



Iggy Pop: Open Up and Bleed

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“Fellow rock stars, casual members of the public, lords and media magnates, countless thousands of people will talk of their encounters with this driven, talented, indomitable creature, a man who has plumbed the depths of depravity, yet emerged with an indisputable nobility. Each of them will share an admiration and appreciation of the contradictions and ironies of his incredible life. Even so, they are unlikely to fully comprehend both the heights and the depths of his experience, for the extremes are simply beyond the realms of most people’s understanding.”

—from the Prologue

The first full biography of one of rock ’n’ roll’s greatest pioneers and legendary wild men

Born James Newell Osterberg Jr., Iggy Pop transcended life in Ypsilanti, Michigan, to become a member of the punk band the Stooges, thereby earning the nickname “the Godfather of Punk.” He is one of the most riveting and reckless performers in music history, with a commitment to his art that is perilously total. But his personal life was often a shambles, as he struggled with drug addiction, mental illness, and the ever-problematic question of commercial success in the music world. That he is even alive today, let alone performing with undiminished energy, is a wonder. The musical genres of punk, glam, and New Wave were all anticipated and profoundly influenced by his work.

Paul Trynka, former editor of *Mojo* magazine, has spent much time with Iggy’s childhood friends, lovers, and fellow musicians, gaining a profound understanding of the particular artistic culture of Ann Arbor, where Iggy and the Stooges were formed in the mid to late sixties. Trynka has conducted over 250 interviews, has traveled to Michigan, New York, California, London, and Berlin, and, in the course of the last decade or so at *Mojo*, has spoken to dozens of musicians who count Iggy as an influence. This has allowed him to depict, via real-life stories from members of bands like New Order and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Iggy’s huge influence on the music scene of the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s, as well as to portray in unprecedented detail Iggy’s relationship with his enigmatic friend and mentor David Bowie. Trynka has also interviewed Iggy Pop himself at his home in Miami for this book. What emerges is a fascinating psychological study of a Jekyll/Hyde personality: the quietly charismatic, thoughtful, well-read Jim Osterberg hitched to the banshee creation and alter ego that is Iggy Pop.

Iggy Pop: Open Up and Bleed is a truly definitive work—not just about Iggy Pop’s life and music but also about the death of the hippie dream, the influence of drugs on human creativity, the nature of comradeship, and the depredations of fame.

Iggy Pop: Open Up and Bleed Details

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Nigeyb says

I've been into Iggy since discovering The Stooges whilst at school in the mid 1970s. Everything I found out about him appealed to my troubled teenage self. My fascination has continued into adulthood and middle age. I was at the Virgin Megastore in Marble Arch, London in 1979 to get my copy of the then newly released "New Values" signed by Mr Pop (and I happened to notice Scott Thurston hanging about in the background and got him to sign it too). As a sixteen year old, on the night before my Maths O'Level examination, I was at the Music Machine in Camden Town, London watching Iggy live (it *was* worth it - and I passed the exam). Over the years I've seen him play live over ten times, and consider watching Iggy and The Stooges play Raw Power live in 2010 at Hammersmith Apollo, London to be one of the greatest nights of my life.

So, whilst not an über-fan, I'm pretty keen: Raw Power, Funhouse, Lust For Life and The Idiot would feature in my list of greatest albums of all time. Despite this enthusiasm I've never read a biography of Iggy. Until now.

Paul Trynka, ex-Mojo Magazine editor, has produced the definitive biography here. He appears to have spoken with everyone who has been involved with Iggy over the years and seems to have been completely honest, and has certainly included plenty of examples of Iggy's selfishness and unpleasant behaviour. As a reasonably well informed fan, I discovered a wealth of information I hadn't known previously and much of this information has added to my understanding of his work and personality. It also sent me straight back to the music - always a good sign.

I do wonder how much a non-fan, or even casual fan, would get out of this book. There is plenty of depravity, in amongst the creativity, and incessant highs and lows, but would this be enough for a reader who has no interest in, or history with, the Ig?

For this fan it's unquestionably a five star read: well written, exciting, redemptive, informative, and inspirational. My only complaint is that, since its publication in 2008 more has happened: the induction into the Rock n Roll Hall Of Fame; Ron Asheton's death; the return of James Williamson; another Stooges album; and more solo Iggy albums (including the current French obsession). That's a very minor gripe though, as this is unquestionably the final word on Iggy, and provides in-depth coverage of the all important Stooges' years and the late seventies, post-Stooges renaissance with David Bowie. A classic.

