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# WIKIS

EVERLY  
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FLAMIN'  
GROOVES  
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KEITH  
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VELVETS

# I WAS A VELVETEEN

1965

BY ROB NORRIS

Towards the end of 1965 there was a lot of good music on the airwaves. But for us kids, High School was a real drag and life in our little suburban town (ONLY thirty miles west of Greenwich Village) wasn't too exciting. Except for one thing: a local band called the Myddle Class! To us, they were as good as the Rolling Stones ANY day and their concerts were the most exciting ones we'd ever seen. They were managed by a man who lived in our town-- Al Aronowitz. My friend Judy was the Aronowitz's babysitter and she would tell us the most amazing stories about the people who would call for Al or come home from New York with him to hide out in the suburbs: people like Brian Jones, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Carole King, who wrote songs for everyone including the Myddle Class. We would hide outside Al's house for hours at a time just to catch a glimpse of those stars. Al usually hired other local bands to open for the Myddle Class but for the December 11th concert at Summit High, he hired (for \$80) a NY band called The Velvet Underground. Judy told us that the band was feeling low because they had just been fired from the Cafe Wha for being undanceable, so we were not expecting too much from them.

Nothing could have prepared the kids and parents assembled in the auditorium for what they were about to experience that night. Our only clue was the small crowd of strange-looking people hanging around in front of the stage. When the curtain went up, nobody could believe their eyes! There stood the Velvet Underground-- all tall and dressed mostly in black; two of them were wearing sunglasses. One of the guys with the shades had VERY long hair and was wearing silver jewelry. He was

holding a large violin. The drummer had a Beatle haircut and was standing at a small oddly arranged drum kit. Was it a boy or a girl? Before we could take it all in, everyone was hit by a screeching surge of sound, with a pounding beat louder than anything we had ever heard. About a minute into the second song, which the singer had introduced as "Heroin", the music began to get even more intense. It swelled and accelerated like a giant tidal wave which was threatening to engulf us all. At this point, most of the audience retreated in horror for the safety of their homes, thoroughly convinced of the dangers of rock & roll music. My friends and I moved a little closer to the stage, knowing that something special was happening.

Backstage after their set, the viola player was seen apologizing profusely to an outraged Myddle Class entourage for scaring away half the audience. Al Aronowitz was philosophical about it, though. He said, "at least you've given them a night to remember" and invited everyone to a party at his house after the show.

The auditorium was almost full again when the Myddle Class kicked off their half of the evening with "I'm A King Bee", sounding something of a cross between the Rolling Stones and Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. They had everyone on their feet in no time, with a well-paced set of originals, Stones tunes, and R&B classics, including a jazzy version of "St. James Infirmary", a Staple Singers number, and a beautiful Goffin & King song (which later appeared on Ms. Springfield's DUSTY IN MEMPHIS lp) called "I Can't Make It Alone." They brought the house down with the songs from their first 45, "Free As The Wind" b/w

"Gates of Eden." Al was RIGHT. It was a night we would never forget...!

# 2

1967

I finally got out of High School in 1967, having learned one thing for sure: I wanted to play rock & roll. After a wild West coast excursion through the summer of love, I settled down in Boston and found the city alive with good bands, as well as with a great rock & roll magazine called FUSION. There were outdoor concerts on the Boston and Cambridge Commons and lots of musicians to jam with. On the edge of the Roxbury ghetto stood the area's best rock club, a wonderful old wooden meeting hall called the Tea Party where you could see bands like the Yardbirds, the Who, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Traffic, B.B. King, and Boston's favorite band, the Velvet Underground. (The back cover photo on WHITE LIGHT/WHITE HEAT was taken on the front steps of the Tea Party.) I was part of a small meditation group centered around an esoteric-astrologer named Isabelle Hickey and her friend Mitch who also worked as a sound man at the Tea Party. One night at a Velvets concert Mitch told me that Lou Reed was a friend of his and offered to introduce me to him between sets, hinting that Lou would be very different from what I was probably expecting him to be. A bit later we went into a big back room where Lou Reed sat, all by himself, eating what looked to be sawdust out of a jar. Mitch introduced us and slipped quietly out of the room. I was speechless. After sizing me up for a few seconds, Lou said, "What are you, on amphetamines or something?" I mumbled that I was not and asked what it was that he was eating. I was informed that it was a high-protein wheat germ mixture that he always ate before playing. This was followed by a brief lecture on the evils of drug abuse. My mind was reeling! I blurted out something about how much I loved their music and that I had

