

Title:

Rock-&-Roll Surrogate

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866

Summary:

Some people in this world chase a lifestyle that is, literally and figuratively, 'out there.' While such a path can have disastrous consequences on their own mortality, could it possibly be of any benefit for the rest of us? Perhaps.

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Jim Morrison, The Doors, Lou Reed, Pere Lachaise cemetery, Rock and Roll, rock and roll history, Cyberiter

Article Body:

Years ago, upon my first-ever arrival in Paris, there was no doubt as to where I would begin my itinerary ...

I went immediately to the Père Lachaise cemetery.

That's the final resting place of such luminaries as Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Sarah Berhhardt and Chopin. If I had been there during daylight, I'm sure I would have taken my time to pay my respects to each of them and others. However, it was around 1.00am, and this was a pilgrimage to what's become more of a shrine than a grave.

This is where Jim Morrison of the Doors is buried.

James Dean lived fast and died young. Kurt Cobain had succumbed, by his own hand, to stress and recurrent abdominal pains. Marilyn Monroe took too many pills. Mama Cass choked on that fateful ham sandwich. Keith Moon simply exploded from self-indulgence.

Jim Morrison was different. He lived hard so we didn't have to.

I believe that there are those among us who live life on the edge for the sole purpose of conveying that experience to everyone else. I don't think they make a conscious decision to do so, but the circumstances of their existence drew them to it. They embody a collusion of talent, freedom, credibility and forum. From that mixture, fate then intercedes and legends are forged.

This role doesn't need to end in the ultimate cost of mortality. Look at Lou Reed. An underground poet laureate who was anointed as such by Andy Warhol, Reed could also arguably be called the godfather of punk --- a genre which ultimately influences popular music to this day --- who then became a Rock-&-Roll Animal before settling into married life and relative tranquility. He's a writer-cum-musician who returned the value of word economy to lyrics (the Ramones owe a huge debt to him), who lionized the shadowy annals of altered states and culminated it by allegedly shooting heroin on stage. Somehow, the nihilistic creator of Sweet Jane, the opiate chronicler of White Light/White Heat, the dark playwright of Berlin, managed to survive. I'm sure no one is more pleased with that result than him.

Morrison, on the other hand, never seemed to care.

His obsession was with a mystic dimension that seemingly co-existed with visceral reality and his determination was to channel it. This endeavor has been well-accounted both in Danny Sugarman's book, 'No One Here Gets Out Alive,' and Oliver Stone's cinematic version of it, logically entitled, 'The Doors.'

Morrison did Break on Through to the Other Side and became The Lizard King. His lifestyle and lyrics served as a catalyst for both new age and outrage. The Doors framed his visions in catchy tunes that were a cornerstone of their era. Their music worked for breezy listening, for intense audiophilia and for all levels in between. When Morrison would sing, "I woke up this morning and got myself a beer," there was no doubting his presence in the original Hard Rock Café and that breakfast was going to be his lightest meal of the day.

With a legacy like that, I guess it's no surprise that rumors circulated about the French authorities wanting to evict him from such an esteemed cemetery as Père Lachaise. However, during my visit, I was told by a watchful gendarme that the graves were purchased in perpetuity, so he and his colleagues would man many a midnight patrol to monitor the Morrison mourners. From what I saw and have come to know, that is a full-time nocturnal posting.

Even at the late hour, I was one of around a dozen who surrounded Morrison's headstone. Someone's ghettoblaster churned through a litany of Doors songs, candles and flashlights provided an eerily appropriate atmosphere, and even though a strong waft of 60s-ish aroma was ever present, the constables kept their distance as long as the tokers kept themselves discreet. The composition of the entourage was constantly changing; the comings and goings were hardly acknowledged. Instead, the conversations were perpetual and free-form. On occasion, someone would recall a personal memory involving a Doors song, but

preferred topics were more along the lines of the consciousness Morrison seemed intent on raising. Lyrics were analyzed and musical passages were toasted. All of this was done in hushed tones, not necessarily out of respect, but because no one wanted to upstage the ghettoblaster's ongoing soundtrack.

I was there for two hours. No one exchanged names or details. There were different points of view expressed, but no arguments. Literary references and musical influences peppered the dialog with a subtle intensity that would have made him proud. The effect of everyone's comments seemed both thoughtful and therapeutic, as they put Morrison's escapades and compositions into deep personal perspectives; there was no doubt he had indeed, in some manner, become an extension of each of their lives and they felt they were enriched because of it.

My lasting memory of that night was the notion that Jim Morrison probably would have preferred being the focal point for those introspective testaments rather than for the massive din of a Doors concert.

If so, maybe that meant he finally got what he wanted. In a way, then, so did we.