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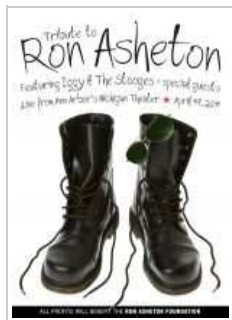


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Iggy & The Stooges _Tribute To Ron Asheton_

MVD Visual

"Love" might not be a word that comes to mind when discussing the music of Iggy Pop and The Stooges (unless it's a devotee saying *they* love the band). Yes, Iggy has declared for decades that "I Wanna Be Your Dog"; he has moaned about "Shake Appeal"; he has announced the presence of the "Cock In My Pocket" – but love has never been a typical theme in the rock 'n' roll world of the Stooges.

But make no mistake about it: love was what the *Tribute To Ron Asheton* was all about on the night of April 19, 2011 – friends and bandmates gathered together to pay tribute to the guitarist and founding member of The Stooges, found dead in his bed on January 1, 2009 having succumbed to a heart attack.

Henry Rollins, the MC for the evening, does a wonderful, heartfelt job of describing not only who Ron Asheton was in terms of man and musician, but how he affected Rollins' own life and music. Though it took two years to organize a formal salute to Asheton, "Tonight we set things right," Rollins tells the crowd in his opening remarks.

And that they do.

Ron's brother Scott – The Stooges' tough-nut silent drummer – provides the night's first surprise as he takes the mic to make a rare public statement. Ball cap, blue jeans, half-tucked-in tee, well-worn leather jacket, and gum-chewing be damned: you can still hear a slight quaver in Scott's voice when he thanks "Jim – AKA Iggy" (Pop's real name is James Osterberg, Jr.) for helping to make his brother Ron's "rock 'n' roll dreams come true. And that goes for the drummer, too," he adds.

Henry Rollins then does a spoken-word tribute to Asheton. "Flashy guitar players use gimmicks to distract you from the fact that they might not have a lot to say," Rollins tells the crowd. "There is not *one second* on the first Stooges album that is not *essential* to the song. There is not one word; there is not one beat; there is not one note that is not needed extremely for every single song. It is a perfect record.

"Iggy's poetry is almost haiku in its sparseness ... and it's that blues guitar of Ron Asheton that lights up Iggy's poetry and makes the rhythm section of Dave Alexander and Scott Asheton come alive. And you realize that Ron Asheton is a serious blues player – playing for the people that have been kicked to the curb."

As both fellow musician and total fan, Rollins is the perfect choice to eulogize Asheton: his 20 minute from-the-heart-with-no-notes



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speech flies by – and when Rollins calls The Stooges to the stage, he remains with them. From the moment he throws his bass over his shoulders, Mike Watt looks ready to pounce – feet spread wide and shoulders slightly hunched. James Williamson looks serious and reserved, his low-slung Les Paul the only thing letting you know he's here to play rock 'n' roll rather than attend a board meeting. And Scott Asheton looks far more comfortable behind his drumset. Rollins leads the band through a fierce "I Got A Right" to warm things up; leaving the stage as Williamson launches into the pounding, driving riff of "Raw Power". Iggy power-skips onto the stage as saxophonist Steve Mackay tucks in alongside Williamson. Stripped to the waist, knock-kneed and hair flying, Iggy is as ... as ... *Iggy* as ever: what you need to remember is, before there was a movement that became known as "punk" – long before – there were Iggy & The Stooges. They were the originals; and they were gathered on this night to remind everyone that Ron Asheton was an original, as well.

There were enough cameras to not only stalk Iggy as he catapults around the stage, but to capture Mike Watt's wild lost-in-the-moment expressions; to capture James Williamson's fingers at work; to close in on Scott Asheton, tucked into his cockpit and driving the rhythm.

There are multiple classic Stoooge moments: Iggy invites the crowd up on the stage for "Shake Appeal"; the band flies off into a crazed space at the end of "LA Blues" before diving into the shadows of "Night Theme", an oft-overlooked Stooges instrumental; Iggy launches himself into the crowd on "Your Pretty Face Is Going To Hell", crawling back onto the stage soaked and grinning.

Watt and Asheton provide not only pile driver rhythms, but amazing amounts of tension-and-release dynamics, as well; Mackay's sax bumps against Iggy's vocals and ricochets off the grooves; Williamson mines a wide range of great guitar tone out of his Les Pauls – everything from mock acoustic darkness to chainsaw roar.

An orchestra actually joins the band for "I Wanna Be Your Dog", but that doesn't stop Iggy from flinging himself into the crowd. (And yes: Mackay holds down the tune's signature one-note piano riff.) Radio Birdman's Deniz Tek – a longtime friend of Ron Asheton – takes Williamson's place for a four-song run, providing a brilliant psychedelic twist to things.

Towards the evening's end, a sweat-drenched Iggy sits on a monitor to say a few words of his own about Ron Asheton – and to tell the crowd, "Thanks for showing up ... and thanks for giving me a life." Williamson joins him, having traded his Les Paul for a Weissenborn lap steel, and the two perform "Ron's Tune" – Williamson delicately fingerpicking while Iggy tells his fallen bandmate, "The only place you find some peace is when you're in the ground ..."

Then it's one more slam-crash as the full band (with both Williamson and Tek on guitar) tears into "No Fun". The stage once again fills with dancers; The Stooges play their asses off; Iggy prowls amongst the writhing bodies, dancing, grinning. A final drum roll from brother Scott – *kawump* – and it's over.

Ron Asheton would've loved it.

Brian Robbins flings himself into the crowd over at www.brian-robbins.com

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