



## Book Club Book of the Month December 2021 *Driving Stevie Fracasso* by Barry Divola (HarperCollins)

### Summary

New York City, 2001. A few weeks before the tragic events of 9/11, the city that never sleeps is buzzing with hectic life, and music journalist Rick McLennan is supremely bored. Bored with his job writing for an underground music paper, his relationship to girlfriend Jane, and all the bland music he's hearing – especially Train's 'Drops of Jupiter'. But as they say, you never know your luck in a big city ...

In one day, McLennan turns forty, loses his job, breaks up with Jane and gets turfed out of his apartment (a true crisis in NYC). Heartbroken and unemployed, Rick seeks solace with his mentor and friend Eliot Toastman, a legendary music writer and critic who offers him a lifeline – write a book about *Future Tense*, the only album by the infamous cult rock band Driven to Distraction. The catch is that the band's lead singer Stevie Fracasso is Rick's brother, whom he hasn't spoken to in thirty years. And the writing assignment requires him to drive Stevie to New York for one last gig, interviewing him along the way.

Desperate to escape New York, Rick steals Jane's 1985 Datsun Stanza and drives out of the city limits, heading for Austin, Texas. When he finds his brother living in obscurity, the siblings are reunited, and Stevie agrees to Rick's plan. But this is no easy drive. Terrible family secrets are lurking, and as Rick and Stevie head back to New York they are waylaid by pain, loss, grievances, and misunderstandings that cut to the heart of their true identities.

But the show must go on. The miles tick along. And as they drive, and talk, and rekindle their connection, Rick begins to see that there is more to life than music and that he needs to grow up a bit to fully appreciate the life he wants to recapture.

### About the author

Journalist, author, and a self-confessed "total music nerd" Barry Divola was born and raised in Sydney, but in recent years moved to Perth with his wife and children.

He regularly writes feature articles and reviews for publications like *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Women's Weekly*, and *Australian Financial Review*. His music writing has appeared internationally in *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *Monocle*, and he was a senior writer for *Rolling Stone Australia* as well as *Who* magazine's long-running music critic.

Divola has won the Margaret River Short Story Prize, the FAW Jennifer Burbidge Award, the Cowley Literary Award, and the Banjo Paterson Award for Short Fiction (three times). *Driving Stevie Fracasso* is his first novel.

### Questions for discussion

1. Rick McLennan is a music snob. How does his elitism hold him back?
2. Stevie Fracasso is a cult music figure but walks away from it. How does that contrast with Rick's attitudes to music, fame and fortune?
3. How does the dynamic between Rick and his mentor Eliot Toastman influence his actions and life choices?
4. How is New York positioned as a character in the book?
5. How is music used to draw the book's themes out? How effective is it?
6. The road trip is a classic story trope. How does Divola both use and subvert the trope to structure the narrative?
7. What lessons does Rick learn from his experiences on the road trip with Stevie, and how do they help him become a better person?
8. Use the book's events to explore this question: What is better – fame and fortune, or humble happiness?
9. How important is Stevie Fracasso's daughter to elevating Rick's thinking?
10. What is Rick's relationship to New York at the end of *Driving Stevie Fracasso* compared to the beginning?
11. How did you feel about the resolution to Jane and Rick's relationship at the end of the book?

### If you liked this book you may also like ...

#### Fiction

*Afternoons with Harvey Beam* by Carrie Cox (Fremantle Press)

*How to Shame the Devil* by Ros Thomas (Night Parrot Press)

*High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby (Penguin Books)

*A Visit From The Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan (Penguin Random House)

*The Commitments* by Roddy Doyle (Vintage)

*The Wishbones* by Tom Perrotta (Berkley)

*The Final Revival Of Opal & Nev* by Dawnie Walton (Hachette)

#### Non-fiction

*Please Kill Me* by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain (Grove Press)

*Psychotic Reactions And Carburettor Dung* by Lester Bangs (Anchor Press)

Lost In Music by Giles Smith (Pan Macmillan)  
Love Is A Mix Tape by Rob Sheffield (Crown/Archetype)  
Diary Of a Rock And Roll Star by Ian Hunter (Omnibus Press)