seen them at Summit High three years earlier. Lou broke into a huge grin & took me into the other room to meet the rest of the band. Everyone was amazed that I'd seen the show (except Doug of course) so we sat around and reminisced till it was time for them to go back on stage. It was wonderful to meet them like that. I was really impressed by how intelligent, articulate, and polite they were: it changed my whole impression of rock & roll stars. They were real people like me and you, after all! After that, I saw the Velvets a lot and everytime I did, I'd go back and see Lou hold court answering fans' questions, giving his opinion on just about every topic imaginable. One person I always noticed around in those days was a skinny little kid named Jonathan Richman, who seemed familiar with everyone. My favorite nights were those when I could sit and listen to Lou and Mitch talk. They would discuss the most amazing things: angels, saints, the universe, diet, yoga, meditation, Jesus, healing with music, cosmic rays, and astrology.

I learned that Lou and Doug (and John Cale before him) were Pisces, and Maureen and Sterling were Virgos. (All the songs on the second LP are published by Three Prong Music which is the trident of Neptune, who is the ruler of Pisces.) In astrology the Virgo-Pisces configuration is an opposition filled with Christian symbolism. Lou also contained this opposition in his own chart. On the third album, this duality found expression even in the back cover photo and the songs were published by Virpi Inc. Lou was a member of the Church of Light in NYC, which, like Isabelle Hickey's group in Boston, studied, among other things, the teachings of Alice Bailey. Lou explained how a lot of his songs embodied the Virgo-Pisces opposition and could be taken two ways. "White Light/White Heat" was an obvious drug song showing the Piscean, suffering and self-indulgent... "road of excess" side of things. But it was also about enlightenment, expressing the Christian purity, self control, "palace of wisdom" aspects of Virgo. Enlightenment was expressed in the feminine on songs like "Here She Comes Now" and "I Heard Her Call My Name."

Live, at this time, the band was incredible. They were super-tight, confident, very powerful, and loads of FUN! One night the MC5 opened for the Velvets; this was when the 5 were at the height of their politically active period and they were accompanied into town by a whole troupe of leather-clad White Panther crazies and a raving M.C. who after their dynamite set exhorted the audience to tear down the hall because it was not large enough to hold their energies and to take to the streets. When the Velvets came on, Lou spoke first to everyone present, saying, "I'd just like to make one thing clear. We have nothing to do with what went on earlier and in fact we consider it very stupid. This is our favorite place to play in the whole country and we would hate to see anyone even TRY to destroy it!" The Detroit contingent was stunned by this remark and the thunderous applause that followed it. The Velvets played especially well that night...

Soon after, the Tea Party did close, replaced by the Ark, a bigger, slicker club where the Velvets played a couple of times. In the fall of '69 I moved to England and a year later read about the night during their summer-long gig at Max's when Lou walked out for good and left the band with an unfinished fourth lp...

# 3

1972

Back in Boston again. The whole music scene was pretty bleak, record companies having gotten the Big Hint from the Woodstock festival and rock & roll having become more & more big business and less & less innovative. In February, the fourth Velvets lp finally did come out. Doug Yule had obviously taken charge of finishing the album, augmenting it with his harmony vocals, lead guitar work, and piano and guitar texture. His name was first in the "line up" and he was the only person in the back cover pic, but... THE RECORD WAS GREAT!

The Velvets! Where were they now when we needed them? The answer to that question came in May of that year in the form of a newspaper clipping from Ohio entitled

"Velvet Underground Resurfaces In Cleveland." The band, led by Doug Yule on lead guitar and lead vocals, consisted of Sterling Morrison and Maureen Tucker, with Walter Powers on bass. (Walter was once in a fine Boston band called Listening.) The author of the article spoke in glowing terms about the twin lead guitar interplay and smooth, tight vocal harmonies, and stated that they played real strong straight-ahead rock & roll. Hmmm, the Velvet Underground? I HAD to check this out!

About a month later they played at a small club in Gloucester (Mass.) and it was all true, they were fantastic! Maureen even had a regular drum kit and was really rockin'. The only problem was the bass player, who was definitely NOT Walter Powers; this guy just did not cut it.

After the show the Velvets and their old friends from the area (inc. J. Richman who now had a band called The Modern Lovers) gathered in the yard and for the first time I sat and talked with the Velvets' long time manager Steve Sesnick, a very friendly, very slick businessman, who owned the name "Velvet Underground". (Astrology note: Steve was a Virgo.) He was the one who had convinced Brian Epstein to make the VU his next project.

