**