

Review

Roger "Twiggy" Day: Pirate of the Airwaves

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330 pages, hard cover, illustrated black and white and colour

In front of me finally lies the book I had wanted to read years ago about Cheltenham-born Roger Thomas, who has a 56-year career within the radio industry and whom millions of listeners of his programmes have come to know as Roger "Twiggy" Day. He took a long time to share his many memories with us.

He does come right away with an opener that is unprecedented. Usually one preface can be found at the beginning of a book. Roger picks up right away with four people, each of whom has written their own foreword and, of course, a memory of their time spent with Roger. They include Ron O'Quinn, his programme director at Swinging Radio England, and Andy Archer, whom he met as a colleague at a number of radio stations.

The first chapter describes Roger's home life with his parents and older brother, and the first contact with that delightful little cabinet, in which the lamps glowed and from which the signal entered the living room, was when his parents requested a request record from BBC Radio's Uncle Mac on the occasion of his 5th birthday in 1950.

But also the chapter where he describes his teenage years and not radio was there for his debut but an appearance on Southern TV's television programme, Pop the question.

Meanwhile, Roger had already discovered the first offshore radio stations with Radio Caroline initially being the favourite but with the arrival of Radio London a different choice was made. In 1965, having already had the requisite experience in the local and regional ballroom as a deejay, he attended a Big L Roadshow at the Marquee Club in London and had the courage to speak to Dave Cash at the bar asking if there might be a chance to get a job at Radio London.

Dave told him that all the jobs were taken but that a new radio station would soon be on air: Swinging Radio England. Naturally, Roger recounted that time when he learned a lot about radio making from Ron O'Quinn and his colleagues. Especially about presenting a programme by speaking to only one listener and thus getting a big reach. Too bad there is no depth in his perception of that period. Surely it must have been a thrill, involving a lot of experiences with various colleagues, from which a great story could have emerged.

Of course, he also talks about presenting the news on both SRE and Britain Radio, which he was not cut out for and was quickly removed from. By the way, Roger Day was the first person to get a job interview at SRE as an Englishman. The second, Peter Dee, subsequently had to change his name because it sounded too much like Roger's name. What if Peter had been hired first. Would Roger Day then have been the person who had to change his name to Johnnie Walker?

One notable item, of which I had not heard before, was his involvement in test broadcasts of Radio Andorra, aimed at England, in April 1967, almost two years earlier than Don Allen could be heard once via the same station. It remained with testing because reception in England was a disaster.

Of course, the time at Caroline South and Caroline International is described with Roger also publishing a timeline of when he came on board and each time also when he went back ashore with the tender. After the seizure of both Caroline ships, Roger plunged back into performing in various clubs but also got the opportunity to join Radio Luxembourg from June 1st, 1968.

Here he worked with former offshore radio deejays like Colin Nichol, Tony Prince and Paul Kaye. But how disappointing it was, the programmes were presented with the use of a technician, one of whom even fell asleep during his shift. What caused this was not revealed. In between, he married his new love Jenny Brown and decided to resign in October 1968. Working at '208' was so disappointing but a request for Roger to accompany The Beachboys' tour as a presenter also led to the decision.

He himself also went back to presenting deejay shows here and there, treating us in a separate chapter with a listing of venues without any kind of stories what went on during those gatherings. Missed opportunity for readers. But even that was temporary. It came to an end as he was approached by Meister and Bollier to become the programme director of the new station in 1970, Radio Nordsee International.

At the time of use of the 186 metres, the message went from Roger to the leadership to commission another frequency as interference from the shipping bands was bound to happen. However, Roger Day probably did not have someone reading intensively since he is talking about the 86 metres. Regarding RNI, he recounted, among other things, the arrival of Larry Tremaine from the US, whom he immediately could not stand. Unfortunately, no substantiation followed as to why this was the case. Of course, the period comes up when RNI was Radio Caroline for a short period and, because of Larry Tremaine, he was no longer wanted on board the MEBO II at a certain point.

Bread had to be earned and so Roger went 'on the road again', unfortunately listing the gigs without sharing with the reader the experiences. Late January 1973 saw the start of a new radio period at United Biscuit Network, run by Dave Dennis, which lasted over seven months for Day as he got a job that would link him to one of the first ILR stations, Piccadilly Radio in Manchester, until the end of September 1979.

