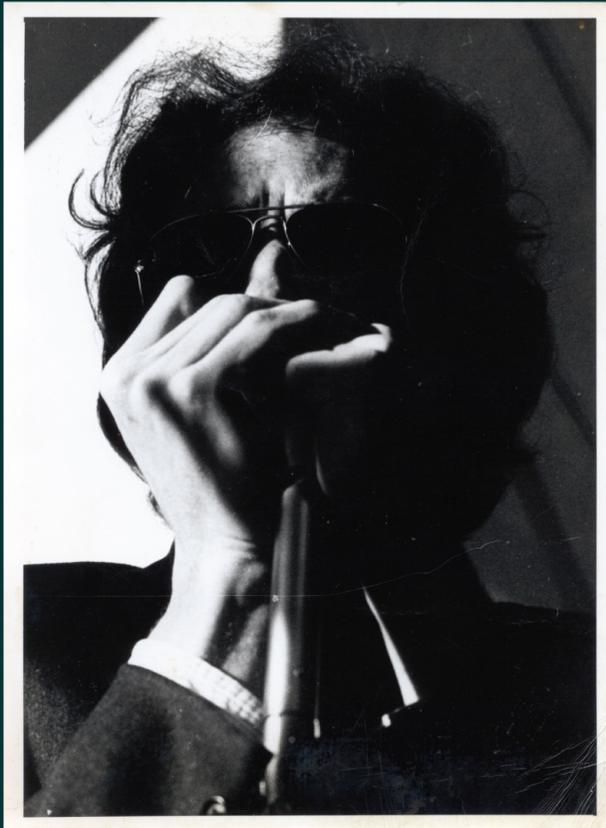


ANN ARBOR

The 1960s Scene



by Michael Erlewine

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The Sixties Scene

By Michael Erlewine

INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in my particular take on dharma training and a few other topics. These blogs were from the Fall of 2018 posted on Facebook and Google+.

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Here are some other links to more books, articles, and videos on these topics:

Main Browsing Site:

<http://SpiritGrooves.net/>

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ANN ARBOR

Here are a series of articles on Ann Arbor, Michigan culture in the late 1950s and 1960s. It mostly some history of the time from my view and experience. I could add more to them, but I'm getting older by the day and I feel it is better to get something out there for those few who want to get a sense of Ann Arbor back in those times.

I have edited them, but only roughly, so what you read is what you get. I hope there are some out there who can remember these times too. As for those of were not there, here is a taste as to what Ann Arbor was like back then.

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January 19, 2019

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Ann Arbor Bars

Looking for guidance, looking for a sign or pointing where to go, how to live. The Beats were cool and were into something different. A little more social and outward yet was the burgeoning jazz scene in Ann Arbor. And this was before it was legal to buy liquor by the glass in Ann Arbor, which meant that for the most part there was no music in the bars. Music was happening but it was happening privately, in the houses, and usually in the apartments and rented houses of U-M grad students and liberated townies.

It was jazz that was being played live in these houses and when the music was not live, it was more jazz or classical albums on the turntable. And what atmosphere there was came from the Beat atmosphere, low lights, little or no furniture, and always a sense of the “cool.” For most of us it was follow-the-leader and this meant ignoring American films and instead having late night conversations, cigarettes, and coffee after a Bergman or Fellini film. It was cool to get “down” and be serious.

And it was literate, in particular European literature, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Kafka, Gide, Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, etc.

Try as we might, the Beatnik generation was fading and so much seriousness was no longer fun, and probably never had been. We tore ourselves away from the European shtick we had been emulating and started to wake up to our own youth.

And there were things happening in Ann Arbor, things
that did not stem from or depend on Europe

Ann Arbor Drive-Ins

Ann Arbor townies back in the late 1950s knew where to spend their weekend nights and often weekday afternoons too. It was just a short ride from the new Ann Arbor High School (built on Stadium Boulevard and Main in 1954) to the first Ann Arbor McDonalds drive-in at 2000 W. Stadium. This was when McDonalds was posting to its sign less than 100,000 burgers sold nationally or thereabouts. Today it is more like 300 billion and climbing.

On Friday and Saturday nights, carloads of teenagers (boys in one car, girls in another) would endlessly circle between Everett's Drive in and the A&W (both on stadium Blvd.), only a block or two apart, and then every third pass or so we would sweep down to McDonalds and back. All the hot cars, low to the ground, with their deep-voiced mufflers, would growl through the drive-ins, going around again and again all the way until 2 AM or so. It was "American Graffiti" in real life. We lived it.

Cute carhops would shuttle back and forth hanging their trays of ice-cold root beer and Coney dogs off your windows. We would park next to our friends and carry on or jump out and move around the parking lot, getting in or leaning-on the cars of those we knew. Or, if you had a steady girl you would circle around, but that was less common. Most of us didn't have anyone, which is why we were there in the first place.

And on some nights we would exit the drive-ins almost en-masse and convoy out Liberty Street to Zeeb Road where we would race the fastest cars against one another for a quarter mile. Dozens of cars would be parked along the road. My friend Doug (Fontaine) Brown would get his dad's Studebaker Golden Hawk and that thing could do 150 mph. And we rode that fast, just to test it out.

And if you were cool, perhaps you were part of a hotrod club. I was a member of the Tachs, and had a little metal plate saying so hanging from my back bumper. Then I was driving my dad's old Ford Victoria hard-top coupe, dark green with cream trim. I was cool.

Ann Arbor Drugs in the Early 1960s

How did the drugs in the late 1950s compare to what took place when the Sixties were in full swing? For one, the stupid inhalers and cough syrups were just gone. No one did that anymore. And the rolls of Dexedrine and Benzedrine disappeared too. There was speed, but it was usually methamphetamine, much more dangerous to play around with. As for pot, it was a constant, but the quality got better and better and, so I am told, it does to this day.

As for alcohol, it remained, but wine was no longer the drink of choice. Beer, and good beer at that, was much more common and the hard stuff also crept back in. And now we come to the one important drug of those times: LSD.

