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

Mark Ribowsky

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This book tells the intimate story of how a band of lost souls and self-destructive misfits with uncertain artistic objectives clawed their way to the very top of the rock 'n' roll peak, writing and performing as if beneficiaries of a deal with the devil—a deal fulfilled by a tragic fall from the sky. The rudderless genius behind their ascent was a man named Ronnie Van Zant, who guided their five-year run and evolved not just a new country/rock idiom but a new Confederacy in constant conflict with old Southern totems and prejudices.

Placing the music and personae of Lynyrd Skynyrd into a broader cultural schema for the first time, *Whiskey Bottles and Brand-New Cars* is based on interviews with surviving band members and others who watched them. It gives a new perspective to a history of stage fights, motel-room destructions, cunning business deals, and brilliant studio productions, offering a greater appreciation for a band that, in the aftermath of its last plane ride, has sadly descended into self-caricature as the sort of lowbrow guns-'n'-God cliché that Ronnie Van Zant wanted to chuck from around his neck.

No other book on Southern rock has ever captured the "Free Bird"–like sweep and significance of Lynyrd Skynyrd. Ribowsky's cohesive narrative gives the band its full due while not ignoring the cruel irony and avoidability of the band's tragic end.

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