

Ron Asheton, Whose Supercharged Riffs Powered the Stooges, Dies at 60

The Stooges frontman pays tribute to his old friend and guitarist

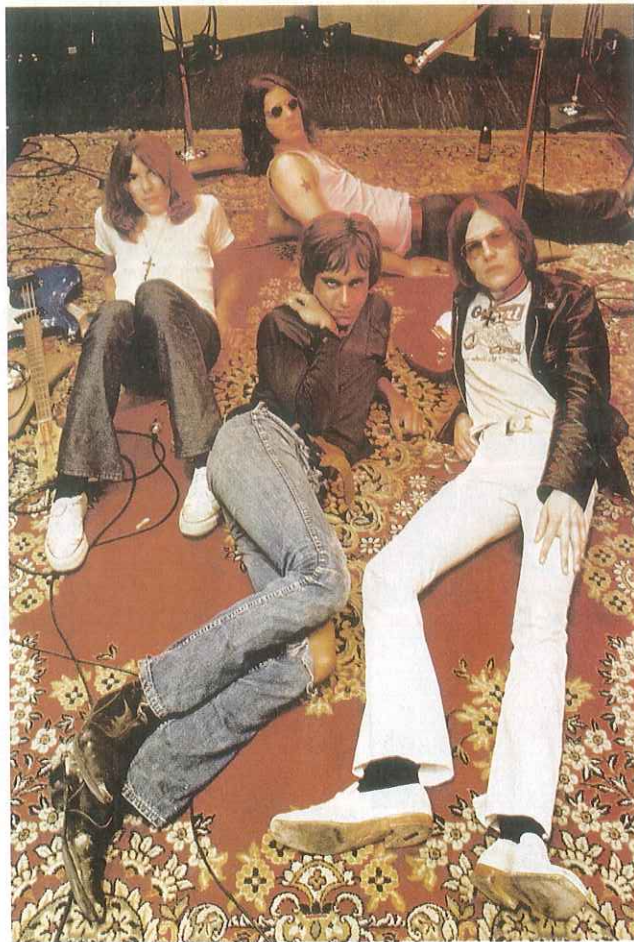
By Iggy Pop

THIS IS THE END OF AN era." Those were the big words that flew into my mind the day I heard Ron was gone. Because he developed a new music. When the Stooges started, I told Ron and his brother Scott, our drummer, "We're going to do something new. These other bands, our young contemporaries - a few years up the road, they won't be here. But we will." My particular talent was a partial one. I would have loved to have written a first-class riff. But Ron took over, doing the themes and motifs. We were better off.

These are the songs that best sum him up: "1969" [on 1969's *The Stooges*] has an economy and clarity of rhythm. The riff is done in a beautifully minimalist style. Nobody's cover ever sounds as good as our version. I love "I Wanna Be Your Dog" for its fully committed mysticism. The magic in his riff, the way he plays it, has too much mojo for the world to appreciate. And "T.V. Eye," for the hypnosis and commitment in his groove. My part is just a couple of notes over and over. But he created a whole world around that.

We both went to Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He was a year younger than me. He played bass in a cover band, the Chosen Few. At one point, Ron and [original Stooges bassist] Dave Alexander cut school and bought round-trip tickets to Liverpool. They wanted to go to the Cavern Club. They had dreams of being in a band like the English groups they admired. I know they saw the Who there. Ron talked about that trip for years. "That trip gave us backbone," he once said, then listed all the things he wasn't gonna do - go to school, get a job.

I forced him to play guitar. Ron's hands were very elegant, large but with long, long fin-



YOUNG PUNKS Ron Asheton, Iggy Pop, Dave Alexander and Scott Asheton (clockwise from right) in Los Angeles, 1970

gers. I saw those hands and thought, "That guy can do it." His sound was the tone of the universe, the stars at night. It was a highly ambient tone. He was listening as much as he was playing. He had a wonderful sense of timing. He didn't rush things, and that carried over into his personal life. He hated to be rushed. I was the den mother when it came to getting rehearsals done on time, and he'd always grumble, "Don't herd me. I'm not an animal."

When he wrote those riffs, Ron would go off by himself. He liked to be alone, in the mood. He would doodle while half-listening to his favorite musicians - his big favorite was Jimi Hendrix. I know he was messing around to Hendrix one day, to "Stone Free"

and "Highway Chile." Later, I heard parts of those timings in "I Wanna Be Your Dog" and "Not Right."

Ron was a private person. He enjoyed easygoing socializing - he liked nothing better

than to sit around the hotel bar after gigs with the crew. But he didn't suffer tension very well. When you have a drug band, it's always key to have one guy who doesn't do it. As things got hairy, Ron moved into this private apartment we had in our house in Ann Arbor. He could heat up coffee, get a beer out of the fridge, take a pee and not have to go outside the door and see the rest of us. What else could he do? Join the Monkees? He knew the Stooges were an important group.

I never once heard Ron complain about the bad things people said about the band, that we were a joke. He thought it was funny. But he had a lot of pride in the group. And in the end, he made people happy. All those numbers we played when we got back together in 2003 sent people into another dimension. When we hit the open-

His sound was the tone of the stars at night. And he listened as much as he played.

ing of "I Wanna Be Your Dog," it was like a genie coming out of a bottle. Ron waited a long time for that. In these last six years, he became a full-fledged rock powerhouse. His dream came true. **ES**

William Zantzinger 1939-2009

William Zantzinger, who inspired Bob Dylan's protest classic "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," died of undisclosed causes on January 3rd. He was 69. On February 8th, 1963, a drunken Zantzinger, attending a charity ball at Baltimore's Emerson Hotel, hit several employees with a toy cane while using racial slurs. He hit Carroll, a 51-year-old African-American barmaid, in the head for pouring a drink too slowly. She ran to the kitchen and told co-workers she felt "deathly ill." The following day, Carroll - who suffered from high blood pressure and an enlarged heart - died in a hospital. After being found guilty of involuntary manslaughter, Zantzinger served a six-month sentence. In 1991, Zantzinger pleaded guilty to charging rent on slum housing he no longer owned. The song haunted Zantzinger, who disputed some of the key facts, until his death. "[It is a] total lie," he told Dylan biographer Howard Sounes in 2001. "[Dylan]'s just a scumbag of the earth. I should have sued him and put him in jail."

ANDY GREENE