Everyone smoked pot at least once in a while. I can remember we had a whole pound of marijuana hidden under a board in the attic at the Prime Mover house and it was not very good pot at that. We smoked every last fiber of it, like it or not.

In the middle Sixties I did not know many who were into hard drugs like heroin or even cocaine. I tried to like pot, would get high and write music or poetry far into the night. But when morning came and I got up, whatever I wrote the night before was always terrible. For me there was no utility in pot, just getting high was all, which never has been enough for me. I have to be 'doing' something. Now LSD is a whole different

story. With LSD I actually learned something, like: a lot. It literally changed my life.

I have written extensively elsewhere about LSD and in particular my own experiences with the drug. Here I just want to point out that this particular drug played a very important role in shaping the Sixties experience, at least in the many people I have spoken to since that time who took the drug back then. I can't tell you that LSD was easy sailing for many of us, but I can say that the overall consensus from everyone I know who took the drug was that the business end of LSD was all about learning. Learning what?

LSD is not a casual drug. Once you have had it you think more than twice before you do it again. If pot is a merry-go-round ride than LSD is the rollercoaster and a steep one at that. Speed is like having four arms and getting everything done. Pot is more like just getting high like with alcohol but certainly more entertaining. LSD and some of the other hallucinogens are a whole other experience and not at all like just getting high.

Boiling the LSD experience down, my own and that of many others I have discussed this with over the years, the main lesson learned from LSD is that it is capable of resolving the habitual subject/object dichotomy, which simply means the tendency to think I am here in my head looking out and the world I am looking at is independent of what I think.

On LSD that rigid division starts to break down. What we see in the outside world depends on what we project from our inside world. Perhaps we all get glimpses of this once in a while in day-to-day living, but acid makes it very clear: the world is our movie screen and upon it we project whatever prejudices and labels we are carrying around. And then, to make it worse, most of us take what we project, our own projections, as validation that what we see out there is in fact real – reality.

LSD is capable of breaking this dichotomy down and revealing to us that actually we play both parts, the projector and what is projected. Once we realize that we are the victims of our own projections... I mean ‘really” realize, then we can begin dismantling the projection apparatus that has been doing this to us all of our lives. This is the positive power of LSD and other hallucinogens.

And while perhaps it is sad that it takes a drug like LSD to make this clear, IMO this is a small price to pay for the lesson learned: responsibility. The key take-away from LSD is that once we see our own dualisms for what they are, we become personally responsible for removing them. Up to then we are just fat in a frying pan, driven hither and thither by every passing wind and phantom our mind projects. We don't even know that we watching a movie we ourselves are creating as we go along.

So the bottom line for me is that LSD and other hallucinogens made a whole generation more

responsible for their own actions and it is this sense of responsibility that 'responded' (pun intended) to the actual needs of the real world and gave us whole and organic foods, home birth, home education, local responsibility, a greater sense of community, the Internet, etc., not to mention a unique generation of music, film, and the arts.

And it is this responsibility (feeling responsible like "it's ours") that is the reason that drugs like LSD cannot just be dismissed as simply an excesses of the hippie life, a side road or tangent. LSD was mainline, part of the main road or avenue that the Sixties folk travelled and the 1960s would not have been what they were without it.

After some fifty-five years of thinking about this, for me this is one of a few key considerations for understanding how the Sixties worked. My friend and 1960s icon poet/activist John Sinclair has come to the same conclusion, that LSD is the key to how the Beat movement ended and what we call the Sixties began. LSD helped to make us responsible for our own actions and for this world we live in. And the Sixties children have proved this by their actions. They have walked their talk.

Ann Arbor Drugs in the Late 1950s

I know it is not popular to talk too much about drugs and it is especially bad to suggest that any drug whatsoever has value, so I want to be a little delicate here. At the same time drugs were very much a part of the Sixties and also part of the Ann Arbor scene, at least from the late 1950s when I tuned in. Let's start there.

As a high school kid trying to hang out with college students and the few actual beatniks that Ann Arbor sported, there were drugs available to me and they ranged from the fairly harmless (unless used regularly) speed to heroin. I never used heroin and actually never tried to get any for that matter, but older friends of mine did. Some were addicts and some died.

Dexedrine was available (sometimes Benzedrine) and they would come in little rolls of ten or so (like candy) wrapped in aluminum foil. Their chief virtue is that with one or two of them you could stay up all night and we did. I can still remember the nausea that speed caused from being up way too long. It was real hard to finally get to sleep. Again, this was the late 1950s for the most part.

And of course there was marijuana, although for a teenager that was hard to come across. The people I met on campus were careful not to share that with me. As I have written elsewhere, we were so devoted to trying pot out that my friends and I would snort the

ashes from joints that others left in the ashtray. That, my friends, is real dedication.

A little more weird was trying to extract the amphetamines from Valo inhalers, which were available in most drugstores. Now doing this could really make you sick for a while. Of course you threw up to get that high. Only a little more palatable was the habit of driving from town to town buying one bottle in each town of Romular, a cough syrup that contained some amount of codeine. It was a cough syrup, but one you had to sign for. This was before the age of computers and if you moved fast enough you could stay ahead of the registration process and gather enough Romular to really get high. It too was disgusting stuff to drink in any quantity, but this is one of the things that the beat crowd did on a semi-regular basis.

Another popular drug was Paregoric, an anti-diarrheal drug that contained powdered opium and, for some odd reason, was available over the counter in Michigan until April of 1964, after which a medical prescription was required to purchase it. The Elixir Terpin Hydrate, which contained Codeine, was available without a prescription and still may be available.

As for hallucinogens, all we had early on was Peyote or Mescaline. Some had mushrooms or Psilocybin but I did not see much of it around Ann Arbor. When I was in high school I chewed some Peyote buds down in my little basement room, fairly promptly threw it all

up, and watched tigers racing around on my bedroom walls for the night.

And let's not forget alcohol, although people I knew were not really into the hard stuff. In fact even beer was not common. It was mostly about wine and often cheap wine at that. The beats drank wine and, therefore, so did I.

