

IGGY POP: PRIME MOVERS DRUMMER

By Michael Erlewine

That's right, Iggy Pop was our drummer. Of course, as usual, I was ahead of my time and he was not "Iggy Pop" at the time, just Iggy. However, I still claim that we named him Iggy. In recent years it seems that everyone from Ann Arbor had the honor to have given him that name. But hear me out. My reasoning is pretty good on this.

When our first drummer "Spider" left the band, we had no drummer. Looking around town we spotted young Jim Osterberg playing in a frat band called the Iguanas. It did not take Osterberg long to see that the Prime Movers Blues Band was a whole other kind of band and take on music. He wanted in and we let him in.

But we didn't really know him yet and he was a wee bit suspect, just because he had settled (up to that point) with being in a frat band. So we called him from day one "Iguana." It was not 100% disrespectful, but it did serve to remind him where he came from. In a matter of days his name was shortened to "Iggy" and that is how he was known from then on until he added the last name "Pop" much later. He obviously like the name "Iggy." His band "The Iguanas" certainly would never have called him Iggy, and if he had already been called "Iggy," we would never have called him "Iguana" for a time, so I believe we named the Igg-ster.

To me, Iggy was a lot of fun to be around, never a problem. I don't recall having had a single argument with him, and I can argue. In fact, if I remember right, Iggy was afraid to tell me himself when he finally left our band, and so I first heard it from someone else. Obviously, he eventually had other fish to fry.

And when Iggy joined our band, he was not a great drummer. He was an adequate drummer, but he had never played something as difficult as the blues. I know, most musicians think the blues is easy, the same progression over and over. This just shows how little they know or care to know. Blues are not easy and Iggy found that out.

Iggy had to work on his drumming and he was very diligent in this. He became a very good drummer. The hardest rhythm he had to learn is something called the "double-shuffle." It is a very difficult beat and Iggy learned it from the Butterfield-Band drummer Sam Lay. It took him weeks to learn it, but he eventually nailed it. Iggy was a fine blues drummer.

We played at whatever gigs we could find. For a while the legendary promoter Jeep Holland managed us, or tried to manage us. We were kind of unmanageable. He dressed us in suits and put us on the teen circuit, playing at teen nightclubs around the state. Blues music and the kind of stuff we played really weren't for teens. And back then we would smoke the weed.

I remember we had a pound of really less-than-great marijuana that we kept under the floorboards at 114 N. Division Street, what was called the "Prime Movers House," and we smoked every last fiber of that weak stuff. It was terrible. I can remember one gig out on the teen circuit, perhaps at Daniel's Den in Saginaw. The weed that night was too good and my brother Dan and I were stoned and on stage. He

was the lead guitarist and at that time I was playing rhythm guitar.

We were looking across the stage at one another, eye-ball to eye-ball. Neither of us had the slightest idea what the next chord change could be, at least I didn't. It seemed impossible that we would ever remember it in time. I was freaked. And of course, the song seemed like it was all in slow motion. But, sure enough, when each chord change finally rolled around, by some chance accident of fate the right chord would appear and we would smoothly play it. Try doing that for most of a night.

And Iggy was also with us when we played the Schwaben Inn down on Ashley Street in Ann Arbor. The wonderful blues player from Detroit, "Washboard Willie and His Super Suds of Rhythm," would play on Wednesday nights, and we would play on weekends.

The Schwaben Inn is where the tide of students who came to hear us met the tide of townies who claimed we were one of them. After all, most of our band were townies, not "pin heads" as we called the U-M students. The fights that broke out between the two groups found us cringing behind our amplifiers. As I have mentioned in another blog, there was one fight that took nine police cars to break it up. And this beer hall never dried out. With its low ceilings, it always smelt of wet beer and cigarettes. You had to catch your breath when you first walked into, until you got used to the smell. One of our good friends, Peter Meek, used to man door, I think just for the fun of it.

And Iggy had one other thing going for him that the rest of us did not. My brother Dan, who roomed with Iggy, tells me he had a great big you-know-what, and was pretty pleased about that. I can't blame him. Later on, as Iggy Pop he liked to show it off from time to time.

Folks are always asking me how outrageous Iggy must have been. Not really, folks. Iggy was a nice guy, even a bit shy. He was a gentleman. And with his long eyelashes, the ladies loved him, but he would always let them approach him, and not vice versa. In my heart of hearts, the Iggy Pop that the world knows was something Iggy came up with just for show, not how he was inside. Who knows what he is now, but back then we all loved Iggy. And of course, I have not seen him all these years and assumed he had forgotten us.

However, on April 19, 2011 at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor Iggy did a show in honor of our mutual friend (and Iggy's guitarist) Ron Asheton, who had recently passed away. Asheton used to play bass in our band, and was much loved by us. At that event, Iggy gave me a shout-out. Of his old Ann Arbor friends he only brought up my name, which surprised me:

"There is a guy named Michael Erlewine, who had the Prime Movers Blues Band, of which Ron Ashton and I are both graduates of, and so many great musicians around Ann Arbor. It is just endless... Ann Arbor is a great, weird, little town."

Thanks Iggy!

P.S. I recently heard an interview with Stooges guitar player Ron Asheton, who used to fill-in on bass for our band the Prime Movers. Ron passed away not long ago, I am very sorry to say. Here are some

remarks that Ron said about the band. I am sorry I don't know who did this interview, but if anyone knows, comment, and let's say thanks!

