



**Episode 1,204: Without This Music, Your Life Is Worse**

**Guest: Roie Avin and Brad Birzer**

**WOODS:** I'm really glad to welcome Brad back, because he's been on so many times, and –

**BIRZER:** Hey [laughing].

**WOODS:** – I was just saying that I had been threatening another Brad Birzer music episode for so long, I was starting to lose credibility in my threats, so now I'm able to make good on it. And I'm also joined by Roie. That's a great treat also, because we want to talk about this beautiful book. It's not just that it's great to read and you get exposed to a lot of music that you wouldn't have known about otherwise, but it really is a beautiful book. It's just very well done, *Essential Modern Progressive Rock Albums*.

And of course a lot of folks listening will know something about what we're talking about, but even those who do, many of them will think that the age of progressive rock is behind us, that it was the age of Yes and Pink Floyd and, to some extent, Jethro Tull and King Crimson and bands like that. Maybe Rush, possibly. But there's so much more, and Brad and I have sometimes uttered the heretical thought that the "so much more" is arguably better than some of the old stuff.

But let's save those heresies for later. Roie, why don't you as the author of this book, take a moment to try to define what progressive rock is?

**AVIN:** Boy, you know, that's the million-dollar question, isn't it?

**WOODS:** You kind of know it when you hear it. It's one of those things.

**AVIN:** That's for sure one thing, and a lot of people think of it is sort of pompous and self-indulgent, and maybe there's some aspect to that a little bit. But in the book, I actually try and take a stab at vaguely defining it, and what I try to say is that it's either one of two things. It's technical in nature, either by the skill of the musicians or the adventurous nature of the production – so it's bands that are trying to do a little bit extra with the music from that regard. And then the other thing is, especially now more than ever, is the disregard for any commercial attention. It's bands or artists that are willing to record the type of music they want to record, hit singles, whatever. And out of that you get full albums and full experiences and full concepts, and sometimes that doesn't mean 25-minute songs. It can mean a brilliant album collection of 4-minute songs. But it's sort of more mentality to me than anything.

**WOODS:** There are a lot of songwriters in mainstream rock music who can write very melodic 3- to 4-minute songs that are very good for what they are. I mean, these people are good at what they do; it's just that I'm not that interested in what it is that they do.

**AVIN:** [laughing] Correct.

**WOODS:** I mean, from time to time, who doesn't like an occasional song from the '80s for nostalgia reasons? But when I come across to people who listen to nothing but that, I just feel sorry for them, that their lives, they're missing out on stuff that can enrich them so much. So that's kind of the way I look at it. But before we get into the subject matter of this book, I do want to raise a question that I tried to raise with Ian Anderson back on Episode 3 of this show, which was: back in the '70s, in '72 and '73, Jethro Tull was able to release two albums in a row, each of which was all one song. All one song, *Thick as a Brick* and *A Passion Play*. And each of them hit number one in the United States. That is impossible to imagine happening today.

**AVIN:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** What has changed in the interim? And I was kind of trying to drive him to say people have gotten stupider, but he didn't seem to be having that. What do both of you think about that?

**AVIN:** Well, not to go in that direction, but in a sense, that's sort of like that. And I don't mean to say it's a dumbing of society in that maybe people got stupider. I think in a sense, radio stations, TV stations, all that kind of stuff, they've tried to cater to common denominator. *This might appeal to more people. It's simpler. It's more vast and easy to accept, and so we'll just do that.* And it's a whole thing with getting down to radio stations being purchased by one conglomerate and there's no real DJs anymore putting their own imprint on what gets played. So it's all of that, and it sort of eventually got to the point where simpler just kind of won out, I think.

**WOODS:** What do you think, Brad?

**BIRZER:** Tom, yeah, I agree absolutely with Roie, and I'd go back to your opening statement too, Tom, where you asked: is this a thing of the past? I think one of the great things that Roie has done in his book, which other people like Dave Weigel – you know, he wrote a very nice book, but they seem to conclude that prog rock is way past whatever it once had. I think commercially, that's probably true, at least for now. It could always revive. But in terms of its art, I think it is better now. Even though you said, Tom, this may be heretical, I'm hearing people, whether it's Glass Hammer or Neal Morse or Marillion or Big Big Train, the kinds of complexity that they're bringing to the music, obviously they're drawing upon Yes and Genesis, but they're doing it in such a way that it really has become much more professional. Of course, production techniques are so much better.

