The Nazz – Nazz Nazz (1969)

Side one *1. "Forget All About It" – 3:15 2. "Not Wrong Long" – 2:30 3. "Rain Rider" – 3:52 4. "Gonna Cry Today" – 3:15 5. "Meridian Leeward" – 3:20 6. "Under the Ice" – 5:40* Side two *7. "Hang On Paul" – 2:42 8. "Kiddie Boy" – 3:30 9. "Featherbedding Lover" – 2:47 10. "Letters Don't Count" – 3:25 11. "A Beautiful Song" – 11:15* Robert "Stewkey" Antoni: vocals Thom Mooney: drums, vocals Todd Rundgren: guitar, keyboards, horn arrangements, string arrangements, vocals Carson Van Osten: bass, vocals

Originally intended as a double album titled Fungo Bat, Nazz Nazz is at once as equally diverse and more cohesive than the Nazz's eponymous debut. It's a weird trick, but the group pulls it off, largely due to the rapidly maturing talents of Todd Rundgren, their main songwriter and producer. Throughout the Nazz's first record, he proved that he was a gifted mimic and a savvy melodicist, yet he never quite landed upon a signature style outside of their debut single "Hello It's Me"/"Open My Eyes." Not coincidentally, these were the two songs on the record that the Nazz produced themselves, and they followed that lead on Nazz Nazz, fusing their sundry influences into a distinctive psych pop sound. Sonically, it's certainly more ambitious than its predecessor and, apart from the odd forays into soul and blues (filtered through Cream, naturally) on "Featherbedding Lover" and "Kiddie Boy," it's more consistent. In many ways, that makes Nazz Nazz a better listen than its predecessor, even if it doesn't have a knockout punch like "Open My Eyes." That's because Rundgren's songs exhibit a stronger sense of identity, as ballads like "Letters Don't Count" and snarky pop-rockers like "Hang On Paul" point the way toward his solo career. There are a few embarrassing detours, such as the hippie-dippy "Meridian Leeward," but the second Nazz record rivals the first because it offers a progression. It shows that the band, or at least Rundgren, have figured out how to blend their influences into something original. the Nazz may never have delivered a follow-up to this -- Nazz III consists of the remaining sessions from the abandoned double album -- but this is certainly ground zero for Rundgren's fascinating solo career. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, Rovi

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