And last but not least there is nicotine. Literally everyone smoked and smoked a lot. Late nights were filled with smoke and either instant-coffee or wine. That's the way it was.

Cinema Guild and the Ann Arbor Film Festival

Cinema Guide, established in 1950, was a student-run organization at the University of Michigan dedicated to the culture of films. The guild is the second oldest college-campus film society in the country. We all went to Cinema Guild and if you were looking to run into someone, they usually could be found at Cinema Guild sooner or later.

We all went there and saw an enormous variety of films, most of them foreign. In fact, Cinema Guide and the Campus Theater up on South University Street were where we actively absorbed whatever was European, most of it dark and brooding but some of it (Italian) occasionally bright and uplifting or at least nostalgic.

It could put you in such a dark light that you stayed up all night smoking, drinking instant-coffee (with powdered creamer), and talking the films through. Cinema Guild was held in the smallish Lorch Hall Auditorium in the old Michigan School of Art Building at 611 Tappan Street. Before and after films we often would walk through the various floors and look at the student statues and paintings that lined the halls.

In 1963 Cinema Guild and avant-garde composer/artist George Manupelli formed the Ann Arbor Film Festival. As of 1980, the festival has been independent of the University of Michigan and is now a non-profit arts organization. The festival usually presents almost a week of films, some 200 of them,

and is the oldest experimental film festival in North America. Its mission has always been to present film as an art form. In March of 2012 the Ann Arbor Film Festival will celebrate its 50th year.

Mostly I remember Cinema Guild and Lorch Hall Auditorium. The films shown there were films you would never see anywhere else in Ann Arbor at that time except perhaps at the Campus Theater. During those years most everyone I knew avoided American films and theaters in favor of the dark, brooding European varieties.

During those early 1960s we all tried on everything dark and European, their films, philosophy, art, and literature. But although it gave us an education, it somehow didn't stick. We were young, American, and just not that happy being so unhappy, which is how I interpreted much that was European after years of trying to emulate it.

I gradually threw it off and went back to being a young American in my twenties and that process really accelerated the advent of what we call the Sixties. Many of us back then escaped from the 1950s into all things European and then tiptoed out of that into our own peculiar celebration of American life. Forget about intellectuals and too many books Just live.

The Gay Scene

Back in the early 1960s the gay scene in Ann Arbor was pretty well defined. There was the Flame Bar and the Town Bar.

The Michigan Union (MUG) bathrooms were pretty much places that if you were straight you didn't spend much time in. Since many of us spent loads of time in the cafeteria, trips to the john were always quick in-and-out affairs. You didn't look to the right or left because someone could be eyeballin' you. You did your business and got out.

The north exit to the Michigan Union opened onto a small fountain in the center of a circular drive used to drop people off. To your right was a long low cement wall that extended all the way out to S. State Street and that wall was a major cruising area for gays. Since a number of us who were in the folk-music crowd liked to be outside too, we would occupy the grass to the south of the wall, but tended not sit on the wall unless we be viewed as inviting invitations. No words were ever said but each group kind of stayed in their particular territory.

And there was definite a group of gays working at the Graduate Library and they would throw parties, gay parties but straight people were also invited, especially guys of course.

The Promethean Coffee House

These days when I visit Ann Arbor it takes twenty minutes just to drive across town. If I have one phrase to describe the difference between Ann Arbor back then and now, it is “overly caffeinated.” Today there seems to be a coffee shop on almost every corner and it makes a difference. Back then there was just one coffee house and that was Mark’s Coffee House on East William Street, and for those of you who are as old as I am you might remember the actual first coffee house in Ann Arbor, “The Promethean” on the other side of William Street from Mark’s and about a block west, just down from where the Cottage Inn pizza place is today.

The Promethean Coffee House served (non-espresso) coffee, mulled cider (with cinnamon sticks!), and played jazz albums, not to mention the Shelly Berman comedy albums. Once in a while folksingers like Al Young (today Poet Laureate of California) would play there. This must have been in the late 1950s. I went there as often as I could just to sit around, drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, look serious, look for beatniks, and (most of all) hope that I would meet the love of my life. Nothing much really happened there aside from all of the sitting around and sneaking glances at one another and after a while it just closed. It was not really much of a hangout. It had somehow already been sanitized. The Michigan Union Grill (MUG) was where the real “beats” hung out anyway. As a high-school student I used to work there busing dishes and what-not. When not working my high-school buddies and I would hang around in the Michigan Union, either playing pool on one of the upper floors or having fun in the tiny

bowling alley that was there. I suppose we were trying to pass for college students, but with our antics I doubt that was successful except maybe in our own minds.

Still, for someone like me, who was reading all of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and the Beat writers, this was as close as I could then get to joining up with the Beat Movement. I was still in high school.

Unfortunately the beat movement was already almost over, only I didn't know that yet. I still hoped I could catch a ride on that train before it left the station. But I would have to wait for the next wave, which turned out to be the Sixties and (I hate this term) the "hippies." I was never a hippie. I am a couple years older than the hippies, so call me a pre-hippie or a post-beat.

And at that time in Ann Arbor I would be at parties with Anne Waldman, Norman Mailer, Bob Ashley, Bob James, and others. And I read anything that had to do with alternative spirituality, books on Zen, Existentialism, Confucius, astrology, numerology, etc. -- things like that.

And I inhaled the beat literature. It was everything I was not. Where I felt that I was trapped in a middle-class button-down society with crew cuts and permanent waves, Kerouac and kind were out in the real world glorifying the blue-collar working types, the blacks, or those not working at all. And I liked that. Instead of a future of fitting into some job that I could not imagine, how about no job at all? How about that for a future? The beats dreamed of an intellectual life of poetry, music, the arts, and they talked and talked,

staying up late, smoking cigarettes, drinking wine, and taking substances -- just what I like to do. Meanwhile, I was facing the status-quo head-on and didn't even have the status of a high-school diploma as a door opener. My lack of a diploma had already sealed my fate to working outside the middle-class, so the beats indeed seemed like an alternative: little to no work at all. What a wonderful idea!

