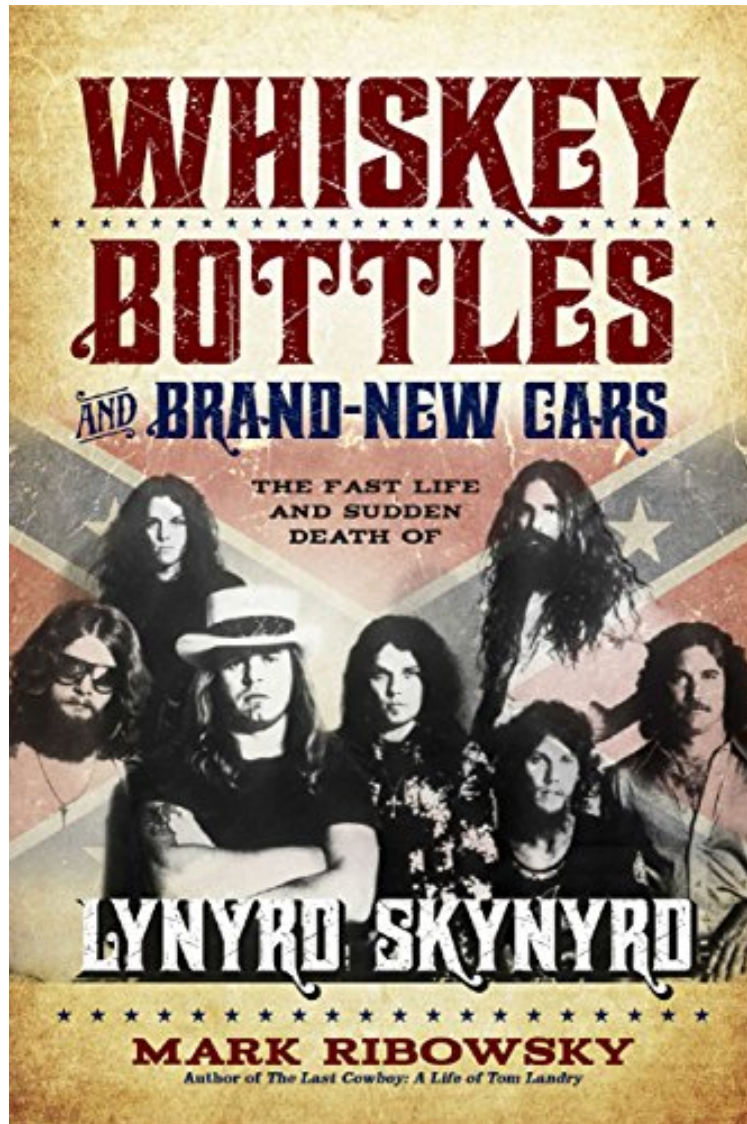


[Download] Whiskey Bottles and Brand-New Cars: The Fast Life and Sudden Death of Lynyrd Skynyrd

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Mark Ribowsky

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Mark Ribowsky : Whiskey Bottles and Brand-New Cars: The Fast Life and Sudden Death of Lynyrd Skynyrd before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Whiskey Bottles and Brand-New Cars: The Fast Life and Sudden Death of Lynyrd Skynyrd:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. wasted time and moneyBy Markcould post a lengthy review of just how bad this book is, but others have the issues covered pretty well. I'm having a hard time even wanting to finish reading this book, it is so full of errors and innuendo. That "flowery language" others mention, some of that is just