But I also think, when we look back at the early '70s, one of the major things that allowed something like Jethro Tull to have those two one-song albums in a row was simply FM radio. FM radio was the Wild West at the very beginning of the 1970s. You had very few regulations on it. Everything was still AM, and so these FM stations that were trying to compete, they were able to do 30 minutes of commercial-free music, probably because they didn't have the

advertisers at the moment. And you're also coming out the '60s and the whole idea that we don't want these massive corporations. So corporations were actually taking advantage and making money on that kind of idea that we don't want the mass corporations, and they were doing well. But labels like Chrysalis, which was Jethro Tull's label, in the beginning they really were for the art, not just for the money, and they saw that they were able to make a lot of money through the art, and I think that's changed dramatically over the last 30 years.

**WOODS:** Even to this day, though, there is a radio edit of *Thick as a Brick* that you hear from time to time, so it can be done. It's still just asking a lot of the listener to trust us that you're going to want to go on a 45-minute musical journey with us.

But let's fast-forward now to the present. I am familiar with the tiniest sliver of the albums in here, so I've got a lot of work to do. I mean, I do like Steven Wilson, and if you've listened to me on this show for a long time, I have mentioned him every once in a great while. And I would say Steven Wilson is a guy who is very well-respected in these quarters because, among other things, he's done remixes or remasters of a lot of classic albums. So he's gotten to know Ian Anderson and Yes and I think King Crimson and a bunch of these other bands, and the fact that they would turn to him means something. He himself comes from a band called Porcupine Tree that I'm very fond of, but now that he's gone on his own, I think he's produced a mixture of extremely compelling, absolutely must-listen material and cacophonous stuff that I can't even bring myself to listen to for five seconds.

So for example, in here you have *The Raven That Refused to Sing*. There are a couple of really, really devastatingly beautiful and killer, really sad songs on that album. But the rest of it I find impossible to get into. It's just the sort of stuff I think his band members would have said, "Oh, come on. Stop that. We're not going to do this." I know I'm a heretic on this. I much prefer his album after that, *Hand Cannot Erase*, which still has a little bit too much of the stuff I don't like, but the first and last songs are absolutely unbelievable.

I'm going to let you guys do most of the talking this episode, but I do want to say one thing. This *Hand Cannot Erase* album, I think I've mentioned this before, but the idea behind it is it's based on this woman, Joyce Carol Vincent, and she had very unusual circumstances when she was living I guess in London, whereby her expenses were being paid, so it was possible for her to have died for rather a while and nobody to have noticed. Because you might wonder: well, what about her rent? She had some arrangement made. But she basically – yeah, she died, and it took like two years before anybody realized that it had happened. And she's a lovely young woman, and Wilson was just wondering how is it possible that you just dissolve into anonymity in the city? It's an interesting exploration.

But what devastates me about it is, that last song, he's taking some poetic license, because when she was found, she had these gifts by her that she had wrapped. We don't know to whom. And so he has her write a letter in that last song, and it's a letter to her brother where she's basically saying she's sending some gifts to the nephews or whatever. And it's the day before she dies, and she says, "I'm feeling kind of drowsy now, so I'll finish this tomorrow." And you as the listener know there is no tomorrow. And yeah, that's depressing and dark, but that's an experience you should have and not just listen to Billy Joel all day. You should have this experience.

**AVIN:** I agree. I think you're right. You're not going to get that from a pop song on today's radio, for sure, and it's important to be able to experience that. I agree.

**BIRZER:** I agree too, Tom. I mean, that's one of those albums – you could listen to an edited version of it, but it's the full 50+ minutes that makes the story. It's the buildup; it takes that long for that woman's story to be told. And I think Wilson is a genius on that album, lyrically, and I like it musically too, but I just think he had the guts to make an album, a very humane album about a person – because these are things that every one of us has been tempted with. We've all thought about it. Most of us haven't gone through it, but she did, and he gives us an incredible insight into the horrors and the beauty of her life.