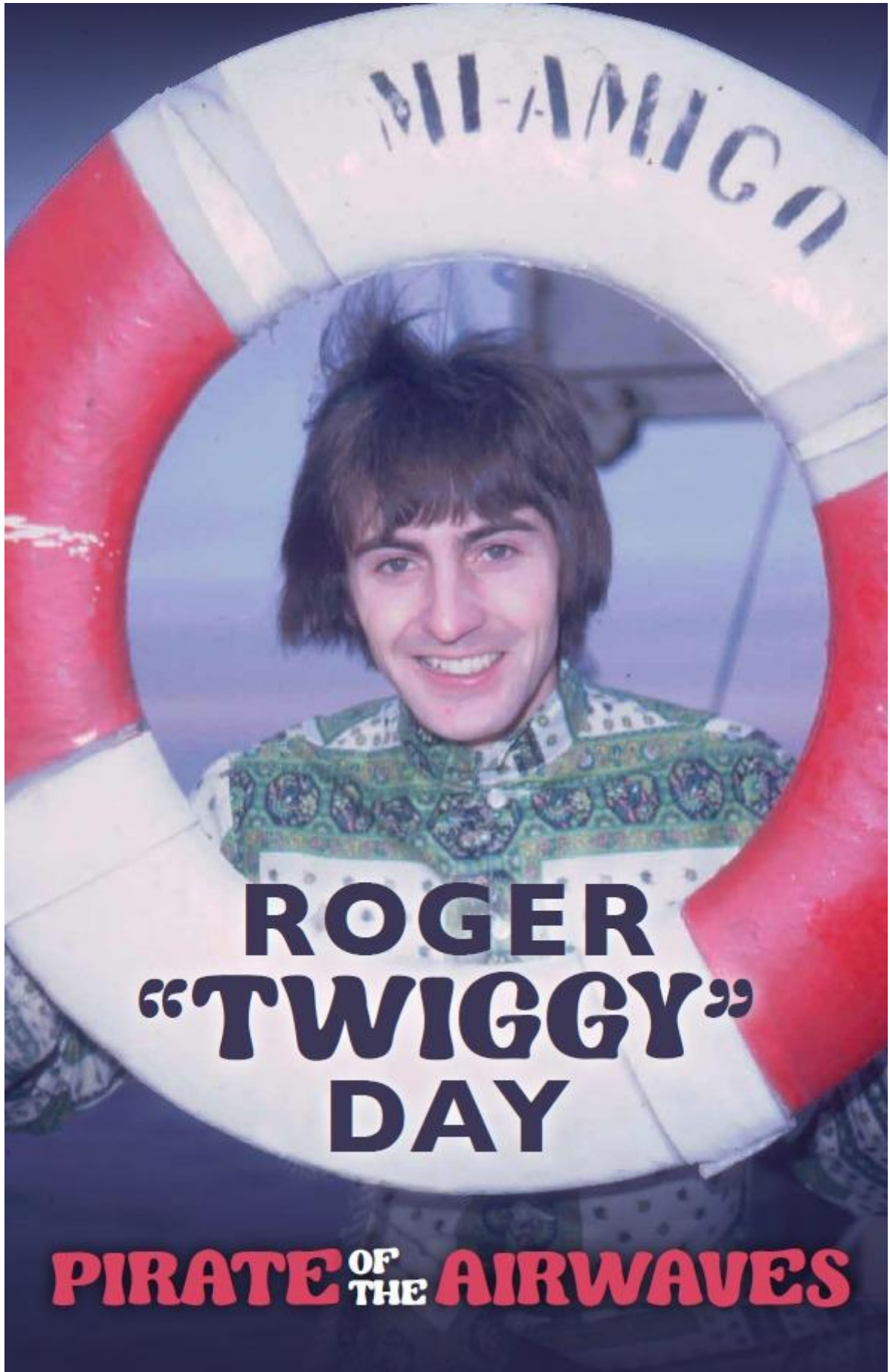
He was the first voice heard on the station, which was run by Stevie Merike, a former Radio Caroline colleague. In those early days, Roger writes, he experienced his "only" gig by voicing spots for Granada TV. Truly a very entertaining chapter to read at least twice to take it all in properly. But once again, the question arises in my mind whether Roger had anyone read along because two more TV appearances come along. Moreover, I wonder why there was absolutely no mention of the return to Radio Caroline in 1973. However briefly, a reference and a reason why this was so brief is a historic omission in Roger Day's book.

Besides an ode to his favourite football team Manchester United, of which he was a huge fan from an early age, Roger takes us by the hand to various ILR stations where he was active. All this may or may not have been appreciated and, moreover, he himself was not always happy with the stations where he subsequently worked including BRBM, Radio West Bristol, Invicta Sound Kent, Pirate FM, Jazz FM, again Piccadilly Radio, Channel Travel Radio and more.

On half a page, Roger then reports his involvement in the Isle of Man longwave project that did not get off the ground and lets us know more about reunions he was involved in. But Pirate BBC Radio Essex and then his time at Local BBC Radio get more attention as well as radio projects of his own. In 2015, Roger decided to serve a totally different employer and that is as a driver at Boots and recounts his health problems and is honest regarding his divorce from his wife, where he also has words of praise for her. Of course, Roger Day makes space for the success of Boom Radio.

Speaking of space, at the back of the book there are seven blank pages that, according to every reviewer, should have been filled with source references to photos and images and a closing note: Acknowledgements. Maybe for the next printing Roger Day?

Hans Knot



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