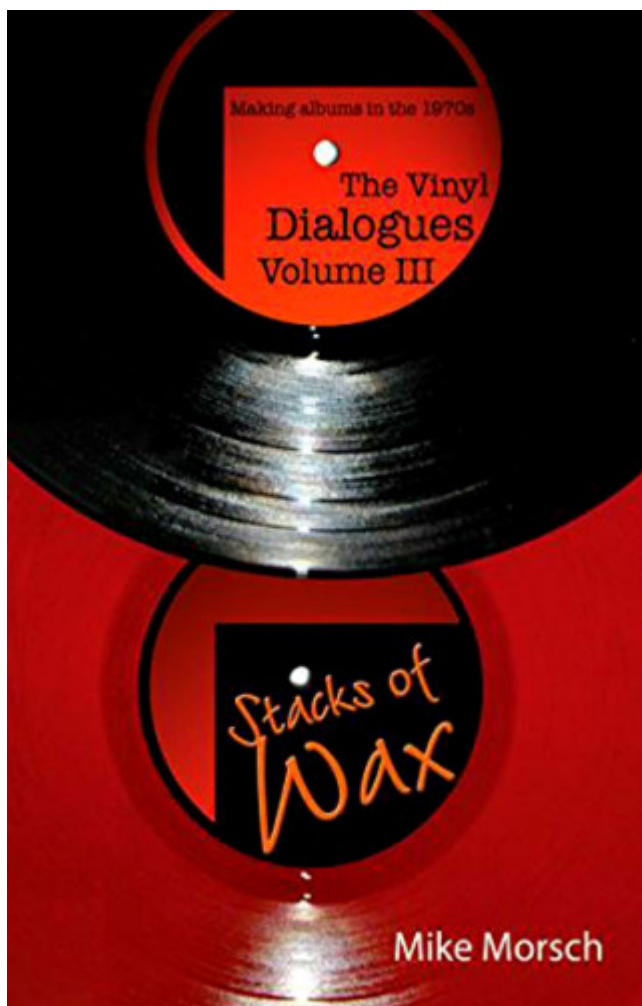


Book on musicians a gold mine

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“The Vinyl Dialogues, Volume III: Stacks of Wax” by Mike Morsch. Columbus, Ohio: Biblio Publishing, 2016, 308 pages, \$16.95.



“The Vinyl Dialogues series has, from the beginning, been about accurately documenting the recollections and perspectives of the artists who made the music that is the soundtrack of my generation, specifically in the 1960s and 1970s,” Mike Morsch explains in the preface to “The Vinyl Dialogues, Volume III: Stacks of Wax,” his latest addition to the series he initiated a couple of years ago. “But there seems to be a sense of urgency now. The artists who crafted the soundtrack of our lives are getting older, and some of them are ‘moving on.’ And with them go those stories about the making of the music.”

As implied by the title, this is the third volume in “The Vinyl Dialogues” series, the first being “The Vinyl Dialogues: Stories Behind Memorable Albums of the 1970s as Told by the Artists,” which was published in 2014 (and reviewed in the Daily News on Nov. 7, 2014), which was followed by “The Vinyl Dialogues, Volume II: Dropping the Needle... on More Albums of the 1970s,” which was released in 2015 (and reviewed Nov. 22, 2015). Both were instant must-reads for anyone who came of age during the 1960s and 1970s and both have been accepted for inclusion in the Rock and Roll Hall

of Fame archives. I suspect the third volume will find a home there as well.

“Stacks of Wax” is a virtual gold mine of insights and inside stories of how some of the most enduring music the world has ever known was created. What makes Morsch’s work stand out from many of his contemporaries who are writing about the music from this era, however, is that his narrative is based entirely on 28 personal interviews he conducted with the artists who are featured in this intimate chronicle of a bygone era in popular music. Most chapters are augmented with photographs of the individuals he interviewed, which adds to the overall appeal of the book. Among the seminal songwriters, musicians, performers and innovators interviewed were Natalie Cole, Mark Lindsay of Paul Revere and the Raiders, Fito de la Parra of Canned Heat, Walter Williams of the O’Jays, Peter Wolf of the J. Geils Band, Carl Palmer of Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Ruth Pointer of the Pointer Sisters, Rick Allen of Def Leppard, Henry Fambrough of the Spinners, Jim Messina of

Loggins and Messina, Daryl Hall and John Oates of Hall and Oates and Art Garfunkel of Simon and Garfunkel. The man is definitely connected.

One chapter that stood out for me was “Surviving the Stranglehold of a Big Psychological Mess,” which was based on the recollections of Derek St. Holmes, an original member of the Ted Nugent Band, one of the rock musicians I was really into during the mid-1970s. Reading about his experiences working with Nugent brought back many fond memories of that particular time in my life. Moreover, it is also interesting to read about the intense conflicts that musicians and performers inevitably encounter, and how they ultimately come to terms with those experiences – or don’t, in some cases – later in life.

“Nugent and St. Holmes had their differences over the years,” Morsch notes in reference to their often volatile relationship. “They first parted ways in 1978 over creative and financial issues. ... Over the years, St. Holmes and Nugent have been able to patch up their differences, and St. Holmes has toured with Nugent the past several years when the latter is on the road. ‘It’s all water under the bridge now. Ted and I are good buddies,’ said St. Holmes. ‘Bottom line – Ted is like my big brother and sometimes we get along and sometimes we don’t. But I listen to him because if it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be here. If it wasn’t for his guidance, I wouldn’t be here. But if it wasn’t for some of my musical talent, he wouldn’t be where he is. As you get older, things do become more clear.’”

Perhaps the saddest story in the book revolved around Cole. Her struggle with addiction has been widely documented and it contributed to her untimely death last year. In the preface, Morsch described his interview with Cole before a show in New Brunswick, N.J., in March 2015: “Mrs. Cole wasn’t impolite or evasive, just uninterested. In fact, she sounded a bit run-down – fragile even – so much so that I inquired about her health. She had experienced health issues in the past, announcing in 2008 that she had been diagnosed with hepatitis C, which she attributed to intravenous drug use. That eventually led to her having a kidney transplant in 2009. But she assured me that she was fine.”

“In March 2015, Cole was still performing sold-out shows and seemed to have her health issues under control,” Morsch continues in “Blown Away by Her Own Voice on a Boom Box,” which detailed the making of “Inseparable,” the album that made Cole a superstar in 1975. “‘I’m feeling pretty good. I’ve had some really crazy, crazy health issues for a while, but I feel so much better now,’ she said. It would not last. She ended up having to cancel several shows in December 2015 because of health issues. On Dec. 31, 2015, Cole died at the age of 65 at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles of congestive heart failure.”

A 1982 graduate of the University of Iowa, where he majored in journalism while also playing baseball for the Hawkeyes, Morsch is executive editor and digital news director of Packet Media LLC in Princeton, N.J. His resume includes serving as a reporter, editor and columnist for newspapers in Iowa, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He has received numerous awards for his writing from various associations. This is actually his fourth book; before he began the “Vinyl Dialogues” project, he penned “Dancing in My Underwear: The Soundtrack of my Life,” which was published in 2013.

Morsch and I have been friends ever since I reviewed his first installment in 2014, and we correspond regularly through Facebook. I noted in my inaugural review of his work that he and I would have been great college roommates. If this music is as important to you as it is to us, you’ll definitely want to add this one to your collection. Rock on, Mike!

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