**WOODS:** All right, so Roie, I want to ask you, given that you compiled all these albums, if you had to pick one as the most accessible for somebody who's just curious, which one would it be? Or you can pick a couple if that's too hard.

**AVIN:** Accessible. Uh, well, there's –

**WOODS:** That's a tough one for this genre, isn't it?

**AVIN:** Yeah. Well, the thing is, with this book especially, because I did it chronologically – we start at 1990 and we run through 2016 – it runs sort of through the beginning stages of the end of the hair metal era where Queensrÿche is starting to throw in some prog metal and Fates Warning, and those are in the beginning, and that's one style leading into the Dream Theaters and so on. And then in the middle, you start to get a little back into the neoprogram with Marillion and bands like IQ, and Spock's Beard starts getting into the picture. And then at the end, you get even heavier. Really heavy metal and progressive metal starts to bridge into the music. So it's hard to pick one that will be all-encompassing, but for me, I think the most accessible band during this whole period is really Spock's Beard, for me, because they're able to write – Neal Morse is a brilliant just pop song writer. While he's a mad genius as far as prog, he can write a four-minute pop song, full melodies and great lyrics – he could write a great country album. He's done sort of something like that in the last couple country albums over the last few years. So I might say Spock's Beard. Maybe *V* might be the most accessible. A lot of people seem to think that's their highlight album.

**WOODS:** Brad, same question to you.

**BIRZER:** Yeah, I'm trying to remember – I read Roie's book very carefully, and I loved it, and I loved the layout, I loved what he wrote. I think I would tend to agree, except I would probably say, rather than Spock's Beard, from that same time period, I would say probably Marillion's *Brave*, just because not only can you get the whole story out of it, but there are a couple of songs in there, "Hard As Love" and others, that I think people who are used to just really good rock, they can pick it up pretty quickly. But I love *V* as well from Spock's Beard, but I would definitely go with Marillion's *Brave* of the ones that Roie has in his book.

**WOODS:** I've actually had Steve Hogarth on the show several years ago, lead singer of Marillion these days, and he was just a tremendous guy to get to know and talk to.

**BIRZER:** I'm sure.

**WOODS:** I think *Marbles* simply because "The Invisible Man" haunts me for the lyrics and "Neverland" haunts me for the music. "Neverland" is a song of just unbelievable vulnerability, that Hogarth, every night when he sings that just performs – it's like a miracle. It's amazing

what he pours into that. If you see a live version of the song "Neverland," it's absolutely killer. So *Marbles* wins just for that. I'm not a huge fan of every single track on it, but that one certainly is pretty good.

**AVIN:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** There's an omission here – and some of it of course depends on definitions. Do we think –

**AVIN:** Well, there are a lot of omissions, so it's tough [laughing].

**WOODS:** But for me, the biggest omission would be Big Big Train, and you may argue whether they belong in a progressive compilation, but they do enough adventurous and interesting stuff.

**AVIN:** Well, they're in the book. You mean they're not in the book at all?

**WOODS:** Oh, let's see. I'm looking at the cover –

**AVIN:** Oh, yeah, *English Electric* is actually in there.

**WOODS:** Oh, sure enough, 232, it is. My eyes just passed over it. Okay, Roie, I officially say there are no oversights in your book.

**AVIN:** [laughing] Okay, great.

**WOODS:** Okay, thank goodness. There it is on 232. I don't know how I –

**AVIN:** If anything, looking back, I feel bad there's not more Big Big Train, but that's, you know, the timing was – they got cut off. The last couple of years, they've actually put out a couple albums that I would put in the book, but –

**WOODS:** I know. Well, they have this album, *English Electric*, and I have a musician friend who now has his own podcast, I think it's called *Musicpreneur*, and he says that my introducing him to Big Big Train – he's a top-notch musician – changed his life absolutely for the better. So I wonder if you guys – I think they are one of the least-known bands in the world considering the quality of what they put out. I think it's a crime that people don't know them. It astonishes me.