He was a very persuasive character and his relationship with the early Velvets (particularly Lou Reed, as a sort of urbane, reassuring street-wise alter ego) is a story in itself. When I asked him about the bass player, he explained that Walter had fallen down some stairs in Detroit and had broken his jaw and that this was the only guy they could find that very day, when Walter had decided that he couldn't play the gig, adding that he hoped that Walter would be well enough to play the following week in Philly. I offered my services on bass and to my great joy Sesnick said it was a great idea and arranged an on-the-spot audition with Doug on piano. We played some of the new tunes Doug was working on and said that if Walter could not make it... I spent the rest of the night hanging out with the band with my head in the clouds. The main topics of conversation: astrology and GOLF !?!

Well... Walter recovered and I ended up in California for a while before returning to New York for a brief stint with Circus Magazine...Sterling finished out that tour and then departed with his new wife for Texas to teach English literature. He was replaced by Willie Alexander (another Boston musician best known for his band, the Lost) when the Velvets toured Europe to promote "Loaded". The tour was a success and while they were here, Doug recorded his solo album, playing all the instruments except drums, which were played by Ian Paice. But more and more discrepancies were coming to light concerning Steve Sesnicks handling of the band's career and finances. After the tour, the band broke up for good with Doug and his wife heading for the hills of New Hampshire.

With the Velvets finished, Sesnicks set about assembling his next band, based around singer Hank Daniels (formerly of the Los Angeles band the Sloths) who he had heard on tour in France. On bass he had Hank's friend George Kay; on drums, Billy Yule; with his pal George Nardo on lead guitar. I played rhythm. We played through the summer and fall of '72 in the New York area while Steve tried to hustle us up a contract. One day Sesnicks took me aside and told me that Polydor wanted to release Doug's record as the fifth Velvets album and would line up another European tour. The band would consist of Doug, Sterling, Mo and me.(on bass) Maureen came around a few times to jam and visit with Steve and his wife Penny, but when it was learned that Sterling wasn't interested in touring, Mo changed her mind, too. Undaunted, Steve put me on rhythm, George Kay on bass, and rather than Billy on drums found Mark Nauseff through A.T.I.-- Mark had never even heard of the Velvet Underground. (His favorite drummer was Ian Paice!) Doug came down from New Hampshire at the last minute,(Sesnicks didn't want him and Billy comparing notes.) and we rehearsed for a couple of days. Then we were off to England;the SQUEEZE tour!

The tour (nine shows) was well received and lots of fun but more managerial difficulties and impending legal activities caused the group to split up at the end of the tour and head back to the States. I stayed on in England for a while before ending up in New Hampshire in early '73 where I found one last version of the Velvet Underground about to perform in Boston without Sesnicks's consent.

This version had Doug Yule on lead guitar, Billy Yule on drums, and George on bass (the old Rockets rhythm section) with a friend of George's from California named Don on rhythm guitar. They played one weekend at a small club in Boston, to a small but appreciative audience, unveiling even newer material...

Shortly thereafter this little-known version of the Velvet Underground disbanded and the saga of the post-Lou Reed Velvet Underground finally came to a close. AMEN!



**VELVET UNDERGROUND**

**THE EVENING at Words in St**  
 Saturday City Hall last  
 night of rock 'n' roll. It  
 was a night of rock 'n' roll.  
 which could have kicked off the  
 evening with a heavyish set  
 which could have been better  
 appreciated by the heavyish set  
 the sound system had been ap-  
 preciated better had their  
 Orchestra. Next on were Fusion  
 storm despite the fact that  
 Their own lights went down a  
 kick and Jill Seward added a  
 about the stage like a danced  
 scopie fairy in torment Novelty  
 of the night award goes to  
 drummer Dave Bell who played  
 the FLOOR Dave Bell who played  
 right round the hall. Fusion  
 came back for an encore too.  
 On came Velvet Underground  
 every inch a rock 'n' roll band.  
 A lot of the material was old  
 stuff - necessary as the band  
 have yet to hear the new  
 material (their most recent  
 album hasn't been released  
 here). Old faithfuls like "Wait-  
 ing For My Man" and "Sweet  
 Jane" harked back to the days  
 when Low Reed was in the  
 band. Low Reed was in the  
 band.

Half the audience were there  
 to see a group which must be  
 legend now. The other half  
 were there to rave so everybody  
 was happy.

The Velvets had been jam-  
 ming in the dressing room for  
 two hours before they came on  
 stage - they obviously like  
 playing. The line-up nowadays  
 is Doug Yule, Rob Morris,  
 guitar; George Kay, bass; and  
 Mark Nauseff, drums.  
 People were listening, people  
 were dancing, the Velvets were  
 playing and everyone had a  
 good time and an encore -  
 "Heroin." - NOEL MERED-  
 ITH.

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