



**Would Mark Knopfler still go this way today?**

A foreword about music, humanity and digital gnomes ...



**Volume 2 will appear in spring 2026**

Did you miss **Volume 1** (more than 500 pages on the history of Dire Straits)? You can find all the information about the book on the website:

**[www.richardkoechli.ch/en](http://www.richardkoechli.ch/en)**

# Would Mark Knopfler still go this way today?

## **A foreword about music, humanity – and digital gnomes**

I don't really need to explain much here in the foreword to Volume 2; my concept remains more or less unchanged: I want to analyse Mark Knopfler's life's work in detail, celebrate his music, examine it in depth and place it in the context of music history. Without any photos, without claiming to be exhaustive, from the perspective of my subjective musical sensibility and my experience as a musician, and with the desire to package the whole thing into an enjoyable story. Volume 1 was dedicated to Mark Knopfler's musical youth and the history of his legendary band Dire Straits – Volume 2 now picks up where Dire Straits left off to honour Mark Knopfler's successful solo career.

Before we begin, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks. The response to Volume 1 exceeded all expectations. Countless emails, letters, statements on social media and reviews (on Amazon and in music magazines) reached and delighted my author's heart. Shortly after the release of the original German edition, I received feedback from people who had devoured the book in a matter of days and nights and were now eagerly asking about Volume 2... – unbelievable! Thank you all, you are a great source of inspiration. Thanks also to the numerous Knopfler experts from all over the world who pointed out a few minor errors to me and enabled me to continuously optimise the book with updates. A book is never perfect, neither in terms of language nor content; with such a huge amount of information,

a few errors inevitably creep in, even with the greatest perfectionism. However, modern book production allows (because larger print runs are no longer produced) for a work to be continuously improved – a clear advantage of digital printing.

Well, while observing the market and analysing the sales figures for Volume 1, a few things struck me. There is such a thing as a global community of Mark Knopfler and Dire Straits fans; music unites and transcends borders. Nevertheless, there seem to be a few differences in the way people react to such a book in different countries and language areas. I don't want to judge that; these are mainly culturally determined differences.

I know the German-speaking world best, as this is where I live; Germans (just like Austrians and Swiss) can be both euphoric and critical or even pedantic at the same time – and that's fine. Interest in my book was enormous in this language area right from the start – thank you and God bless you, as we say.

The French are a touch more passionate in comparison; in the French-speaking world, there was clearly a great desire for a serious book about Mark Knopfler, but initially there was also scepticism about my work – then the dam broke quite quickly, and since then demand in France has been high and the reviews extremely positive. That makes me very happy, because France is my second home. The interest in the Spanish and Italian translations is also gratifyingly high – I don't regret for a moment having the book translated into these two languages (which was not originally planned).

Volume 1 was thus published in a total of five languages – the only disappointment is the performance of the English edition. It would be by far the largest market, with a huge number of Knopfler fans and music lovers worldwide, but somehow there was a snag from the start. Although there were some

wonderful reviews in the UK (for example, by Pete Clack in the trade magazine *BLUES IN BRITAIN*), the English-speaking world is the only area where the book received a few really malicious and scathing reviews. A 1-star review on Amazon in Australia based on false claims right at the beginning of the publication (with a call to all MK fans around the world: ‘Don't buy this book under any circumstances!’) created a negative buzz and deterred many interested parties from forming their own opinion. For example, a radio producer from the USA referred to this Amazon review and railed against the ‘rubbish’ (as he described my work) on a large Knopfler fan portal – without having read a single page of the book himself. Well, Bo Diddley, the creator of the wonderful song ‘You can't judge a book by its cover’, would turn in his grave at such audacity. I cannot explain this blind hatred.

No one has to love my book, it should be criticised at any time with well-thought-out arguments – ideally, this can even lead to an exciting dialogue or dispute. But simply mocking a work that brings joy to many people and dragging it down into the mire of a 1-star review defies all logic and humanity. Especially when we expect exactly the opposite from music: that it heals us and makes us happy. Mark Knopfler's wonderful life's work masterfully overcomes this hurdle – why should a book about him provoke hatred?

## **The digital gnomes**

Well, there is another key reason why the English edition of Volume 1 has only been able to gain a limited foothold so far: the digital gnomes. The legendary AI and the flood of books it has set in motion ...