**AVIN:** Yeah, I want to talk about Big Big Train a lot, because that's the band that changed a lot of things for me. And actually, I want to go back, because we've talked about a few albums that came out in 2013. That's a significant year for prog, I believe, and actually for myself, because that's when I started my website, The Prog Report, which is where I eventually got to doing the book and so on. But I started that in 2013 because there was this big resurgence in prog. All these amazing albums seemed to come out in that one year. Steven Wilson's *Raven* album came out; Big Big Train's *English Electric*; Spock's Beard had a great comeback album with *Brief Nocturnes*; Flower Kings had a great album come out. There were a bunch of albums that came out in that one year, and I just could not believe all this great music was finally coming back, because the last maybe 15 years prior, while there was

good music, it was sporadic. You'd get one album here, one album there that was this good of prog quality.

And Big Big Train was one band that I just did not know existed, especially in the States, and I only stumbled about them because Nick D'Virgilio, who was a favorite drummer of mine from Spock's Beard, was in the band that I had just found out. And yeah, I agree the *English Electric* album blew my mind. I couldn't believe someone was producing something absolutely equivalent to the level of what the classic Genesis albums was. Every bit as good, in my opinion, if you like that style. But there was a big turn in that year, and since then, Big Big Train has become one of the biggest bands in prog, undoubtedly.

**WOODS:** Yeah, they've gotten a lot more attention. That's absolutely true. And Brad has played a big role in that, to be sure.

**AVIN:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I'm glad that they're starting to get some recognition, but I would say to people, if they get *English Electric Full Power*, which is like the double album, I am actually not that impressed with track number one, so don't switch it off after track number one. Go right to track number two, listen all the way through, and then listen again, and then listen a third time, and then you'll suddenly say, whoa, okay, now it just hit me. In fact, actually, "The First Rebreather" came on, and I got into that one immediately. Very rare. With progressive, it takes me a while. I've got to really let it sink in. That one I immediately saw what they were doing, and I said, "Wow, this is great. I'm so glad I know this exists." So I owe this to Brad for telling me about it, so thanks to Brad.

Now, I'm going to have each of you pick out – I don't know, it's hard to do this, because in a way, I just want to talk about albums that people need to know. I think I'm going to title this episode something like "Without This Music, Your Life Is Worse," just to get people's attention.

**AVIN:** [laughing]

**WOODS:** So I do want to focus on the good as opposed to, let's say, the experiments gone wrong. I'd rather focus on the essential albums that you include in here. Who would you say is the best-known band in this collection?

**AVIN:** Well, I would say Dream Theater –

**WOODS:** Dream Theater's got to be, yeah.

**AVIN:** – would be the main one. They've had a really long career. They've played big arenas and stadiums all over the world, maybe not as big in the States, but they still do really big venues in the States and really great business, and so I would have to say Dream Theater is still doing very well.

**WOODS:** How do you think the age of the Internet helps or hinders this kind of music?

**AVIN:** I think it's helped. It's done nothing but help. It's allowed you to discover this music in ways you never could before, because you can't rely on radio to show it to you, and now you

don't need that. And with even things like Spotify, where you get recommendations about this similar type of music, or if you follow my site, Prog Report, or Brad's site, Progarchy, there's so many avenues to get informed about new bands. *Hey, if you like this band, you might like this band.* And you can even reach out to half these bands online, and they'll write you back, which is amazing.

**WOODS:** Yeah, and Brad, I'm sure you've done that.

**BIRZER:** I have. And I'm always interested who writes back and who doesn't, and I'm sure some people just think I'm a nutball when I write to them. I'm sure, Roie, you've had that happen too, but I bet with your book you're getting a lot better attention than you were. But it is really interested to see these people, because so many of this third wave – and maybe we're in the fourth wave now, but this third wave of progressive rock musicians, yet they're basically us who went a different path.

And I think they recognize that they have to be very open in a decentralized age. They don't have the labels backing them, generally. Inside Out obviously is great, and Kscope and others. But they don't have the same kind of label support they once had. And I'm not saying they're friendly only because it's in their self-interest, but there's no doubt that they recommend that, to be well known, they have to be accessible to the audience. And I find that absolutely fascinating, because I think it changes the music. The music has to address us. The audience is a major factor in this wave of prog in a way that I think has been different for a lot of musicians for a long time. A lot of musicians – you think about The Cure. The Cure was huge, but partly because they had this image, and you'd get all of these teenage kids who wanted to be a part of that image in the '80s and early '90s. That's not true with Big Big Train. Big Big Train is not an image. Big Big Train's an art form, and you either believe in that art or you don't. So you're not tuning into Big Big Train because Greg Spawton's a really good-looking guy with an image –

**AVIN:** [laughing] Right.

**BIRZER:** You're tuning into him because Greg Spawton knows how to write a lyric, and that's a huge difference, I think.