Back then I was not in the least phased by "down," by living on the edge or even beyond it in relative poverty, forced simplicity, and even discomfort. It was all cool to me at the time. The fact that it was mostly a drug and alcohol scene while living on next to nothing and (a dirty nothing at that) seemed something of a solution to me. A little dirt never hurts. Picking up and smoking other people's cigarette butts was kind of cool in a way, at least cool enough to tell others about. It was what beats did. Getting handouts at a shelter or free health care at a clinic was just beating the system. Pilfering some food here or a little wine there was what everyone did. I had no trouble with that. I was an apprentice to that.

Back in 1960, as I have pointed out, there were no hippies and for that matter it was not even the Sixties when I studied up on the Beat Movement; it was still the 1950s and a life (up until then) lived in school, forced to study (which I did not), made to hide under the school desks because the Soviets might bomb us with atomic bombs any day, and having ourselves labeled by the idiot psychology of the time as manic-depressive, paranoid, schizophrenic, etc. I was not

personally these things, but these were the kind of terms that were applied to our minds and psyche by society. This was my introduction to the mind – sick labels. So I left. I just dropped out. It was a relief.

All that I cared about is that I was at last out of boring, boring school, on my own, and free to experience for myself what I could only read about and imagine in the books of Kerouac and the poems of Ginsberg. As mentioned, the Beats were very educated in the liberal arts, often self-educated. They were not academics, but amateurs in the truest sense, in love with literature, music, and the arts. That is what I deeply wanted as well. I have always educated myself in all things. Back then I was my own teacher.

Clint's Club

Clint's Club at 111 E. Ann Street in Ann Arbor was one of those long narrow buildings that reach way back from the street. As you came into the club, the bar ran along the left side, while on the right was a row of picnic-sized tables at right angles to the door. In between the bar and the tables was space to walk. The small bandstand, located at the back and to the right, was raised something less than a foot high. We could barely fit all of ourselves and our equipment on it. Behind us, to the left (as you came in), was a single door that led to a backroom, and to the right bathrooms.

This single block on Ann Street (and only on one side at that) was the center of all Black businesses in Ann Arbor. It had a couple of bars, a pool room, and so on. There were two bars right next door to one another, the Derby Bar at 113 E. Ann, and then Clint's Club one door to the east.

The Derby was a hangout for the younger Blacks and the Ann Arbor police journals have plenty of entries as to its toughness. This was where young policemen went to prove themselves and where they claim heroin and just about any other kind of illegal- whatever took place. To their mind, this was the "nastiest" part of Ann Arbor. The local police called it "The Block." Apparently there were two murders in the bar in one year in 1974. The police claimed that when they answered a distress call and rushed to the bar,

they often would find just a dead body and no witnesses.

Right next door was Clint's Club, where the older Black folks went for a drink and to relax. We played at Clint's club for something like a year and a half, sometimes on and off, but usually on weekends and often Thursday through Sunday nights from 9:30 until 2 AM. Our 5-piece band was paid \$35 a night for the whole bunch of us.

I have been in the Derby Bar a number of times and it was a lot rougher. The younger Blacks were ashamed (or so it seemed) that their parents and elders would listen to a mostly White blues band next door while they were into the latest R&B tunes. And at the Derby they didn't like White folks all that much. I remember one time when my brother Dan Erlewine and I went into the Derby for a drink. Dan remembers:

"There was this guy Ron from my 9th-grade class at Slauson junior-high school. "Thelma" was his mom's name (and also his nickname, since the young Black guys at Slauson called each other by their mother's name). They called me "Phyllis" (my mom's name) and that's what Thelma said when we walked in. "Say Phyllis... etc. Then he said "Let me get you and your brother's picture..." Then he charged us for the photo, and fleeced us for what little money we had... no bills, since we'd just bought a Pabst Blue Ribbon and I think we split that because it was all we had the money for. If they got \$1.25 out of us, it'd have been all we had."

It was like that. Racism works both ways.

Meanwhile, next door at Clint's Club things were a lot friendlier. Mostly our band was all White, but sometimes we had a Black drummer, and so on. About as threatening as it got for us was that once in a while, when a song was over, one of the Blacks would call out "Come on everyone, let's give these boys the clap." That was kind of funny but also harmless.

I also remember one time when we were unloading equipment in the middle of the afternoon and, as we came in, we found Ernie, the manager, rolling on the floor with a customer who had a knife in his hand and Ernie was smashing his head with a hammer. That got our attention, for sure.

Otherwise we were happy to play at Clint's and did so for quite a long time. I know the bathroom was a little crude for some of our band. There was just one long white porcelain trough (about eight-feet long) for a urinal and a single bare toilet setting out in the open, OK for a whiz but not in great demand for 'number two'. We would walk a couple of blocks east to our home for the serious stuff.

We loved playing Black music at a Black bar, as stupid as that might sound. We practiced hard and wanted to prove our sincerity by having our tunes heard by people who knew what they were all about. And these older Black folks knew the tunes. We were doing many of Little Walter's songs, but also songs by

Jimmy Rogers, Junior Wells, and all kinds of great blues songwriters. And we played our hearts out. Unfortunately we never made a record (one is coming out in 2019). A few years back one box of tapes emerged out of someone's basement in which was one reel of a single set at Clint's Club. Some of our band thought it stunk but I was glad to hear anything at all and to get to play it for my kids. Anyway, everyone but me sounded great!

I often wonder about my interest in seeking out wise older men to learn from. Perhaps it is because, although I had both grandmothers, I never had a grandfather, on either side. How I would know what I was missing I have no idea, but perhaps there is something in there that goes way back in the human race that wants to have a grandfather, someone separate from one's father with perhaps more life wisdom, kindness, and hopefully a little time on their hands, enough for a grandkid or two.

What I never found in a grandfather I found in the great blues artists of Chicago. How did I get close enough to know them? That started with me serving them food and drink at the landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970, and at the 1972 Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz festival. Even more influencing was interviewing and spending time with scores of the finest blues artists. That sealed the deal. I was hooked.