lifting parts of lyrics from songs by Frankie Valli and The Doors, without credit. Was there not a fact checker or proof reader for this book? In this day of instant internet research, there is just no excuse for these kinds of mistakes. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Complete garbage. By Richard Thrown together book culled from magazines other books. Complete garbage. 53 of 57 people found the following review helpful. Lord knows I can't unread this book! By Customer To paraphrase both the classic and current editions of Lynyrd Skynyrd, Lord knows I can't unread this book. If not for the author's stunning lack of research, unfamiliarity with his subject and clear agenda to manufacture controversy where little controversy previously existed, *Whiskey Bottles and Brand New Cars* would wholly unmemorable. Unfortunately, that's not the case. For starters, look at Mr. Ribowsky's research listed in the bibliography. For what he calls the definitive biography of Lynyrd Skynyrd, he interviewed exactly eight people. That's right, eight, and of those at least five had been fired or otherwise dismissed by the band prior to the October 1977 plane crash that devastated the group. He also cites books, many of a biographical nature, which he then categorizes as "BS" in the text. Then Mr. Ribowsky is on to magazine articles, blogs, the crash report, official and YouTube video and, finally, the liner notes to the 2001 re-release of Skynyrd's 1976 live album. As close as I can figure, he basically used the internet. Huh. I believe a biographer should know the subject of his biographical work intimately. In the case of Lynyrd Skynyrd, a band decimated by an airplane crash nearly 40 years ago, information may sometimes be difficult to find. Difficult, but not impossible. Let's start with the basics: the guy should know the music. In order to illustrate just a few examples showing that this isn't the case, we should begin with Skynyrd's most enduring song, *Free Bird*. Those familiar with it know the somber slide guitar played during the song's lyrical section. While Mr. Ribowsky works to show the importance of the instrumentation, interaction of the band and who plays what, he gets the players completely wrong — Gary Rossington, not Allen Collins plays the slide and he always has. Since that is crystal clear on some videos Mr. Ribowsky lists in source material, it is clear that he either didn't actually watch them or didn't know which band member was which. He speaks about a song that lashes out at the music industry. It's true that they had one, "Workin' for MCA", but he lists it as "Don't Ask Me No Questions" from the same album. Even for non-fans, one look at the lyrics to the two songs or even simply their titles would illustrate the difference. He goes on to describe a subject not present in "No Questions" or "MCA", making one wonder what he was listening to or if he listened at all. Simple stuff, simple evidence, simply inaccurate! Mr. Ribowsky discusses an incident where Skynyrd was so upset with the mix of an album that guitarist Ed King was dispatched to Los Angeles to remix it for release. While some details are sketchy, this event is well-known and did occur pretty much as the book describes except for two key details: wrong album, wrong year. If "wrong year" was one of his themes, he sure got that right! He discusses a 1974 Long Island concert as having happened in 1973 and notes two shows where Skynyrd went all the way to England for one-off appearances in 1975 and 1976. Those last two never happened and he must have relied on a couple of unnamed sources for the dates, sources that he uses several times going forward: bootleg concert recordings! Now bootleg records are actually great sources for seeing what songs a band played, how they played them and to get the gist of a particular performance on a particular day. However, bootleggers from the 1970s aren't exactly famous for knowing one day from the next or even the year as is the case here. One of the few things about Skynyrd that is well documented are their concert appearances. The information is easy to find and even included in one of the bibliography-listed sources; he apparently didn't bother to look. Ribowsky's depiction of Skynyrd's singer and leader Ronnie Van Zant essentially boils him down as a talented, tortured, violent psychotic alcoholic and drug addict with a daddy complex. For the record, Ronnie settled many an argument — including within the band — with his fists. He and the band drank and drugged excessively which probably isn't headline news to anyone who knows much about rock music in the seventies. Ronnie himself confirmed a lot of this in interviews and wrote several songs that dealt with drinking and drugging in ways that are largely unmatched even 40 years later. Both from the viewpoint of knowing the dangerous routine of the rock and roll road as in "Roll Gypsy Roll", as well as the eerie and cautionary tales in "That Smell", Ronnie was an open book in that respect. While certainly not over the hump at the time of the crash, Ronnie and the band were making great strides in cleaning things up in 1977. Although Ribowsky refutes this, first-hand sources — if he'd spoken to any — could have confirmed it. Again, all of the information was out there. As far as fighting goes, there's no doubt that Ronnie led his band with an iron fist. He's been described as one of the kindest people you could ever meet and also as a mean drunk. It is pretty clear that too much booze left him prone to seeking quick and violent solutions, but the man simply wasn't the nut that Mr. Ribowsky describes. His lyrics were kept in his head and not written down. He thought that if he couldn't remember it, it wasn't worth remembering. Several band members have lamented over the years about the ones that were lost. Ronnie got where he was by being talented and tough. God help those who crossed him; Ronnie settled things the same way in adulthood as he did growing up on the wrong side of the tracks in Florida. Ronnie Van Zant wrote songs that bore common messages expressed so effectively that they're still relevant in 2015. Many were about family and Ribowsky somehow twists them into the daddy complex. He does this by tying lyrics into quotes from Ronnie's father Lacy Van Zant about Ronnie not getting a high school diploma. Lacy was, in fact, widely quoted