**AVIN:** Well, the loss of radio for these bands has actually been positive in the same thing that you're talking about, Brad, because they know they don't have a chance of having a hit single anymore. So now your advantage is to go all in and do whatever you feel passionately about, whether it's a long epic or not or one song on a whole album, and appeal to that fan base and reach them directly and talk to them and invite them to come see you and build a community around it. And that's what's saved this music right now.

**BIRZER:** And Tom, if you don't mind, I'll jump in on what Roie said.

**WOODS:** Yeah, please.

**BIRZER:** I think the single-most important thing about these bands that we love, when we're talking about Big Big Train: nobody has built a better community of an audience or listeners than that single band has. Big Big Train, Greg Spawton has not only built a community of musicians for the band itself, but there's the online forum on Facebook. I can't imagine a

more active forum than the one for Big Big Train. I think even Dream Theater, which would draw more numbers certainly, they don't have that kind of fan response in terms of: let's talk about what this lyric means, let's think about why you used this trumpet here or this here. That's where Greg Spawton has been just unbelievably successful.

**AVIN:** Agreed.

**WOODS:** I want to talk about any interesting stories about the music, because this is – obviously, it's a compilation of the best essential albums you've got to have, but there must be some interesting, compelling stories about the making of the music in one case or another, or something that surprised you or was unusual. Anything like that you can share?

**AVIN:** Boy, I'm trying – my brain is racing through to try and figure out which is the story to pull.

**WOODS:** Okay.

**AVIN:** But I guess one of the biggest ones in talking maybe to an audience that isn't as aware is the Spock's Beard story with their album *Snow* and their lead singer, Neal Morse, who quite right after putting that album out. And for people that don't know, Spock's Beard is very similar to Genesis not only musically, but in that particular story. So Neal Morse was the main guy who wrote all the songs and was the band, essentially, while the rest of the band are amazing players and certainly noteworthy, but he wrote the music. It was all his vision. And they were building legitimate success over five albums, and here they come to do their double album, which is similar to Genesis' *Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* about a guy going to New York and finding himself and sort of different things like that. And he's struggling with it during the whole time of the recording, knowing that he needs to leave the band after this. Same thing with Peter Gabriel and *Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*.

And sure enough, a week after *Snow* gets released, he informs the band and the label he's leaving and goes off on what became more of a religious-based solo career, and has reinvented himself to be one of the top three or four most successful musicians in prog today. Meanwhile, Spock's Beard kept on going. Their drummer took over as lead singer, much like Phil Collins took over for Genesis. So a lot of parallels there. For people that aren't familiar, that's a pretty unique one.

**BIRZER:** That's a great story.

**WOODS:** Now I want to ask you guys to do something kind of like what I did at the beginning, where I made a pretty good case, I think, for listening to the album *Hand Cannot Erase* and particularly that last song, "Happy Returns," and how haunting it is. I'd like each of you to pick an album and make a similar case to listeners.

**AVIN:** You go first, Brad. I need a second [laughing].

**BIRZER:** Okay, no problem. You know, for me, and I hope you don't mind, Tom, talking too much about Big Big Train, but I first heard Big Big Train because of who's the editor of Carl Olson, who's the editor of *Catholic World Report*, a great guy. I first heard Big Big Train when their *Underfall Yard* album came out in 2009, and I feel like it was one of those things for me

personally that I had been wanting for a long time. I had been a prog listener – you know I'm 50, and I've been a prog listener, because I had two older brothers, since about 1972. So when I was about four or five, I was introduced to it, and I loved it even then, though I didn't quite understand what it was.

And for me, the only album – and I don't think you and I share this passion, Tom, on this, but really the only album that had ever quite spoken to me the way *The Underfall Yard* would was *Moving Pictures* by Rush. And they're very different albums, but it really was for me *The Underfall Yard*, and I was just – that was the first time they had David Longdon as the singer. It was the first time that you had Nick D'Virgilio as the drummer. You had Dave Gregory from XTC as the guitarist. Everything just came together in that album for me, the themes, everything.