I don't want to join the current chorus of panic and predict an apocalypse caused by artificial intelligence. We will all have to

get used to it; this level of technology is not completely new anyway. Digital intelligence has been at work in many areas for many years; in culture, for example, in the promotion of creative works (social media and the entire internet in general is an AI-based platform), and in some cases also in the design of a work (music production has been using digital devices for decades, which are essentially also based on artificial intelligence). The real revolution at the moment, however, is that new forms of AI are not just helping humans to implement their ideas, but are taking over the actual core job: the formation of ideas, the creative process, the creation of the work – largely or even completely without human intervention.

In practice, this will happen in 2025 when someone will be able to spit out a work at the touch of a button using AI – whether out of pure financial interest or simply out of a desire to “create” something despite a lack of talent, diligence and training. Now, artificial intelligence cannot produce a house or a car, as there are still too many material factors involved – but in the fields of music and text, it has an easy job, because texts ultimately consist only of letters and music of sound waves (which can be digitally reproduced). In these and numerous other areas of intellectual and manual activity, AI today has the potential to produce works that imitate human creativity – and, as part of the revolution, at an incredible pace!

AI can comprehend and analyse a complex 100-page text on a specialist topic in a second (!) and write a coherent summary of it in any language. AI can imitate a human voice or the sound of a legendary guitarist in astonishing quality within seconds and generate new variations of the musical style in question. AI can spit out a completely arranged and produced new song in seconds, including lyrics and all the trimmings, based on specific requests: Please make me a song on the theme of ‘the tragedy of the current war in Ukraine’, in

the style of Mark Knopfler, with his legendary guitar sound, his personal singing voice, and stylistically based on ‘Brothers In Arms’.

This is just one example, of course; the same thing also happens in the field of images and videos. AI actually spits out the song in a few seconds (depending on your subscription, it can take quite a long time, one or two minutes, wow...) – and such games are now actually also popular among Knopfler fans. Not so long ago, I was certain that the standards of quality and authenticity in this genre of music were timelessly high and that therefore the great temptation would not take hold – but I quickly realised that many Knopfler and Dire Straits fans also really enjoy songs ‘created’ in this way. Probably simply because anything that reminds us of a beloved artist reawakens our enjoyment of and relationship with their music. This is a normal human reaction, which I do not wish to judge.

So it's a nice toy. But an incredibly dangerous one, because it calls into question the at least 40,000-year-old tradition of human creativity (researchers estimate that the first musical instrument, a flute, is around this age), because it completely degrades the human will to create and express oneself and leads to absurdity. Why should a young person today still endure years of hard work learning a musical instrument in order to continuously perfect and refine a particular form of expression? Why should people still lead an intense life, go through all kinds of emotions and strokes of fate, and transform them into artistic activity? Why should they tirelessly search for the meaning and reason for their existence, endure the mental anguish of this search, in order to be able to leave behind an encouraging, healing testimony in the form of a work of art? Why should people still perform these feats of strength when they know that AI can create and rework such a work in seconds? Where will people find the means to support themselves and their families through artistic activities in the future? When AI floods the market

with products produced in seconds, either satisfying people or driving away their desire to consume cultural works at all.

The question of why people should continue to do so is easy to answer: because it makes them happy. Those who can spit out a song at the touch of a button may enjoy this toy in the short term – but such a work cannot make the client (whoever presses the button is, at most, still the client) truly happy and fulfilled. The feeling of having acquired a craft and expressive power after 40 years of living and working hard – this feeling is unique and cannot be imitated. It is this feeling of inner peace when we, each in our own way, look back on a life lived, look with joy and inner pride at the hurdles we have overcome, put the hurdles we have failed to overcome into perspective with a dignified ‘at least I tried’ and hum contentedly ‘I did it my way’.

Whether the path is spectacularly successful, like that of Mark Knopfler, is hardly relevant. The question is, however, whether Mark Knopfler would still take this arduous path today, in the age of AI. We don't know, but AI certainly calls the path into question because it provocatively calls out to us: ‘I can do the same thing in a few seconds!’ Well, if you truly listen – one *hears* well only with the heart, as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry would probably say – you will always notice the subtle difference, but it is very tempting to be satisfied with the surface.

To return to the actual topic: artificial intelligence is currently in the process of completely transforming the world of books. For the past year or two, the market has been flooded with books that have been created either largely or entirely with AI. Courses are now being offered on how to write, produce and publish your own book in three days with the help of AI. There is no longer any question of ‘writing’ in the traditional sense. In the writing community, the rule of thumb is that, even with the best will in the world, hardly anyone can work

with concentration and inspiration for more than four hours a day; the whole process of writing a book is a daring adventure that engulfs the author and constantly pushes them to their limits, only to finally give birth to a baby, a work of writing, after a thousand hours of work. A serious book with high-quality texts takes an average of one year to write. Added to this are talent and a boundless love for the medium of written language, as well as expertise acquired over decades (at least in the case of specialist books).

