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Iggy Pop Says Stooges Drummer Almost Died This Summer

Iggy also says that he's working on new material with Stooges guitarist James Williamson

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By Andy Greene
September 1, 2011 1:25 PM ET



Iggy and the Stooges

[Iggy and the Stooges](#) just wrapped up their annual summer tour of European festivals, but they did most of the dates without original Stooges drummer Scott Asheton – who is recovering from an undisclosed illness. "He was rushed to the hospital after our appearance at Hellfest in France," Iggy Pop tells *Rolling Stone*. "He was on a flight to England when all sorts of hell broke loose. Without proper medical attention right there he would have bought it. He got very, very good care from the British and all sorts of tests. He's now at home in Florida and I think he'll be fine with a lot of rest."

The Stooges are doing a four-date West Coast tour of the U.S. in September, but Asheton will miss those dates as well. "I want to get him up next year," says Iggy. "The fella that came in to do the job [Larry Mullins] is a worshipful acolyte of his drumming who has been studying every four bars of our musical output since he was a teenager. He knows the songs forwards and backwards."

Here's more from our conversation with Iggy Pop.

You've played almost entirely overseas this year. Why is that?

Well, why not? There have been 30 dates this year and six will be in the States. That's our usual ratio. That sort of corresponds to our record sales, licenses and everything else. The States is a third or less of the world market. If you interview Marlboro, Coca Cola, General Motors or all sorts of people you're going to get a similar answer. In our case it goes a little deeper, but not much deeper.

I feel like I can't do enough. We won't be doing anything more this year. We're already booking next year though, which should be the end of a three-year cycle for us when we cover a particular record or repertoire. So far, we've got something in Warsaw and something in Austin for next year.

You say that next year is the final year of this cycle?

Well, this particular cycle. There'll be other events that should come into play. Either some sort of a recording or a project that involves the group, whether it's a film, or recording within a film, or recording without a film. You

shouldn't do this over and over, ad infinitum, especially when you're vintage. Even when you're new, that leads to too much premature death and dismemberment.

I've heard lots of bootlegs from the early days, and I really feel that you guys play better now.

Yeah, we do. That's one thing I like about the arc of the group, one of the beauties of our relative failure in worldly matters when we were young. We failed to make a big hit in the worldly sense. It left us with something to do in life. It left us with an interesting story arc.

Sting, you're a great guy, love you, but you can practically hear him saying, "Oh Christ, do I have to see them [The Police] again? And go out and sing that bloody shit with them again? How long is this tour? Can we cut it down by a week? Can I have a wall around my part of the stage?" For us, it's a little different. There's a certain sense of mission, at least for me, that's still valid. Also, the execution – we're still learning to do it right.

I'm amazed by [Stooges guitarist] James Williamson's chops. He hadn't played guitar in a good 30 years. I was worried that maybe he had lost it.

Everybody was worried but me. Especially in the early rehearsals. Scott was getting really nervous because it didn't sound . . . it took him some doing. I just said, "Oh, shut up!" I've always been a dangerously theoretical person and my theory was it's the guy. It's technique, just technique. That's all.

You've played a song like "Raw Power" with so many people over the years, but nobody plays it like James.

It was when I was playing it with the 74th guitarist that it began to occur to me that things were flowing in a certain direction. From time to time, I tried to keep a lid on how many of those songs would come into any given repertoire. As the last century closed, I found myself doing more and more of them and choosing my live band more and more on the basis of if they'd enjoy doing Stooge-y stuff instead of would they enjoy playing *Avenue B*, which I love as a record - but there was a conflict there. So I was fortunate that a couple of things clicked and the group came together to get the job done.

Are you working on some new material with James?

Yeah, we started trading stuff by MP3 back and forth as soon as we started. We actually did get together this spring. He came to my house in Miami and we wrote 10 things. I think we like about half of them. One of the songs, "Requiem For A Heavyweight," is a really nice piece of music that James wrote on the dobro. We played it at a tribute concert to Ron Asheton in Michigan earlier this year. I was so nervous that I sang the first half of it an octave too high by accident. I sounded like I was the singer in America. I've always liked "Sister Golden Hair" and "Horse With No Name," but I'm not that guy.

I wrote another song about merchandising called "Popular Pants." We'll keep writing. I think he'd like to make an album and I'd like to make more the score for an intelligent video game. So as far as what the format might be, I don't know.

Have you ever thought about playing *The Idiot* or *Lust For Life* straight through in concert?

I've got to revisit those two live at some point. I've done them so badly live that I'd like to do them really, really well once before I sail into the proverbial sunset. Although at times I've certainly done those songs with with a lot of spirit . . . But, yeah. I would like to do something with those two albums.

You and James had so many years where you didn't talk. Are you guys close now?

I wouldn't call us close.

What would you call it?

I know him. And that's how it's always been with Ron and Scott too. You get to a point in life and a certain age, and through attrition and rapidity of life itself and loss and paranoia, you all of a sudden look around and realize that there are only three or four people that you really know. It's because you know them from way back. So we have that. But on the other hand, there is so much diversity in what we think or feel and what we ever were to begin with, and then we have our diverse experiences – a lot of things come into play. So you know, we're not far either. We have sat down and gotten as drunk as it's okay to get for us to get together. Nobody got hurt.

It was a riot to see all the reactions to your performance on *American Idol*. I went on Twitter and see all of these young kids writing, "Who is that weird, old guy? Why isn't he wearing a shirt?"

Yeah, there was quite a range of reactions. I glanced for a day or two at the general range of the whole thing and it was certainly wide. Even the *Christian Science Monitor* chimed in. It's pretty interesting.

It was probably the single biggest audience of your entire career.

I suppose. I didn't really think of it that way. I mean, I was aware of all of the camera angles and how it would look on TV, but when when you're working it you're thinking of the studio audience and the Supreme Court there in front of you. It was sort like what we had – Sotomayor, Thomas and Scalia. And there I was! Arguing my case.

You turn 70 in six years. Do you see an end date to your performing career?

I would imagine it would seem like it would be sometime at or slightly beyond that type of date there. Probably in there.

You're in pretty good shape though.

Well, I try. Part of that is just refusing to work too hard all the time to try too hard to be a big shot. That's sort of why I live in Miami, although there's more and more international important riff-raff showing up there. But the idea was to stay away from the dreaded A-markets.

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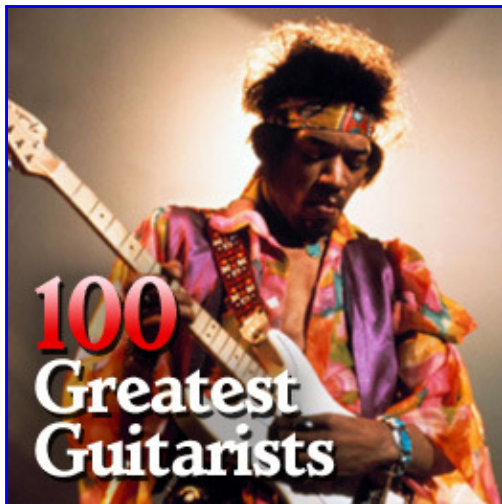
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