Ms Tlaskal says

I am interested in late 60's/70s pop/rock and Iggy Pop struck me as an emblem of this uninhibited era.

This excellent biography is a good example to use to illustrate a need for alternate points of view in narrative writing. Paul Trynka is a great writer who keeps us speeding from his student years as a possible presidential candidate, to his first gigs, adulation and debauchery, yet I longed to hear his own voice, rather than the measured one of his biographer. I honestly did not read every page after the middle, just skimmed over the drug use and zany pool parties, but the bits about him and David Bowie were interesting.

The best tidbits I learnt were in the first quarter:

He was an asthmatic and was given a drug akin to speed as a treatment which exacerbated his creativity...maybe gave him a taste for drugs later on

His real name was Jim Osterberg, Iggy Pop was a megalomaniac persona he added later

The Iggy bit came from the first band he was in; The Iguanas

He saw Bob Dylan at a transition concert in Ann Arbor, in which he had traded his acoustic guitar for electric and the abuse he copped for it

His band The Stooges 'could only have existed in Ann Arbor, for no other place was as smart and as dumb'

Iggy used to sing into a vacuum cleaner to get vocal effects

When two members of his band were deriding the looks of two fans in the front row, he upbraided them and told them that these were two fans willing to give you their attention, and that was...gold.

He never wore a shirt on stage because he read somewhere that the pharaohs never wore shirts...

Tosh says

This is a very good rock n' roll biography by Paul Trynka (who was the editor at Mojo Magazine) on Iggy Pop. He did his research well, and interviews I think almost everyone who is close to Iggy, except Bowie - and there is a lot of material in this book on the Bowie/Iggy relationship.

The fascinating aspect for me is how Iggy deals with his fellow band members over the years. Sometimes charming, sometimes cruel - he is sort of goes off like the weather. Yet he's a guy who is usually in control of the situation no matter how stoned he is or was. Like a cat he lands on his two feet - or sometimes on his chin.

Without a doubt Iggy/Jim (his real name) is somewhere between a genius and an innocent with a pair of angels on his shoulders. This will probably be the essential biography on Iggy, so it is recommended for those who thrill to "The Idiot" or "Raw Power" And of course the first two classic Stooges albums.

Caddy Rowland says

I don't know how anyone could give this book less than 5 stars unless they don't find Iggy Pop fascinating...and if they don't, why would they read it?

I enjoyed it very much. Many times it made me sad for Iggy. I felt compassion for him, even during his ugliest moments, as I think he has some issues most people will never understand, including me. But to have a persona that completely takes over your mind and body...it can be your performance but it also can ruin your personal relationships. And, as the book indicates, it isn't easy to switch off and on. I don't believe it

was quite so easy as to say he had a choice. Not sure he did.

I love Iggy very much. I think punk, heavy metal, and music that followed owe a debt of gratitude to him. I also hope by now he has opened himself up to truly loving and finds peace and a happy personal life.

The ending of the book had me sobbing. It was heartbreakingly beautiful in it's wording.

Peter Krakow says

In this thinly veiled fictionalization of the Democratic Party since the late 1950's author Paul Trynka (whom I suspect is actually David McCullough using an alias) digs deep into why Liberal ideals have never risen to their rightful place in the pantheon of American history.

Using a made up character named Iggy Pop to represent the brilliance and visceral embodiment of the Thinking Left, we're taken on a roller coaster ride of the highs and lows of the party, what could have been and whose responsible . . . mostly a greedy corporate media and Air Supply fans (Republicans) . . . for making sure we (he) never becomes the rock star to rule them all.

And yes, Mr Pop doesn't always help matters. Just as it looks like he's recorded a record that will cure all the social ills of the common man for good, he goes on a heroin bender and gets more attention for things like taking a crap on stage behind the Marshall stacks (some metaphors were more eluding than others) than for refusing to compromise the punk rock life style (the single payer option) only to sell out, rise again . . . get by-passed 6 times by the Rock'n Hall of Fame and then chuck it all again for a new hot cuban girlfriend.

The sad irony of the man with the largest dick in rock (The Real American Dream), that somehow still feels inadequate (Liberal Guilt) is a touching, complex, powerful, but ultimately depressing story of our times.

I highly recommend it.

Jeanne T. says

Couldn't put this down and when I was done I had an erotic dream about Iggy Pop. Amazing. Unlike the Susan Sontag biography, this book was a riot of action. It was interesting to read about a such a punk legend and how he didn't really find much "success" in the time when he was writing/making the music. In retrospect (fueled by the inclusion of his songs in the Trainspotting soundtrack), it seemed to me that he was always famous and amazing. Also, I love the stories of people who had a hard life, touched bottom and came through it wiser.