Anyway I got close enough to encounter the kindness for others in their life experience, no matter what color

you were. They had seen it all or most of it, and the great ones were way beyond pettiness. Artists like Big Mama Thornton, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, Roosevelt Sykes, and others were accepting and nourishing. Of course there were players that were stand-offish and not friendly, but they were in the minority. Without thinking, I immediately took these great beings as my mentors.

For about six years I pretty much studied Black music, the blues in particular. I played the records and played along with the records. I supplemented that by playing live music in the Prime Movers Blues Band from 1965 on. I stopped playing, more or less, in the spring of 1971. And I went to Chicago to see the blues artists playing live and hosted them when I could. James Cotton and his entire band stayed with us for, if I remember right, some weeks.

I can't say much for my playing, but I do know that I did not lose respect for the great blues players. I was always the student, and never graduated to arrogance in this area. I feel the same today. I was never trying to get anywhere and I did not get far in that regard. It was enough to hear, study, and attempt to play the blues.

When it came to white boys playing the blues, our greatest influence was that first Paul Butterfield Blues Band album which came out in the fall of 1965. They were our heroes and we got to know them some. Whenever they played in Detroit or near us, we would go. And we traveled to Chicago just to hear them

play. I was told that Paul Butterfield himself said that the Prime Movers were the second-best white blues band in the country. Of course the Butterfield band was the best, and they were, no doubt about it.

For a while we would do the same songs they did, many of which were the same songs the great blues masters did. Then we moved on into mostly songs that I liked because I had to sing them.

DAVID's BOOKS

David's Books was a located inside Saguaro Plants on Ashley Street, but relocated to Liberty Street in 1978. David Kozubci sold the store and moved to Beverly Hills, where he did bit parts in commercials (Godfather's Pizza) and movies (Sylvester Stallone movie).

I knew David back then and he lived near me. My David Kozubci story is when one early morning in the dead of winter David showed up on my front porch stark naked except for a pair of underpants. His wife had thrown him out and locked the door. I gave him an old camel-hair coat that I had always intended to wear but never got around to it because it had too much attitude. David gratefully accepted it and vanished on down the street with it on.

Liquor by the Glass

How could the repeal of prohibition in 1933 affect the onset of the Sixties in Ann Arbor? It sounds like Chaos Theory where the flapping of a butterfly wing in Brazil affects the amount of snow that falls in Greenland. But such an effect did occur.

Prohibition was repealed at 6 P.M. May 11, 1933 at the Court Tavern on 108 East Huron and simultaneously at some nineteen other Ann Arbor businesses that day. But there was a catch that, although Ann Arbor would no longer be a dry city, liquor by the glass could not be sold at bars but only in private clubs like the Elks and the Town Club. And here is how it affected the onset of The Sixties.

Because liquor by the glass was illegal, it meant that bars did not have the extra cash to hire musicians and their bands. The result of this was that the jazz scene in Ann Arbor was not in the bars but instead in houses (usually student rentals) around town. This “liquor by the glass” law was finally repealed on November 9, 1960, but up to that point there was a special music atmosphere that only existed privately. As a high-school student interested in all things Beat, including jazz, I found my way into that scene, albeit only as a tolerated bystander. And there was a vibrant music scene happening in Ann Arbor for those who knew about it.

I can remember one large rental on the north side of the street in the first block or two of E. William Street. Hanging from the second story out over the front steps was an enormous flag with a photo of Thelonious Monk and (if I remember right) just the single word “Monk” or did it say “Thelonious Monk?” It may have only had Monk’s image. It was in houses like these that the forefront of jazz was taking place. Jazz players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob “Turk” Pozar, and Bob Detwiler played. Small groups formed and improvised far into the night.

As a high-school kid, I was allowed in but had to keep a very low profile, sitting along the floor with my back against the walls and taking it in. No one offered me any of the pot they were smoking, but a friend and I used to snort the ashes left by the joints. That was how dedicated we were in our wish to emulate everyone there. Aside from smoking pot, there was lots of wine and when they were not improvising jazz, they were playing classical music on the stereo. And although the atmosphere of those parties was not pure Beat, it was all serious and “down” as the beats liked it. The sunlight and nakedness of the Sixties was yet nowhere to be seen. This was the late 1950s.

The point of relating this is to point out that these underground jazz sessions were just one of several indicators that pointed the way from the Beat movement forward to what was to come in just a few years, the advent of the Sixties. I am talking here of the late 1950s and very early 1960s.

These houses and jazz parties usually had one or two largish rooms. The jazz players would set up in a corner.... drums, a standup bass, and a horn, usually a saxophone, but sometimes a flute. And of course a piano, if one was present. There was very little vocal jazz as I remember. The drink of choice back then was wine, red wine, and you would usually find it out in the kitchen in gallon jugs or bottles.

And there was pot, something that for a high-school boy like myself (who was reading Kerouac) desperately wanted to get a taste of. And these things went late. Time was something we had back then, with nothing better than that night waiting for us before the next day. The right-now of the late nights was just about perfect. And it was oh, so serious. All of the dark mood of European movies, art, and literature had rubbed off on us until “down” was our form of cool. The word “cool” says it all. We were not hot, or even warm. We were cool.

And let’s not forget the poetry. Words were big with the beats, and literature and poetry were the coin of the realm. If it was not about music, it was cigarettes, coffee, and endless talking until the bennies or Dexamills wore off. And it is not like we had any experience in life at that point, so it was all speculation.

If I was on speed and also drinking coffee, some sort of high nausea will take hold of me as it got toward morning. My hands would shake, but I also knew that in that state no sleep would come for a long time yet,

and any attempts to rest would be find me lying there wide awake, slightly in the zone, when dawn came. Any sleep would only be a half-sleep. I would be telling myself by that time that I never wanted to take speed again, but I probably would. And I am talking about those little rolls of Benzedrine wrapped in aluminum foil... about ten or so, the size of aspirin.