And I have to tell a really quick – this is a name-dropping personal story, but I had a young woman in my Western heritage class at Hillsdale whose last name was D'Virgilio. And I thought, okay, this is too weird, and I came up to her after class, beautiful young woman, and I said, "Gabby, I have to tell you. My second favorite drummer in rock after Neil Peart is this man named Nick D'Virgilio. Are you any relation?" And she says, "Well, Professor Birzer, that's my uncle."

**WOODS:** Wow.

**BIRZER:** [laughing] So it was one of those great moments where it's like, holy Moses, this is too wild to pull all together. But yeah, for me, Tom, it's *The Underfall Yard*, and it's not – I think, again, not only is Greg Spawton brilliant, but that man has dedicated his life to making this band work, and now that he's in his 50s, it's working. And this is a story of struggle where the guy did everything he could to make this band work, and it was putting that group together in 2008 and 2009 to record that album that made that band what it is and where they're at today.

**WOODS:** All right, ready or not, Roie, it's your turn.

**AVIN:** [laughing] Well, so there's three albums that changed my life at different periods, and I'm not going to talk about all three at length, but Dream Theater's *Images and Words*, and I talk about how significant that was for me in starting basically this book off, and then Spock's Beard, *Delight*, which is their first album, and Porcupine Tree's *In Absentia*, which came out many years –

**BIRZER:** Oh, yeah.

**AVIN:** – and started a new era for me of listening. So those three together mark for me the most important albums in my listening over the last 25 years. But the album that I want to talk about, going against what you were saying, Tom, is actually Steven Wilson's *Raven That Refused to Sing*.

**WOODS:** Wow, that is a gutsy choice, all right.

**AVIN:** Yeah. So you know, I just think the time – the first time I had heard that album, I had been a long-time Steven Wilson fan. Porcupine Tree was one of my favorite bands, if not my

favorite band, during that few years. And I wasn't thrilled with his first two solo albums, because I thought they went way off to a whole other realm of experimenting, but *The Raven*, it just blew my mind. It blows my mind to this day. I think every song on it is complete and utter genius. And the last song, the title track, just devastates me every time. I mean, the first time I heard it and then if you watch the video, you start crying. It is so deep about the – the title track in that song, it's about this guy who misses his dead sister and sort of starts trying to communicate with a crow about that and how he's longing for his dead sister and all the emotions that come from that, and it's just a few lyrics, but the performances are intense. Yeah, I think it's the most brilliant album to come out in the last ten years.

**WOODS:** It's interesting, when I saw him in concert – I've seen him a couple of times, but it wasn't for that album, I don't think, where I heard him say, "I'm now going to perform for you the greatest song I've ever written, and it's "The Raven That Refused to Sing."

**BIRZER:** [laughing]

**WOODS:** And then he said, "Now, you can disagree with me, but you're wrong. This is the greatest song I ever wrote."

**AVIN:** I agree – listen, I'm one of those of people that agrees with him. I think –

**WOODS:** Yeah, I think he's full of it.

**AVIN:** I think it's a devastating song.

**BIRZER:** I like his chutzpah [laughing].

**WOODS:** I think it's a beautiful song. It really, really is. I agree. But I actually think, on that same album, even more devastating for me is the song "Drive Home."

**AVIN:** Another brilliant one.

**BIRZER:** Absolutely.

**WOODS:** And that's a video that people should go watch. You watch that "Drive Home" song, and I'll just say, I posted this on my Facebook page once, and I don't usually do music on my Facebook, but I posted this and I said, "Here are these" – it's animated – "Here are these two people driving down the street, and suddenly he turns and his companion is no longer in the car, and it seems this is impossible. What could have happened? Wait until you find out the terrible truth." And I just left it there. Well, everybody had to click. *What's the terrible truth? How is it possible that you could be driving along and then your companion is missing? What is the terrible truth?* And when you find out the terrible truth, it just grabs your heart and won't let go. It's amazing. They actually made a computer game out of this that my kids play –

**AVIN:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** – called *The Last Day of June*, and it's a – geez, that game is really great. We have to get back to it and finish it. We're close, but no cigar so far.