Dan says

A generally well researched and fact-filled biography but not written in a manner that keeps your interest for very long. Iggy Pop is one of my favorite artists yet I struggled to read more than a chapter without having to put the book down due to the author's bothersome writing style. I do not recommend this book to anyone, whether you are an Iggy Pop fan or not.

Dr. Detroit says

When it comes to The Stooges and their slightly troubled front man Iggy Pop, attempting to separate myth from reality, contextualize it, understand it, and then shape the whole mess into something that doesn't make you want to grab a razor blade and run a warm bath after reading it, dances a fine line between brave and foolhardy.

Despite the title, Paul Trynka's chronicle is as much about The Stooges as it about Iggy, the specter of the Asheton brothers, Dave Alexander, and James Williamson bothering his every step during the 30-plus years since the wheels came off, reunion questions, rumors, and propositions unanswered until a few years back. And in true Stooges fashion, their first studio album since *Hector* was a pup, "The Weirdness," was greeted with a universal "huh?" last month.

Tellingly perhaps, Trynka's prologue picks up the plot at what is arguably the band's nadir, the February, 1974 Michigan Palace dust-up which spawned the glorious "Metallic K.O.," an album chock full of physical and psychological warfare and the sound of Iggy with his finger on the self-destruct button, where it would remain throughout a very dark period in L.A. which made John Lennon's lost weekend look like a Promise Keepers convention.

Trynka paints a stark picture of what the boy voted "most likely to succeed" in high school had been reduced to; often homeless, drooling, desperate for Quaaludes or heroin, and boasting an arrest record which included impersonating a woman. He was about as far gone as any muso has ever been, perhaps less concerned with dying than not living. The fact that he eventually made it back out into the light with most of his grey matter still basically preserved goes in part toward my theory that he was dropped off in that Ypsilanti trailer park from another part of the cosmos after being fortified with the Detroit equivalent of Kryptonite.

When he was inevitably institutionalized for the first time after being given an ultimatum by the LAPD, even the head shrinkers' panties were in a bunch trying to diagnosis him, eventually settling on hypomania, a disorder on the bipolar side of the chart characterized by wide swings between euphoria, irrationality, and depression. Copious drug intake and the daily grind of hopping on and off the Iggy and Jim Osterberg treadmills is a lot of pressure for even someone with Iggy's constitution to weather.

"Open Up and Bleed" is a wellspring of Iggy/Stooges minutia, much of which even a life-long Detroiter like yours truly hadn't heard or read before, like the five-stitch cut on Iggy's chin suffered during the photo sessions for "The Stooges" album cover which had to be airbrushed out or the audition arranged as singer for Kiss he never bothered to show up for. Imagine...

Despite an unnecessary maligning of "Happy Man" as the worst thing Iggy's ever recorded (surely most of "Avenue B" trumps it), Trynka delivers most everything you'd ever want in a sozzled Murder City saga; druggy madness, over-amplified, dirt-under-your-fingernails rawk, and a happy ending (Stooges reunion and a girlfriend with boobs as big as his head, natch!).

Talk about your American dream.

Bob Schnell says

Paul Trynka's biography of Jim Osterberg (aka Iggy Pop) is an in-depth study of a complicated man. This is not some fan idolization, Trynka pulls no punches and is equally quick to criticize as he is to praise. The result is enjoyable and thoughtful.

As a fan of Iggy's music I've never looked much past the stage persona and raucous rock-n-roll shenanigans for which he is infamous. It turns out that Jim is intelligent, philosophical and gentle while his alter-ego Iggy is all noise and fury. Complications set in when Iggy refuses to let Jim take over when he's offstage. It would make a fascinating psychological study but the author does his best in layman's terms to describe the inner conflict and how it has led to both triumph and disaster.

Also interesting is how much David Bowie played a part in Jim/Iggy's solo career. I always knew they worked together and had a mutual admiration club, but I didn't know that is was an ongoing lifelong relationship.

Malcolm Frawley says

One of the best music biogs I have read & as good, if not better, than the same author's Bowie book, Starman. Trynka gets inside his subject through meticulous research along with exhaustive interviews with Iggy himself. While respectful of his subject Trynka is no quivering fan boy & exposes Iggy's less attractive side which is, basically, Iggy. Whenever he is Jim Osterberg he is mostly an intelligent, decent & caring human being. Considering this author's other noted biog subject much insight is shed on the long, & mutually beneficial, relationship between Iggy Pop & David Bowie. The excesses enjoyed by these types of rock stars are hair-curling at times but they are again handled frankly & without sensationalism. I couldn't help but laugh at Iggy Pop's 1970s persona who dedicated himself to a macrobiotic diet while simultaneously ingesting every illegal drug known to man. Still, he survived & is about to enter his own 70s. While respecting his place in rock music history I am no died in the wool Iggy Pop fan. I have the Stooges albums & the Bowie collaborations, The Idiot & Lust For Life, but that's all. But this was a fantastic read. Highly recommended.