And now artificial intelligence comes along and throws this whole catalogue of values into the bin. Anyone who comes along or is greedy for money can now, at the touch of a button, commission AI to produce a book on a specific topic and in a specific style. It doesn't even take three days to generate the text; this period includes further steps such as typesetting, layout, print PDF generation and administrative processes (organising distribution, etc.).

In our case: you can give the AI a few inputs, and it will spit out a biography of Mark Knopfler in an incredibly short time – simply by gathering all the available information (official data, media reports, interviews, etc.) from the internet and generating a text from it. Either you accept the first version straight away, or you give the AI gnomes the task of changing or adding something here and there. In any case, three days' work is a relaxed timeframe with some leeway.

Okay, and does that actually happen? With Mark Knopfler? You bet it happens! A year ago, when volume 1 was published, I had already had fun counting the AI books about Mark Knopfler at the world's largest bookseller (Amazon.com); at that time, there were already 50 (in words: fifty) AI books about Knopfler in the English-speaking world. Unbelievable!

Can you recognise these books? Yes, at the moment it's still quite easy. Firstly, they are comparatively thin; most of them don't even make it past the 100-page mark – 100 pages are not enough to do justice to Mark Knopfler's life's work. This is

impossible if you want to go even slightly in-depth. Going in-depth is something that AI is currently unable to do, because depth requires the soul, attention to detail and literary passion of an author. Secondly, the quality of the modest text (and in most cases also the book cover...) is quickly recognisable as either poor or mediocre; AI texts are now grammatically correct and accurate in terms of content, but somehow they seem bland, monotonous, soulless, lacking in real tension, and hardly moving. Thirdly, AI books can be recognised with a simple test: the name of the author. What has already been published under this name? Not a single AI book bears the name of a recognised expert – instead, all these AI books bear a name under which numerous other books on various topics have already been published in recent months, including biographies of film stars, famous athletes, cookbooks and so on. That says it all; these are people who publish a book every week, either under their own name or a fantasy name, in the hope of earning a little pocket money.

Small change, as these people who press the button know – there's no big money in it. Because the poor quality is usually quickly exposed, and because these books drown in the vast sea of AI books. Every now and then, however, a Knopfler fan is tempted to buy such a book – only to express their disappointment angrily on Amazon. This is another way to recognise these books: they almost without exception receive scathing reviews. A single scathing review doesn't say much (it could also be a hate comment...), but the sum of all reviews is telling. Or the fact that a book doesn't receive a single review after a long time.

So, what is the effect of this flood of books? Quite simply, the people (who were originally quite a lot) who would be fundamentally interested in a serious and exciting book about Mark Knopfler have now almost all been scared away within a short period of time. AI books are flooding the market, clogging it up – and driving people away from even looking

for a new book. There are now not only 50, but probably (I can't be bothered to count them anymore) twice that number; who wants to spend hours on Amazon trying to choose the right book from 100? My book joins the same list of Knopfler books – because, as in music, there is unfortunately no transparency. That is the real problem: both the AI works and the real, human works appear as equals in the online market – because no one bothered to address this problem with concrete measures in time.

To cut a long story short: just a few years ago, my book would have received much more attention in the English-speaking world because there were very few publications about Mark Knopfler. Of course, John Illsley's wonderful book 'My Life in Dire Straits' has been very successful for some time now, but the market would certainly welcome a few more serious books written from a different perspective and in a different narrative style. But 50 or 100 books? And soulless, poor-quality ones at that? Enough is enough. AI has closed this door. It's a shame. I can try to market my book as efficiently as possible under the label 'No AI', but that only has a limited effect – the damage remains.

Fortunately, because most of these AI books are currently only available in the largest market, the English-speaking world, the flood has not caused any major damage to the other translations of my book. In the German, French, Spanish and Italian markets, the desire to read seems to be more or less unaffected at the moment – thank God (pardon me, of course, my thanks go to all of you who are reading this book). However, AI books have recently been creeping into these language areas as well, and the flood will be almost impossible to stop.