**AVIN:** Well, you talk about criminally underappreciated in America, Steven Wilson, who actually does really well here and is still not known. I mean, he's sold out two –

**WOODS:** Yeah, he's ignored. He's ignored.

**AVIN:** He sold out two nights at the Best Buy Theater in New York, which is a very nice-sized place.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I was there. Yeah, I was there for one of them.

**AVIN:** Yeah, he did two shows there. So he's doing really well, but yet can't get a sniff on *Rolling Stone* and different things like that. So who knows? But that guy's as good as anyone that's ever done it, in my opinion.

**WOODS:** Yeah, totally agree. Well, anyway –

**BIRZER:** Tom –

**WOODS:** I want to get a final word from Brad and a final word from Roie, so Brad, go ahead.

**BIRZER:** Oh, I just want to make sure, I've got to mention one other band, because after Big Big Train they're my favorite, and that's Glass Hammer, from America. And they're a band that's been around since 1992, so their 26th year, and like Big Big Train, they get better with every single album. And I think their last album, *Valkyrie*, from last year, I think it is one of the strongest albums that I've ever heard. And so not only do I love the band, but I would feel remiss after this whole conversation if I didn't mention them and especially that album.

**WOODS:** All right, I appreciate that. And then Roie, you are the author of the book. Why don't you make your elevator pitch for why people should get it? By the way, I'm going to of course link to the book. It's *Essential Modern Progressive Rock Albums: Images and Words Behind Prog's Most Celebrate Albums 1990 - 2016*. I'll link to that at [TomWoods.com/1204](http://TomWoods.com/1204), our show notes page for today.

**AVIN:** Awesome, thank you. And Tom, thanks for having me on. I appreciate it. It's a lot of fun to always talk about it. And I appreciate you bringing prog to your audience. That's always great to have somebody like you doing that.

**WOODS:** I want their lives to be better, and honestly, this makes your life better.

**AVIN:** [laughing]

**BIRZER:** [laughing] Amen.

**WOODS:** I mean, by the way, if we're talking about older prog, if you listen to "Turn of the Century," by Yes, from 1977, that makes your life better. Objectively, your life is now better.

**BIRZER:** It does.

**WOODS:** All right, anyway, go ahead, Roie. Sorry to take your time.

**AVIN:** Well, you know, I think it's important to note that this book is not about saying that prog is better now or that prog back then wasn't good or anything like that. It's simply saying: you don't have to only listen to Yes and Genesis. There is other music to listen to, and it's fantastic. And what I tried to do in this book is just bring that to light. Some of these albums are albums that people know. Some of them, they've never heard of. Take some time. There's over 70 albums covered in the book. And prog today is doing really well. It's very healthy. It's become the rock music of this modern era that we're in with bands that are flourishing, bands that are doing some of the most creative music that has ever been out. And if you like Yes and you think nothing's better than Yes, that's great. We love Yes. But that doesn't mean some of these bands aren't great. There's a lot of bands like Haken, Deerhunter, Thank You Scientist, all of these brand-new bands that have come out in the last five to ten years that are doing some of the most amazing music you'll hear. And I hope people check out the book. I hope they check out some of the bands and, like you're saying, make their lives better.

**WOODS:** Absolutely. Well, Roie Avin and Brad Birzer, I wish we could talk for four hours, but maybe – we've got to do this again, obviously. I'm actually –

**BIRZER:** Oh, absolutely.

**AVIN:** Yeah, any time.

**WOODS:** – in a bit of haste because I have some travel coming up, but we should do this again, especially because I've been teasing this episode for like a year and a half or two years. "When are you going to have Brad Birzer back on?" That's when I know I've got a real, hardcore *Tom Woods Show* fan, when they say, "When are you going to have Brad on to talk about music again?" I say, "Yeah, you guys get me. You people get me."

**AVIN:** Tom, we need to get you over to Morsefest and start getting into the whole Neal Morse pipe, too.

**WOODS:** All right, look, I'm open to all of it. So anyway, again, thanks to both you gentlemen. Brad, we'll talk about your book when it comes out, of course, but again, thanks to both of you. We'll talk to you soon.

**AVIN:** Thank you very much.

**BIRZER:** It was great talking to you guys. Thanks so much, Tom and Roie.