Mr_wormwood says

Who doesn't like Iggy Pop? well, me now, just a little, since reading this book. But only because a good quarter of this book details how pathetic he had become just before he hit it big with Bowie and the Idiot (begging for drugs in hotel corridors, stealing drugs from star-struck teenagers, eagerly prostituting himself for drugs by being the kept rock-star of various middle-aged women with a penchant for rock stars and a lot of money to burn). Also another good quarter of the book details his long string of failed albums, I've listened to them all, and after eight of them in a row, more than a decade of misses, you start to wonder, was it all just blind luck that he made any good music at all? That said, one thing that this book definitely did make clear, which can only work to increase your admiration, is that this man is damn-well indestructible. Car crashes, overdoses, more overdoses, mental breakdowns, more mental breakdowns, and yet nothing can stop him and he still performs live with all the energy and vigour that he always had. Who doesn't like Iggy Pop?, shit i love the man.

Aaron says

Whilst mostly written in a dull, assumptive style, I guess this will be the best bio of James Osterberg/Iggy Pop. There are some interesting facts that I never knew about - Iggy's introduction to heroin via the radical-Queer 'Cockettes', how important the Bowie/Osterberg relationship was to Osterberg's life and how Iggy ultimately shunned the man who saved his life and gave him the best creative years and produced his greatest works outside the Stooges, and finally Osterberg's massive failure on the R.O.A.R Tobacco Industry funded boogie-alternative tour.

Whilst the ladies go gag-ga over his Dionysian aura, he seems like a total asshole to his lovers, and his treatment of his son is quite abhorrent, kind of ironic since Osterberg didn't get the same treatment from HIS parents. One of the failures of this book is that it tends to glean over Osterberg's personal relationship, unlike the Bockris Lou Reed bio that doesn't shun from the gory melodrama.

Whilst I love Iggy/Osterberg's work, he comes off as big an asshole in his personal life as Lou Reed was. He is still alive and still has a few years to redeem that part of his persona. But who am I to say or judge?

I'm not expecting him to make any interesting or creatively valid records, but his live show proves he still has a great future behind him.

Thomas Strömquist says

"Probably the best rock biography I read - the man is absolutely fascinating and at the same time very much human in this great book."

Marti says

While I am a fan of Iggy (especially the Stooges period), I really did not know very much about the man. He usually turns up in biographies of other bands or books on the Punk scene in general, always portrayed as a totally self-destructive and out of control maniac. Therefore, it was a surprise to me to learn that Jim Osterberg was a model student in an affluent community, who was voted by his classmates "most likely to succeed."

And not just any classmates. Despite living in a trailer park (necessitated by baby boom era housing shortages rather than poverty), his social circle included the children of people like Robert McNamara and Arjay Miller (Head of Ford Motor Company). Apparently nobody was kidding when they thought he could be President (perhaps he could still consider it).

Naturally my favorite parts of the book covered the 1960s when he played in a garage band called The Iguana's through the period where the Stooges self destructed in about 1980. It seemed as if Iggy was destined to become a casualty of excess had it not been for David Bowie's intervention and support during the Berlin years.

As he got his life more in order, the music became more predictable culminating in his becoming widely regarded as the elder statesman of punk and grunge in the 1990s. While not as interesting to read about as the crazy years, I am glad he survived.

Anna says

When I was a kid, I never knew why Ziggy Stardust was a character of David Bowie's and the name and the story sounded so much like Iggy Pop. The intertwining of Bowie and Iggy was very interesting. Jim/Iggy was diagnosed as hypomanic, he probably could get other diagnoses like bipolar or borderline. I don't mean this to be glib but where can people with chronic mental illness find sufficient employment? ADD and ADHD cases continue to rise but it that because we are now predominantly white-collar desk workers and the skills of persons with ADD or ADHD no longer fit the job market like they would in a blue-collar culture. The most interesting piece was learning that he had been given epinephrine regularly as a kid for asthma. No wonder he was off. I think there was a causal between the rise in pharmaceutical drug use after WWII in the US and the subsequent recreational drug use of the 1960's.
