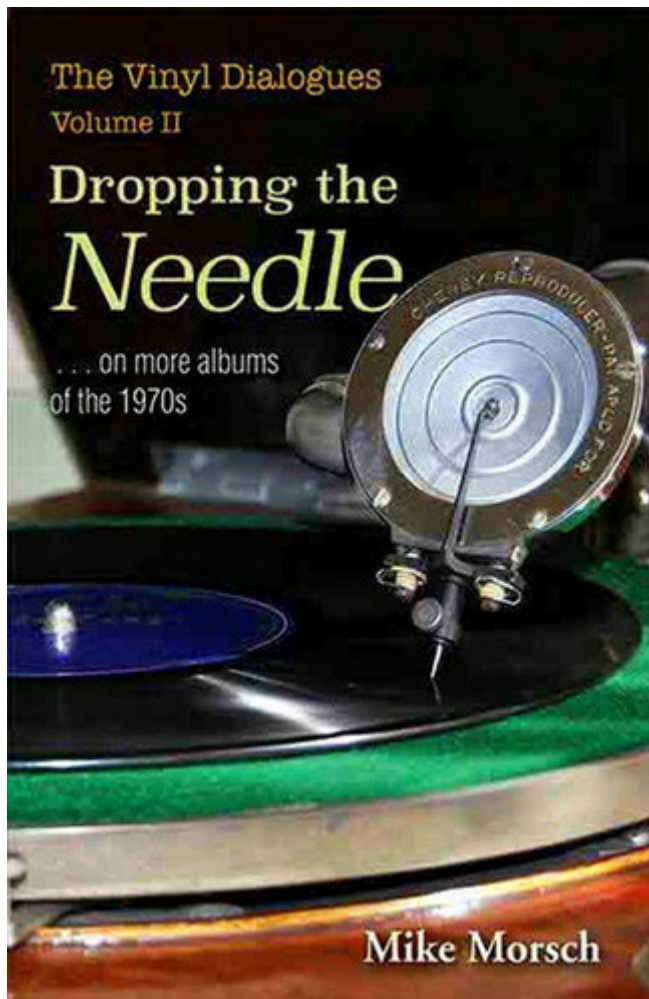


'Dropping the Needle' rocks!

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"The Vinyl Dialogues, Volume II: Dropping the Needle ... on More Albums of the 1970s," by Mike Morsch. Columbus, Ohio: Biblio Publishing, 2015, 270 pages, \$14.95.



Randy Bachman had written a song for his brother Gary, who had a speech impediment," Mike Morsch explains in "The hit that the world wasn't supposed to hear," a chapter in his new book, "The Vinyl Dialogues, Volume II," about one of Bachman-Turner Overdrive's biggest hit singles. "It was an instrumental, but Randy put lyrics on it that included some words that he intentionally stuttered while singing, intending it as a joke and for only his brother's ears."

"Randy Bachman had no intention of letting the rest of the world hear that song," Morsch continues. "But once he heard it, Charlie Fach (vice president of Mercury Records) did. There would now be nine songs instead of eight on the album. The additional song was 'You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet,' and it would become BTO's first and only No. 1 single. Randy Bachman was embarrassed by the song, so much so that he admitted to turning the volume down when it was played on the radio."

Children of the 1970s: Mike Morsch has done it again!

As a few of the more astute readers (and music connoisseurs) may recall, I reviewed Morsch's

last attempt to further immortalize the seminal recording artists of the 1970s, "The Vinyl Dialogues: Stories Behind Memorable Albums of the 1970s," in the Daily News a little more than a year ago (Sept. 7, 2014). And although I enjoyed that inaugural effort immensely, I have to admit I found his latest work to be even more captivating.

In the original volume, Morsch provided readers with a behind-the-scenes look at how 31 albums of the 1970s came to occupy their rightful place in the pantheon of the all-time greatest music ever recorded – at least to anyone who spent their formative years during this immensely creative period of American popular music. This time around, he augments his initial collection by interviewing the driving forces behind 26 additional tours de force.

As was the case with the original book, the selection of musicians runs the gamut from hard rock to country, with virtually every genre having some representation. In this offering, for instance, he

interviews members of such influential groups as The Beach Boys, Sly and the Family Stone, Gallery, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Eagles, Kansas, Dire Straits, The Cars, Blondie, Loverboy and The Statler Brothers (just to name a few) as well as individual artists and duos such as B.J. Thomas, Maureen McGovern, Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis Jr., Lou Christie, Ricci Martin, Hall & Oates, Guy Hovis and Ralna English, and Gino Vannelli.

By the way, if you don't recognize a few of those names, it isn't really your fault – you were just not lucky enough to be coming of age during one of the most astonishingly groundbreaking musical eras the world has ever experienced. Then again, I guess I could be biased when it comes to my affinity for great songs that have obviously stood the test of time.

Without a doubt, one of the reasons I was drawn to “Dropping the Needle” was the inclusion of a chapter devoted to The Cars, one of my all-time favorite bands – then and now. Hearing Morsch describe the process that produced one of the most excitingly original albums ever brought back warm memories and a renewed interest in the musicians who took their rightful place at the forefront of the music scene during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

“By the end of the three-week stay in London, (Elliot) Easton and his Boston-based bandmates – Ric Ocasek, Benjamin Orr, Greg Hawkes and David Robinson – had cut an album that many would come to consider a rock masterpiece, the self-titled ‘The Cars.’ “ Morsch writes in “A pair of snakeskin boots like Brian Jones had,” the 21st chapter. “The record took only 12 days to record and nine days to mix. By late 1978, the album would be certified platinum.”

What I found most endearing about Morsch's narrative, however, were the numerous anecdotes and quotes he includes that add an element of humanity to the individuals he elected to profile in this exquisite primer. For example, consider the following excerpt about how the enormous success of The Cars' debut affected its members: “The album cover on ‘The Cars’ features a woman behind the wheel of a car, peeking out from under her right arm that is lying across her forehead, with a big smile and lips with bright red lipstick. But that cover design was not the band's original intent. Easton said that to support the album, the band did personal appearances at record stores. Fans would buy the album and then file by a table where the band members were sitting to get it signed. Easton said he got so tired of signing that album cover with that big grinning face and those big red lips that he'd sometimes black out some of the teeth with his marker.”

All I can say is: Let the good times roll!

Morsch is executive director of Packet Media Group in Princeton, N.J. A 1982 graduate of the University of Iowa, where he majored in journalism – and where he also played on the Hawkeyes' baseball team – his career has included stints as a reporter, editor and columnist for newspapers in Iowa, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The recipient of several prestigious awards, his previous books include “Dancing in My Underwear: The Soundtrack of My Life,” and the predecessor to the current release, mentioned above.

As the author notes in the introduction: “These dialogues are filled with insight, sparkle and fond recollections. The stories behind the memorable albums in this book will surely resonate with many – from the artists who crafted them to the listeners, like you and me, who still appreciate the music that filled up the soundtracks of our lives.”

After reading “Dropping the Needle,” I could not agree more. Morsch could have been my roommate in college; I have a feeling we would have gotten along splendidly. Go out and buy this one today!

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