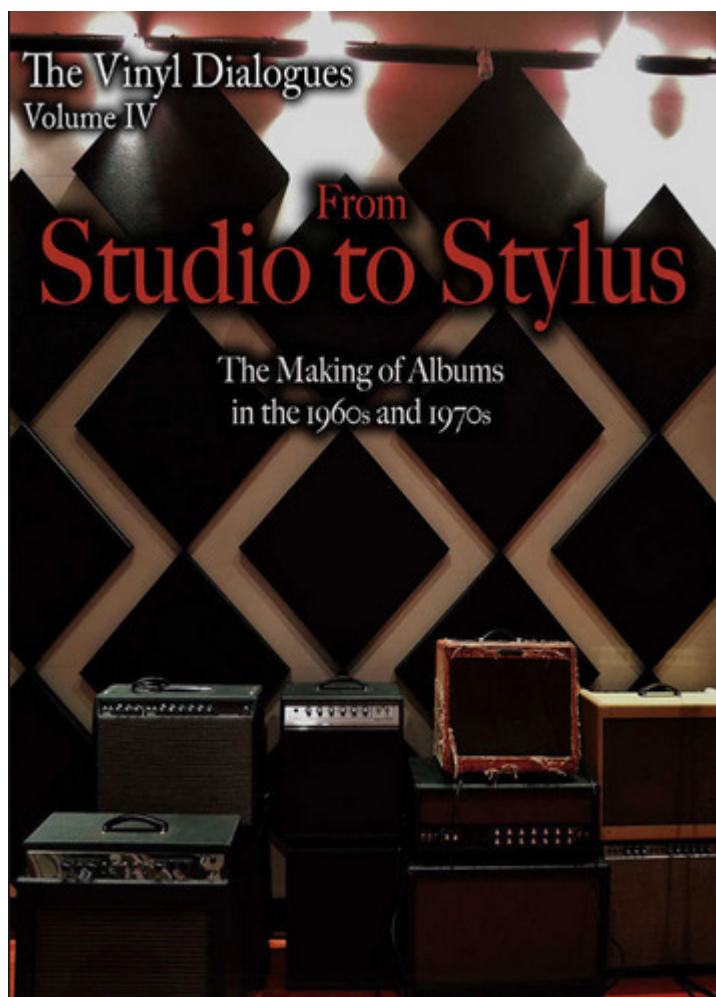


ROCK ON

‘Volume IV’ is latest in powerful series

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The Vinyl Dialogues, Volume IV: From Studio to Stylus” by Mike Morsch. Columbus, Ohio: Biblio Publishing, 201, 291 pages, \$15.95.



Growing up in the 1960s, you could not help but be influenced by what came to be known as the “British Invasion.” I entered the first grade at Waverly Elementary School in the fall of 1964, so my entire childhood took place against a backdrop of the cultural revolution that seemed to be evolving at an ever-increasing pace. If they were still alive, my parents would attest to the fact that the first record I ever genuinely fell in love with was “I’m Henry the Eighth, I Am” by Herman’s Hermits. I literally played the 45 until it wore out; I knew the words by heart and often sang the song on the playground during recess.

Why am I telling you this? Because one of the bands Mike Morsch profiles in the latest addition to his “Vinyl Dialogues” series, “Volume IV: From Studio to Stylus,” is Herman’s Hermits – more specifically the leader of the group, Peter Noone, who we all referred to as “Herman.” It is easy today to forget just how big they were in the early to mid-1960s. “With the Beatles taking America by storm in February 1964 and laying the foundation for other British groups, Herman’s Hermits would capitalize and have a huge

year in 1965,” Morsch explains in “Something Told Them They Were Into Something Good,” the third chapter and, for reasons that should be obvious, one of my favorites. “Releasing their first album, the self-titled ‘Herman’s Hermits,’ in February 1965, the group would eventually surpass the Beatles as the top-selling pop group in the U.S. that year. Between August 1964 and September 1967, Herman’s Hermits released 19 singles, 14 of which made the Top 20 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart. Ten of those were Top 10 singles, with two of those reaching No. 1 in the U.S.”