So those were the two places where I felt (at the very least) the presence of the Beat muse, in those all-night house parties at night and sitting in the Michigan Union by day. For Ann Arbor, that was it. And although the beat stereotype image might be of the solitary thinker, the beats (or wannabes) I knew were remarkably social. They seemed to like gathering together. Of course there were one-to-one talks in apartments or even single rooms, but as often as not they were about administering drugs. I can remember one beat person, Fran Trun. He was older than me and had all the earmarks of the beat generation, including a heroin habit. He lived way out State Street in Ann Arbor, almost to the Stadium bridge. Some late nights I would venture out there and if his light was one, I would go up.

More than I once I had watched him cook his heroin, tie off an arm, and shoot up. Too me that was something to see, about as close to real experience as I got back then. Sometime later I heard he had died when his car careened off a Pennsylvania turnpike. I can only guess at where his head was at that moment.

And many of the Ann Arbor beats were just students, although students that were conspicuous by their berets, long hair, and navy pea coats. I had the pea coat, but was too embarrassed to wear a beret. And of course, they seemed to always be older and more serious than me. I so much wanted to be older and to be part of all that. And there were the women. I was too young to really deserve much attention from the beat women, although they were so beautiful. As I was really just a townie, I gravitated to the townie women who, like myself, danced at the edge of the student beatniks. And there were not many.

I remember a tall, skinny blonde girl name Francis Hurley that I kind of followed around or hung out with. She was shared by a number of us and I was more a friend than anything else. I do remember spending the night with her at this or that place, although probably nothing much happened.

And places to have sex in Ann Arbor when you were in high school and living at home were very hard to come by. The empty room or apartment, the tiny side room off where others were partying, the back seat of a car, the summer grass – anywhere you could. It was a constant problem. I can remember my grandmother who live at the corner of East University and Hill Street had a little basement room that she would rent out to students. Sometimes it would be empty and I would sneak in with my girlfriend, file down the basement steps and past the old furnace and slip into that small room. What a godsend it was to be out of

the elements and alone with someone you wanted to make love with. Of course grandma, good Catholic that she was, would have hated the goings on there, or would she?

Russell Gregory

Every college town probably has a local bookstore where everyone who is 'anyone' educated hangs out. In Ann Arbor in the late 1960s (pre-Borders), that was Centicore Books, originally on Maynard Street, but relocated to South University. Somewhere I read that the official title was "Paper Back Bookstore and Centicore Modern Poetry Shop." It was the South University period I am writing about here. Sure, there were other bookstores in Ann Arbor, but this particular one is where both the students and professors bought their books and hung out. Centicore was the place where you might run into Andy Warhol, Norman Mailer, or John Cage when they were in town. Centicore was "the" place.

And what made it that 'place' was a single individual, Russell Gregory. He didn't own the store but he made the store what it was. He knew more about books and literature than any of us, professors included. And he was not simply a walking inventory of book names. He had read them all and could talk to you about them with real intelligence. Literally everyone who read knew Russell.

And he not only read books, understood them, and could guide any of us to where the best parts were, he also was a poet and writer (journals and essays). It was not enough for Russell to hold forth at the bookstore, he also had years of weekly get-togethers at his home at which all were welcome and great

discussions took place. While the above is remarkable, that alone was not what endeared Russell Gregory to me.

Russell Gregory is a living Transcendentalist, just like Whitman, Emerson, and Thorough, the only one I have ever encountered who not only carries that lineage but is able to project it into your consciousness and: what a view!

Russell Gregory in the Centicore bookstore pointing out which books on a topic are important and just why is one thing, important in itself, but Russell after hours or off in a corner of the shop actually reenacting the mental landscape of the Transcendentalists, empowering you in its vision is quite another. His ability to make that unique American philosophy actually come to life and live again or live on was another. Gregory's sense of local history, his sense of "place," was profound.

I am not talking about imparting the history of people, times, and places from a bygone era, but rather a sheer transport into those realms. You are there and those thoughts live again in you, now! Russell had that power and he shared it with those who could receive it, whenever possible. I would say Russell Gregory lived for those moments.

Personally, he was about as polite and careful in his dress and mannerisms as a human can be and yet he was also able to show you just enough of the edge of what he did not like for you to be guided. He was no

stranger to opinions, just very careful to deliver them in such a way as not to be offensive. I wish I had that talent!

In time, Centicore and the 1960s went the way of the world and two brothers name Border took over and launched a completely different kind of bookstore in Ann Arbor. Russell eventually left Ann Arbor and moved back closer to his roots in Ionia, Michigan, where he lived. He served as the editor of the local Ionia newspaper for many years and I wish I had time to research what he did with that newspaper. I am sure it was remarkable. Later, Gregory worked part-time at Schuller's Books in Grand Rapids, still guiding readers to the best of the best and I am sure occasionally empowering lucky souls in American ideas.

I can remember one time I was being a little assy and chided Russell for not writing any poems recently. He turned and looked my dead in the eye and said: "Michael, these days my best poems are walking around Ann Arbor." Enough said. I got the point.

Anyone else here remember Russell Gregory and care to comment?

Ann Arbor's "The Ark"

The Ark is one of, if not "the" oldest folk or acoustic music venues in America from the 1960s that is still going. My band the Prime Movers Blues Band used to play there in 1966 when Iggy Pop was our drummer. This is when The Ark was a large fraternity-sized house at 1421 Hill Street known as the Henry Carter Adams House. There was no stage. We played in front of a fireplace in a large room and there were two connecting rooms that had wide open archways. There were not even any chairs. The audience sat on the bare floor or on cushions.

In fact, Dave Siglin, who became the manager of The Ark in January of 1969, told me the first time he ever stepped foot in The Ark was to hear my band the Prime Movers play. Dave just retired in 2008 after making The Ark one of the greatest music venues in this country.

The Ark really was there at the beginning and thanks to Dave & Linda Siglin and a host of dedicated board members and volunteers, the venue has grown from a small beginning through the very difficult process of scaling to the national treasure it is today.

