



Blowing Fuses Left and Right: The Legendary Detroit Rock Interviews

Directed by Gil Margulis

[MVD Visual](#) - MVD5119D (DVD)

Available from [Amazon.com](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
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The, er, brains behind this lo-fi and dated but still unique set of interviews is Gil Margulis, who, in the intro segment, comes off like a TV merch hawk. Don't let that discourage you. Why it took him 25 years to finally get this DVD together (the interrogatives were done in 1988) is anyone's guess—perhaps because MVD is one of the few labels that will readily take on offbeat historical documents and he had to make his way to them—but the genesis motivation is simple and straightforward: Margulis was a teen-aged enthusiast who had his head crushed by the Detroit sound of the 60s and wanted to delve more deeply into just what the hell was going on with these anarchic exuberant musicians who were taking rock and roll into the back alley and administering a mugging.

The gents interviewed are none other than the great Ron Asheton of the Stooges, sadly now departed from this vale of tears and Marshalls; Rob Tyner, the exuberantly odd singer for the MC5, also croaked; and Dennis Thompson, still alive and at one time the MC5's drummer. I have to say I VERY much recall grabbing the Stooges LP off the racks when it first issued because it was so damned off the wall, especially the mesmerizing and Stooge-atypical *We Will Fall*. With Blue Cheer, the Red Crayola's *Parable of Arable Land*, Harumi, and various other grunge, freak-out, metal, and strange-prog albums as preparatory fodder, *The Stooges* was still a stand-out and, as we'd find, the real germ seed for punk (the MC5 is oft also credited thusly but were too jazz-prog-psychedelic and creative to really be punk). Asheton's being quizzed in what appears to be his kitchen, smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, and orally reciting a plethora of anecdotes and insights into the unfolding story of one of the world's most famous rock groups. What you hear from him in *Blowing Fuses*, you'll catch nowhere else.

Where the Stooges and Iggy only ever gained in presence, sales, and prolificacy, the MC5, in terms of releases, collapsed after a mere three years but landmarked themselves as an imperishable milestone in rock and roll's tumultuous rollercoaster. Where Asheton is plain-spoken, downbeat, and matter-of-factly pedestrian in his narrative, Rob Tyner's more passionate and, as one would expect, politically based, but it was revelatory to discover that his unorthodox stage presence wasn't just a theatrical work-out but actually derived in a berserker side to his psyche. His narrative is filled with honesty and a thousand factoids not found in other interviews and essays, unveiled through a viewpoint dominantly psychological. In fact, in his recitation can be found what I suspect will one day be a part of a reinspection of the psycho-cultural aspects of rock and will burrow much more deeply into motivational truisms well beyond the social contrivances and consensus reality presently standing as facile explanations.

Tyner holds back not at all, starts busting up the seamy side alleys that give the lie to the peace and love side of the house. Sure, there was the Jefferson Airplane and flower power, but there were also rough-asses like the MC5 who liked a little blood in their teeth, and Rob hesitates not a moment to lay it out. After not being consulted by the press for a long long time following on the group's demise (they'd rise twice again, briefly in the mid-90s, then in 2003-2012), it appears he wanted a confessional booth as well as a historiographer's chance to set the record a hell of a lot much straighter. Listening to him is a whole new lesson in the practice and the business of professional rock and roll...which, as especially Frank Zappa oft stated, is filthy.

Dennis Thompson's the angry man among the three, not in an overt mode but simmering underneath, slipping out fairly frequently in cynical commentary and opinionations, sometimes challenging Margulis to inspect his questions and premises. Like Tyner, though, a disarming honesty shines through readily, especially as he debunks the longstanding media-spreche meme that MC5 was a revolutionary band. It didn't start out that way but sorta kinda sided in as time went on, and the imprint became inevitable due to mercantile-social pressures. What the gents really wanted was "to be the hottest rock and roll band" and politics be damned. In fact, again like Tyner, Thompson demolishes a lot of the rock mythology surrounding them, takes an axe to the BS and lays out the very simple soul-deep artistic motivations. It was also he who was enthusiastic about Margulis' project and, had he not helped the young...er, film-maker...with access and encouragement, we might never have had this fascinating set of insights.

You have to hand it to Gil, though, despite my several razzes in this critique, as he managed to obtain an archival snapshot that overturns a lot of fantasies, wish fulfillments, and even pseudo-religious mindsets regarding what art and expression are, why the 60s spawned what it did, and why Detroit was so damned different. Paradoxically, the late release of this DVD is more important now than it might have been in its own time. With the dismayingly prevalent permanent bullshit of critics like David Fricke, Robert Christgau, Dave Marsh, and others, and with Baby Boomer, now more willing to reinspect their golden days

Fricke, Robert Christgau, Dave Marsh, and others, and with Baby Boomers now more willing to re-inspect their golden days, especially as the capitalist system dives into a shithole, what's laid out by the cats who were there in real time, living life in a cyclone, chisels the truth into stone tablets and may, along with a number of other manifests (and hopefully an honest critic/journalist or two, but don't hold your damned breath on that), finally yield the kind of aestheto-sociological chronicle still very much needed. For a very satisfying three full hours, you sit cheek to jowl with the brains and emotions of these three guys who are and were quite a bit different from what the press, their managers, and PR agencies made them out to be.

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