Asheton: Other than that, my first real professional type situation was in the Prime Movers Blues Band, where Iggy was going to Pioneer High also and I would see him at school...We used to meet down at the Michigan Union and... at that time, originally, he was in the band "Iguanas," but he quit and hooked up with the Prime Movers and they were auditioning for bass players.

The Prime Movers was where I really got in touch with Iggy. He is the one who turned me on for auditioning for the Prime Movers... So I went in one night, played for them, got the job. That's what kicked off my real learning experience of playing music.

Question: What kind of job was that you got at that point with the Movers? Were they playing around a fair amount?

Asheton: Yeah, the Prime Movers were just really taking off. I felt really, wow, I was blown back. At that time they were accomplished musicians, so what it did for me... I would either skip school or every day after school I would just go and practice. It's the house you live in now, the Prime Mover House. Right in that room, for hours every day. They taught me a lot until....they were so much better and more accomplished than myself at that time and they eventually copped to Jack Dawson for a bass player, who was more their age group and much finer a player than me.

Question: How long did you play with them?

Asheton: I think I was in the band for like six months and then after ... I saw it coming... and then after the boot I still hung around, did equipment, went out on their gigs and they let me sit in for a tune or two. They would even do things like tell their bass player Jack that practice was an hour later so I would get to play for an hour with them. And I still worked out with Iggy on drums, helped him learn the double-shuffle, play some bass while he practiced his ass off every day learning the double-shuffle.

Question: So the Prime Movers Blues Band that was really nice, eh?

Asheton: Oh that was a great band, the Prime Movers Blues Band.

Question: People speak really highly of Michael and Daniel Erlewine?

Asheton: Yep, I learned tons from the Erlewine brothers. That was my first real foot into the reality of actually being in a band, you know, and having the experience of...With Dave and Scotty it was like basement things. We weren't ...none of us were good enough to get that real hit from playing in a band, but the Prime Movers was like...whoah...They would do like all the blues tunes ...they got more blues, just more into the solid blues.

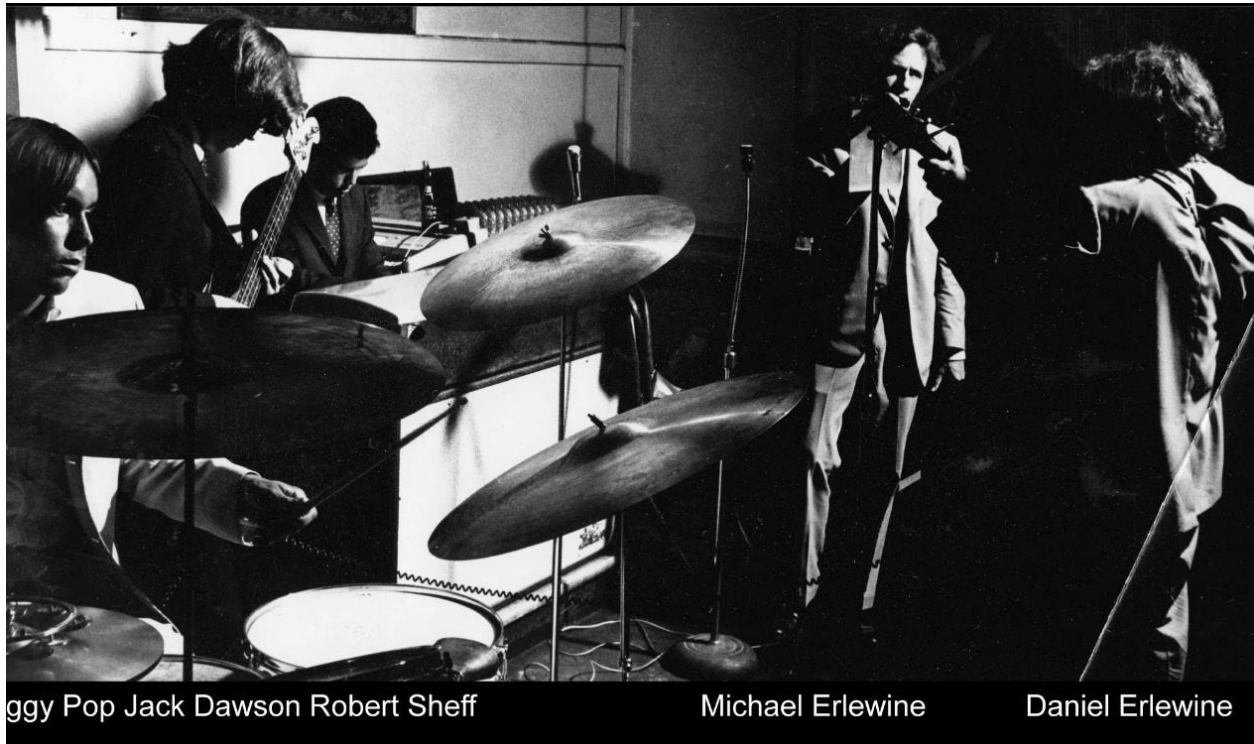
Question: Where did the Prime Movers play?

...Those guys would also do bars like they did two weeks in Grand Rapids at this bar. We lived above it.

Question: That was a college bar then?

Asheton: No, it was just, whoah...all types. It was just like this redneck place... there were a lot of close shaves with drunken redneck types and the Erlewine brothers, with their long curly hair. They would be ... guys would get drunk and call them "Hey, Brillo head" or "Hey nigger hair" or something like that. It was a lot of close shaves, but it was fun. You would just get so plowed and transcend the danger. There was always that edge that there could be a fight any second, you know.

ATTACHMENTS



Iggy.JPG (139.6 KiB) Viewed 953 times