Going way beyond the statistics, however, the real value in Morsch’s chronicle lies in the window he provides into what it was like in those primordial, chaotic days for future superstars. Picture the following scene, affectionately recalled by Noone during his interview with Morsch: “Sometimes we would get in the van after a gig in the north of England, drive all night, and get into the studio at six in the morning. Because we were kids and enthusiastic, nobody ever complained,” Noone said. “People

used to sleep at different times in the van. We all couldn't sleep at the same time. We'd get to the studio early in the morning and The Animals would be packing up their gear and putting it into their van to go do their thing. It all seemed perfectly natural."

As noted above, this is the fourth installment in an ongoing series of books by Morsch. The first volume, "The Vinyl Dialogues: Stories Behind Memorable Albums of the 1970s as Told by the Artists," was released in 2014. It was followed by "The Vinyl Dialogues II: Dropping the Needle" in 2015 and "The Vinyl Dialogues Volume III: Stacks of Wax" in 2016; I have reviewed all three in the Daily News.

Since his very first foray into documenting the genesis of some of the best, most enduring music ever produced, I have stayed in touch with the author. Personally, I hope he never tires in his quest to keep us informed of the behind-the-scenes stories endemic to the creative process. It's not "just" music as many of the true believers like to assert; the recordings made by the artists Morsch spoke with really did – and continue to – change the world.

"Volume IV" continues the legacy of journalistic excellence that has come to characterize Morsch's career. In this exquisite postscript to the annals of music history, he provides an insider's perspective on the making of 27 classic albums from what many consider to be the most fertile and creative period in our nation's never-ending musical journey. Among the other artists highlighted in this edition are The Shirelles, Peter, Paul and Mary, The Association, Gary Puckett and the Union Gap, the 1910 Fruitgum Company, the 5th Dimension, Three Dog Night, Poco, The Beach Boys, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, the Starland Vocal Band, The Stanky Brown Group, Mary Kay Place, the Marshall Tucker Band, the Captain & Tennille and The Stylistics. Those of a certain age will immediately recognize these artists as some of the greatest performers of all time; many of my peers will no doubt have cherished memories of important moments in their lives accentuated by their songs playing in the background.

Which brings me to the eighth grade. The next song I fell in love with during my seemingly never-ending adolescence was "Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)" by Looking Glass. I remember vividly the first time I heard Elliot Lurie's melancholy masterpiece; I still know the lyrics by heart. And apparently, given the reverence still afforded the composition by millions around the world right up to the present day, I was not alone in my captivation. Again, witness the following excerpt from Morsch's interview with Lurie in the chapter he includes about the group's phenomenal No. 1 hit: "It's unbelievable to me that the song has endured the way that it has. I think part of it is the lyrics. People identify with a story song. Another part of it is that hunt-and-peck production of it that we did. When you hear that song on radio today, it doesn't sound quite as dated as some of the other things because it's not quite a Grass Roots record and it's not quite a rock record. There's something a little different about it." Yes there is; it's been quite a few years since eighth grade, but I still get teary-eyed every time I hear those opening notes.

For the record, Morsch is a 38-year veteran of the newspaper business, most recently as executive editor of Montgomery Media in Fort Washington, Pa. He has been writing about music for the past 10 years; in addition to the present series, he is also the author of "Dancing in My Underwear: The Soundtrack of My Life." An ardent supporter of the local music scene in Philadelphia, his favorite bands are the Beach Boys, Hall & Oates and America. On a more personal level, I have begrudgingly forgiven him for the lack of reverence and admiration he consistently shows toward Led Zeppelin.

As I have said in previous reviews, Morsch has done it again. The man is on a mission. Let's hope he never slows down. Highly recommended.

– Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.