The Ark was the inspiration of four Ann Arbor churches, the First Presbyterian, Calvary Presbyterian, Northside Presbyterian, and Campus Chapel. It was intended as a coffee house and gathering place for young people and the First Presbyterian not only came up with the majority of the

funding but also provided the building on Hill Street, which was known as "Hill House." By December of 1965 it was renamed "The Ark," and has been known by that name ever since. From the get-go, The Ark was busy almost all week long and not just with music, but with poetry, movies, a Wednesday night hootenanny, political and theological discussion, and Thursday Night Forums which featured a wide variety of local speakers.

Over time the church support became less available and the venue began to depend upon donations and admission fees. By the later 1970s, there were no funds available from the churches and this crisis precipitated a key fundraiser in the form of the Ann Arbor Folk Festival, an all-weekend happening that today has become an annual event. In addition, The Ark reorganized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. That festival goes on today.

By the early 1980s, the First Presbyterian Church needed the Hill Street location for its own use and this resulted in The Arks move to 637 ½ S. Main Street where its first show featured Michael Clooney on September 8, 1984. And a little over ten years later the venue made its move to the current location at 316 S. Main Street, where it opened on September 12, 1996 featuring Greg Brown, Maura O'Connell, and the Chenille Sisters.

I have had the privilege to sit on a number of boards, including this venue, but never one as devoted or organized as that of The Ark. Not only is the Board of

Directors and the Charter Members (who elect that board) remarkable but so is the group of over 400 volunteers who work to make each performance all that it can be. The Ark is a well-oiled machine that has produced what IMO is the finest folk, roots, and ethnic venue in the country. And it offers music 300 nights a year.

Over the years there have been something like 3000 acts, including national acts such as 3 Mustaphas 3, Adrian Belew, Ahmad Jamal, Aimee Mann, AJ Croce, Al DiMeola, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Andy Cohen, Angela Strehli, Ani DiFranco, Anson Funderburgh, Archie Shepp, Arlo Guthrie, Arthur Godfrey, Balfa Toujours, BeauSoleil, Béla Fleck, Billy Bragg, Bob Brozman, Bobby McFerrin, Bonnie Raitt, Buckwheat Zydeco, Buffy Sainte Marie, Carla Bley, Charlie Musselwhite, Christine Lavin, CJ Chenier, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Commander Cody, Corey Harris, Cornell Dupree, Cubanismo, Dave Alvin, Dave Holland, Dave Van Ronk, David Bromberg, David Grisman, David Lindley, David Rawlings, Del McCoury, Delbert McClinton, Diana Krall, Dick Siegel, Doc Watson, Don Cherry, Don McLean, Donovan, Dr. John, Duke Robillard, Eddie Shaw, Eric Andersen, Ewan MacColl, Fabulous Thunderbirds, Fairport Convention, Flora Purim & Airtó, Frank Morgan, Garrison Keillor, Gene Harris, Geoff Muldaur, Geri Allen Trio, Gillian Welch, Greg Brown, Guy Clark, Henry Threadgill, Holmes Bros, Indigo Girls, Ira Bernstein, Iris DeMent, J.J. Cale, James Blood Ulmer, James Cotton, Jane Ira Bloom, Janis Ian, Jay

Stielstra, Jay Ungar, Jean Ritchie, Jethro Burns, Jim & Jesse, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Jimmy LaFave, Jimmy Scott, Joanne Brackeen, Joe Ely, Joe Louis Walker, Joel Mabus, John GOrka, John Hammond, John Koerner, John Lee Hooker, Jr., John McCutcheon, John Prine, John Scofield, John Sinclair, John Stewart, Johnny Griffin, Johnny Winter, Jorma Kaukonen, Josh White, Joshua Redman, Junior Brown, Kate Wolf, Kelly Joe Phelps, Kevin Eubanks, Kingston Trio, Kurt Elling, Laura Nyro, Leo Kottke, Leon Redbone, Les Barker, Lesley Gore, Lil' Ed & The Blues Imperials, Limelitters, Lost World String Band, Lucinda Williams, Magic Slim, Marcia Ball, Maria Muldaur, Marshall Crenshaw, Mary Chapin Carpenter, McCoy Tyner, Michael Brecker, Michael Hedges, Mike Seeger, Mimi Farina, Mose Allison, Nanci Griffith, New Lost City Ramblers, Nils Lofgren, Norah Jones, O.J Anderson, Odetta, Oscar Brand, Pam Tillis, Patti Smith, Patty Griffin, Paul Geremia, Peggy Seeger, Peter Madcat Ruth, Phil Esser , Phil Woods Quintet, Queen Ida, Ralph Stanley, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Rebirth Brass Band, Reckless Kelly, Red Clay Ramblers, Richard Thompson, Richie Havens, Rick Danko, Rickie Lee Jones, Ricky Scaggs, Riders In The Sky, Robin & Linda Williams, Robyn Hitchcock, Roger McGuinn, Romanovsky & Phillips, Roomful of Blues, Rory Block, Rosie Ledet, Roy Book Binder, Shawn Colvin, Siegel-Schwall Band, Smokin' Joe Kubek Band, Son Seals, Son Volt, Spider John Koerner, Stacey Earle, Stanley Clarke Band, Stefan Grossman, Steve Lacy, Suzy Bogguss, Taj Mahal,

Tannahill Weavers, Terrance Simien, The Kennedys, Tinsley Ellis, Tish Hinojosa, Toad the Wet Sprocket, Todd Rundgren, Tom Paxton, Tom Rush, Tommy Flanagan, Tony Williams, Tony Williams, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Townes Van Zandt, Utah Phillips, Wavy Gravy, OJ Anderson, Wayne Shorter, and Wynton Marsalis. And don't forget my band the Prime Movers Blues Band and my daughter May Erlewine plays there at least once a year.

The Beats and MUG (Michigan Union Grill)

Although an affluent community like Ann Arbor was hardly the culture in which the Beat movement (theoretically) thrived, nonetheless the influence of the Beats was present and very much felt in Ann Arbor back in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. There were no lines of skid-row apartments or dives where the beats hung out like you might have found in Detroit or Oakland but we did our best. The hang-out of choice was the “Union” (Michigan Union Grill or MUG as it is officially called) located in the basement of the Michigan Union on State Street. Of course all that has changed now and those rooms are unrecognizable but in the late 1950s and early 1960s this was where it all went down.