on the subject. He points out that his son was only one credit shy of graduation, but why did he talk about it at all? Their documented interactions confirmed closeness, love and respect. However, coming from what was called "Shantytown" in Jacksonville Florida, maybe Lacy didn't want people to think his son was an uneducated hick. I'll never know, but I guess that Ribowsky's hypothesis is rooted in his multiple comparisons of Skynyrd to The Doors. The Doors??? Now Ronnie and Jim Morrison were similar in that they were rock singers from Florida who died young, but that's where it stops. Jim did have tremendous issues with his dad, having disowned him prior to The Doors breaking out and declaring his parents "who were very much alive at the time" - dead in the liner notes to the first Doors album. However, Ronnie was no Jim. Listen to "Free Bird" and then to "The End". There's nothing similar there. Did Lacy bug Ronnie about not finishing High School? Absolutely, but whose dad doesn't get on their nerves once in a while? Much of the book is dedicated to the "controversy" surrounding Skynyrd's 1974 hit "Sweet Home Alabama" and their use of a huge confederate flag as a backdrop when it was played live. The author attempts to show inherent prejudice within the band but he does so under a fundamentally flawed premise: he judges and makes no mistake that he's passing judgement here - the mid-seventies by 2015 standards. There's no doubt that flying the stars and bars across a stage would rightly cause controversy today. The flag has come to symbolize the worst in Americans and imply hate to the point that its use would immediately be kicked around the cable news shows until it was discontinued. However, this was not the case in 1974. Ribowsky basically says that the song and the use of the flag were popular in the south, "but elsewhere left a decided unease and instant revulsion." This is simply false. He claims that the revulsion came largely from, "northern liberals, including the most respected rock critics." If that were so, why then are no backing quotes from the northern liberals and the only ones from those "most respected rock critics" are glowing reviews of the band? Anecdotally, I remember a couple of skiing trips at Magic Mountain in Vermont during the winter of 1974-1975. Any time I entered the lodge the song (or the Doobie Brothers' "Black Water") was playing. Even with one of the biggest northeast liberals, Paul Newman, sitting a table away, "Alabama" was inescapable and there was no revulsion to be found. When Ribowsky reveals where the use of the flag began, his research - again - falls flat. "Indeed the first manifestation of the flag was the jacket art for the single release of the song, featuring an image of a young woman's beckoning lips, onto which were stuck a color image of the Confederate flag." I suppose this is plausible at the surface, but Lynyrd Skynyrd didn't have any singles released with picture sleeves in the US during the 1970's. The cover described by the author is from a highly obscure single release from Spain. Not only would the band have had no control over the release, it is unlikely that the members ever saw it prior to the crash. These things were produced in tiny numbers and have only shown up in the US through international trading circles. In other words, it did exist but who knew? Mr. Ribowsky points to Ronnie Van Zant's ever-changing explanations of the use of the flag. At different times he said it was a gimmick, a record company stunt, hype and other such things. Often the band would say that it was simply a symbol of their southern heritage, but overall nobody had a solid explanation. While Ribowsky says that this points toward racism, it is more likely that the band didn't want to offend any segment of its fan base once the flag was already flying. His discussion of "Sweet Home Alabama", particularly as it relates to the inclusion of Mississippi's segregationist governor George Wallace's name, as a racist message is equally puzzling. The song was written as a southerner's response to Neil Young's "Southern Man" and "Alabama" which both ripped southern culture as Young saw it. As noted several times in this review, Mark Ribowsky had little familiarity with Skynyrd's songs. Ribowsky claims, "It would seem impossible that he (Ronnie) could have worked Wallace into these lyrics as he did without realizing that the man was a breathing synonym for intolerance." The lyrics, "In Birmingham they love the Gov'nor (Boo, Boo, Boo!) / Now we all did what we could do," are indeed kind of ambiguous. Were they supporting Wallace or putting him down with the boos? One thing is for certain though; "Alabama" has a singular distinction in Skynyrd's music: it leaves you wondering. Actually it's that entire verse that is atypical of all other Ronnie Van Zant compositions: "In Birmingham they love the Gov'nor (Boo, Boo, Boo!) / Now we all did what we could do / Now Watergate does not bother me / Does your conscience bother you (tell the truth)" That verse, unlike the others in that song and every other that Van Zant wrote does leave you guessing. People have opined on the song's meaning for over 40 years but interestingly, there's no other Skynyrd song that leaves you wondering about anything! Ronnie wrote songs that were in your face stories of his life and how he saw things, plain and simple. If, as Ribowsky hypothesizes, Ronnie was "likely apolitical", could he have just thrown these two highly political and current items out there simply to show how screwed up the political world was to him? Of the 52 different songs Skynyrd released from their first album in 1973 through 1978's posthumous First and Last, only that one had any ambiguity in the lyrics. Actually it was just the one verse in the one song which tells you that Van Zant knew he shouldn't attempt to explain such a hot topic too deeply. In truth, that short verse said everything you ever needed to know about Ronnie: George Wallace and the Old South didn't represent him any more than Watergate represented most Americans. Still he was proud of his roots and wasn't going to let some Canadian like Neil Young put the south down. There are so many more errors in this