As I said: no panic, no doom and gloom, just sober realism. Authors must learn to find new ways to reach the real bookworms. We have to come to terms with this situation, and it's exactly the same in music. Let's not play the heroes – let's admit our existential fears bluntly. But then the next step must be taken: giving up is not an option. Definitely not! That's why I'm now writing volume 2. And if AI is here to stay, we'd better learn to use it sensibly in some areas – always with the aim of not relinquishing control of the creative process. I don't allow a single AI sentence in my book; I only capture sentences from my own brain, knowing that this is not even 100% my own work, because inspiration and intuition are ultimately gifts. But if they are gifts, then I don't want them from digital gnomes, but from the real boss, yeah.

In the area of research, on the other hand, the gnomes can certainly help. The new AI gnomes can significantly speed up the search process on the internet if you ask them the right questions. I'm not averse to that; spending hours rummaging through the internet for data and facts is not my favourite pastime – ChatGPT and other gnomes can do it much faster. Go on! What I do with these facts, how I weigh them up, comment on them personally and mix them with my own experiences, in which music-historical context I place them, and how I package the whole thing into a story – all of that is still 100% my responsibility.

Gnomes also make sense when translating texts into other languages; the quality of AI translations is astonishingly high these days. Provided you are willing and able to interact for the fine-tuning, a specialist book in particular (in the case of poetry with artistic language structures, some things are lost) can be perfectly adequate in an AI translation. In any case, it's an excellent compromise: if I had the choice, I would always hire a renowned translator – but such a professional works on a 500-page book for a year and costs a fortune. Unfortunately, this is out of my reach. Thanks to deepL (currently the best AI

translator), I was able to translate volume 1 into four languages. You can't just press a button here – translating a book like this (including fine-tuning, typesetting, etc.) still takes one to two months, but it's a welcome alternative nonetheless.

My conclusion: AI is not fundamentally evil; it is a tool, nothing more and nothing less. When people misuse a tool, the problem isn't with the tool – otherwise we'd have to ban every kitchen knife and axe. Or even words, because they can kill too, as we all know...

## **What's changing in Volume 2...?**

So much for the starting point. In Volume 2, I will now examine and celebrate Mark Knopfler's solo career. As already announced, I will start by discussing the album with Chet Atkins ('Neck and Neck') and the country adventure *The Notting Hillbillies*, because they represent a kind of bridge from Dire Straits to Mark Knopfler's definitive solo path. In response to popular demand, I will also take a closer look at the songs on Dire Straits' last album, 'On Every Street', because this album also served as a transition to his solo career – and because I know that some readers are disappointed with the way I neglected this Dire Straits finale in Volume 1.

I am happy to listen to criticism if it is constructive. I will definitely take a few small things to heart in Volume 2: I won't be quite as obsessed with detail as I was in Volume 1 (apparently some people couldn't care less about guitar serial numbers – hard to believe), and I won't include quite as much cross-referenced information about who and what made Knopfler what he became. The same applies to the cross-references to my own experiences as a musician – everything has already been said anyway.

Volume 2 will therefore be an even higher dose of Mark Knopfler; his music will be the absolute focus. In terms of concept, it will be a little more 'track by track' (as many have requested), but still with the freedom to give individual songs and aspects more space than others. As you know by now, I am a blues musician – in my genre, you NEVER give up your freedom.

I am very much looking forward to the second part of our journey together, dear readers. Thank you very much for your attention and for supporting this project – whether as a reader, sponsor or by spreading the word.

Richard Koechli

(If you would like to sponsor Volume 2, please see the next page for details)

## **You would like to become a sponsor?**

As with Volume 1, I would like to point out, without obligation, that it is possible to be mentioned by name in the book as a sponsor.

I am not launching a crowdfunding campaign and will not be proselytising; just a note: every sponsorship contribution helps the project. It gives me a little more breathing space to concentrate solely on this book and, in the end, allows me to invest a little in advertising.

**Option 1)** You transfer € 50 (or US dollars or British pound) and will be listed by name as a sponsor in the book.

**Option 2)** You transfer € 150 (or US dollars or British pound), will be listed as a sponsor in the book and will receive a copy signed by me personally after publication.

**Option 3)** You transfer at least € 300 (or US dollars or British pound), will be listed as “Executive Producer” in the book and will receive two copies signed by me.

Interested? Please send an e-mail ([info@richardkoechli.ch](mailto:info@richardkoechli.ch)); I will be happy to reply immediately and provide you with my bank details for the transfer (IBAN or PayPal).

By the way: As with Volume 1, the same applies to Volume 2: write to me if you would like to **share a personal anecdote** related to Mark Knopfler's solo career with the readers. If it fits in a certain context, I will be happy to include your story in the book.

Any kind of support is valuable. Thank you very much!