“definitive biography”. A Saturday Night Special was an extremely dangerous home-made single shot handgun, not a Smith Wesson .38; a ballad isn’t a blues song; Rick Medlocke didn’t sing on “Win”; and Steve Gaines didn’t sing on “I know a Little”; intolerance, as used in the previous paragraph, wasn’t even part of the American lexicon during the 1970’s, a time when we were still talking about the coming ice age as opposed to global warming! He says Skynyrd went onstage to the song “Dixie” until the end when that hadn’t happened for at least two years prior to the crash; he should have listened to those bootlegs! He incorrectly describes set lists at concerts where, again, bootlegs could have helped and then discusses songwriting done during sound checks. There is actually sound check evidence that Steve Gaines (along with Artimus Pyle and Leon Wilkeson) was working on a new song following a soundcheck in Sheffield England in 1977. However, Ribowsky says that the entire band was doing this regularly and in the only recording available, Ronnie Van Zant wasn’t even present! Finally, in a description reminiscent of the jailhouse scene in Arlo Guthrie’s “Alicia’s Restaurant”, the author discusses the low fuel situation on Skynyrd’s doomed aircraft. He says that since fuel gauges were broken, the only way to check what was left was to use a dipstick — that’s right, a dipstick! Considering the simple fact that the fuel was in the wings, I suppose that the pilot just got up out of his seat while traveling over 200 m.p.h. and during a cockpit emergency, climbed out on the wing, opened the tank, stuck the dipstick in and returned inside saying, “Hey, we’re outta gas!” That’s not just irresponsible, it’s just plain stupid. As 40-year aviation enthusiast, I can assure anyone reading this that the only dipstick involved in this story is the author! The list goes on and on — from there. Ribowsky, probably as an excuse for not interviewing a single person who survived the crash or their immediate families for this “definitive” work, says that nobody involved in the current edition of the band will talk without there being money involved. Now it is true that the Skynyrd of today is something of a money machine with way too many fingers in the pie. However, they also put on the best Lynyrd Skynyrd show possible year after year, and release some pretty good new material as well. There’s still a Van Zant (Ronnie’s brother Johnny) at the microphone and Gary Rossington Rick Medlocke are spot-on every time. It isn’t the Skynyrd of 1977; it’s the Skynyrd of NOW. It is true that behind the scenes fights, lawsuits and general bickering have taken on a life of their own, but at over 100 shows per year, none of the fans really care. Both the survivors of the crash and their families suffered greatly from PTSD, survivor guilt, depression and any number of other things. Is anyone really surprised that they are, at times, a bit dysfunctional? The real surprise would be if they weren’t. So, what does Mark Ribowsky really think of Lynyrd Skynyrd? He lays it out pretty well when he invokes the devil and Lucifer fifteen times in relation to Ronnie Van Zant and the band. He actually goes so far as to say that Lucifer brought Ronnie (and therefore the airplane) down. Seriously, this author is an unscrupulous irresponsible idiot for the words he’s recorded in this book. His fact checking skills should easily place him in the Rolling Stone Rape on Campus Department’s Hall of Fame! There are only a couple of reasons to create trash like this. The first being that, while researching a biography of Otis Redding due next month, Ribowsky stumbled upon the fact that two key players in that story were also key figures in the early years of Lynyrd Skynyrd. He decided to kill two birds with one stone and enhance those interviews with a couple of additional ones and top it off with some internet research. In other words, a good old fashioned opportunist money grab. The other is simply political — an attempt to really taint Skynyrd’s legacy and music just in case some politician he doesn’t like uses their song or songs. Either one, a combination of both or neither, there’s no excuse for writing this unfounded hatchet job and even that description is generous. Sadly, it is unlikely that there will ever be a definitive biography of Lynyrd Skynyrd. Unless founding member Gary Rossington and the Van Zant family are involved, everything will fall short. Reading Mr. Ribowsky’s book, one can understand why those people are reluctant to talk and the net result of *Whiskey Bottles and Brand New Cars* is that they will likely reinforce any walls already in place. The closest one can get is the late Ron Eckerman’s *Turn it Up*, but it only concerns life on the road in 1976-1977. It isn’t perfect especially considering his own PTSD, survivor guilt and substance abuse, but if readers want a taste of Lynyrd Skynyrd’s world from early 1976 up to and including the plane crash itself, that’s the best source for now. As for this book — I doubt anyone will be talking about in 40 years like the song it assaults, “Sweet Home Alabama”. Hell, people probably won’t be talking about this one next week.

This intimate story of Lynyrd Skynyrd tells of how a band of lost souls and self-destructive misfits with uncertain artistic objectives clawed their way to the top of the rock ‘n’ roll world. Based on interviews with surviving band members, *Whiskey Bottles and Brand-New Cars* shares how lead singer and front man Ronnie Van Zant guided the band’s hugely successful five-year run and, in the process, created not only a new country rock idiom, but a new Confederacy in constant conflict with old Southern totems and prejudices. Placing the music and personae of Skynyrd into a broad cultural context, this book gives a new perspective to a history of stage fights, motel-room destructions, cunning business deals, and brilliant studio productions. It also offers a greater appreciation for a band whose legacy, in the aftermath of their last plane ride, has since descended into self-caricature.

ldquo;An excellentnbsp;look at a band whose creative evolution was tragically cut short.rdquo; mdash;Booklist