Back then there were three very large rooms in the basement of the Michigan Union, each one capable of seating between 100-200 people and the clientele in each room was segregated... not by race but by the type of people who hung out there. The room to the extreme right as you entered the MUG had not only the self-serve cafeteria line but both tables and booths. Here you would find mostly students, some townies, and people none of us knew. We didn't go there, although I can vividly remember that room one dark day in 1963, staring up at the elevated TV, on the death of John F. Kennedy. That is where I was when Kennedy died.

The large dining room on the extreme left was not always open or at least was empty most of the day except for dinner or sometimes for lunch overflow. It was dinner time when this room was most active. People I know never went there unless they really needed to study or just to be alone. Otherwise it was empty, with the lights dimmed at times.

It was in the central room where everyone I knew hung out. This large low-ceilinged room with its harsh flat light was filled with small gray Formica tables that seated four each. The tables and chairs coupled with the low ceilings gave the impression of sea of gray, about as 1950s a look as you could ever hope to find. The monotony of the place was punctuated here and there by large columns. We ignored all of that because here was where all the "Beats" hung out, and we usually would sit at tables closest to the door between the middle room and the empty dining room on the left. And this was how it was for many years. It was here that I sat around with folksingers like Joan Baez drinking coffee or patiently waited with a nervous Bob Dylan for the review in the Michigan Daily of his concert (of the night before) to appear.

Earlier, when I was in high school I used to bus dishes in the MUG, so even then I knew it well, but not as well as I would just a few years later. It was here that the local beats sat around, often so serious and with long faces. But it was (as mentioned earlier) also where the folk crowd hung whose faces were anything but long or dour. It was a case of two

generations or lifestyles passing one another or coexisting. I wanted ever so much to fit into the beat crowd but in the end I found myself already naturally a part of the folk crowd and later on of the arts crowd.

In the end, it was with the music and arts crowd that I made my peace and more or less fit in. This was in 1960-1963, some years before I began to play music professionally. Back then I was... well... nothing much, not yet anyone at all. Some would say I was serious and I would say I “meant well.” That was the sum total of my ability at the time, to mean well. I was about twenty years old.

The Union was not like a restaurant or café where you were served or watched over. It was all cafeteria style and if you weren't in the cafeteria line you were out of mind as far as the establishment was concerned, unnoticed, and free to just sit there with one cup of coffee (or nothing at all) all day long. No one ever came by and kicked you out. And we did just that. This was before there were any coffee houses in Ann Arbor, even before Mark's Coffee House, and certainly before the plethora of caffeine-saturated places that Ann Arbor sports today. Oh yes, there was one sanitized beatnik coffee house, “The Promethean,” on E. Williams Street, but that was earlier and there only briefly -- hardly there at all.

Of course the cafeteria food of the MUG sucked, which is why we mostly just drank tea or coffee, plus the fact that no one had any money. And we drew on the napkins with our little Rapidograph ink pens. You

had to be quick or the ink would spread fast and spoil your drawing. And there we sat... and talked...and talked. We smoked cigarettes. This went on for years and looking back it was a wonderful time, a time of belonging to a small close-knit group of friends, friends that were not too close, mind-you, but always (so it seemed) getting closer. And that was the fun. To us that was living.

Frat Scene

What's the one venue that always needs bands? Where do you often have to lug your equipment up three flights of stairs? and once on that third floor, you might find a sandy beach and everyone in bathing suits in the middle of winter? And where else will 20 guys moon all the girls in the room? You got it, on fraternity row. They didn't pay that well, but when you had nowhere else to play you could often get a gig at a frat house. I have seen more than I would care to write about playing frat parties.

And they usually would feed us something and occasionally even tell us to help ourselves. I can remember eating bologna for weeks after one haul. Robert Sheff, our keyboard player, would fry it in a pan like it was a steak. I didn't go that far. That was a lot of bologna.

Influence of the Beat Generation in Ann Arbor

We know about the stereotype crew-cut 1950s mentality out of which the Sixties emerged and it is a cliché by now to argue that the one was probably the cause of the other. And most of us know something about the Beat Generation that cast its shadow on the late Fifties and into the early Sixties, but less is known about that transition period from, let's say, 1960 until the Sixties and "hippie" movement took hold around 1965. This appears like a gap or void in the history books relating to the Ann Arbor scene. What happened in Ann Arbor during that time? What were the influences that helped to shape the emerging Sixties culture?

This time period was not simply a dead-calm or empty void in history, and not just a pause between what had been and what was to come. In fact, Ann Arbor was very active during those years and that activity helped to shape what we now refer to as "The Sixties" mentality. And let's get a few things straight:

I wish I could say that the Beat Movement was "the" primary influence on the Sixties generation but that is not quite how it happened, at least in Midwest towns like Ann Arbor Michigan. By the early 1960s the Beat generation had mostly vanished, gone underground, or (embarrassing to groupies like me) had found ways to pimp a meager existence somehow. The Beats influenced and left their mark on the generation just a

couple of years older than the Baby Boomers, what we might call the pre-Hippies or near-beats. Those pre-hippie kids like myself (and my friend John Sinclair) did everything we could to embed ourselves in the beat ethic, but it was just a little too late. We didn't make that train and were left standing at the station wondering what to do with our lives.

I learned a tremendous amount from the beats about art, poetry, European literature and philosophy, classical musical, jazz, and substances. The beatniks were literate, educated, sophisticated intellectually, and very aware of poetry and the arts. The hippies (at least in the beginning) were just the opposite: unsophisticated, uneducated, not literate, and so on. You get the idea. It probably was the baby boomers who failed to teach their kids how to really read and love books, a fact that is playing out today.

In other words, it was not the Beats themselves, but the near-beats (the pre-baby boomers) like myself who educated the hippies and pointed out to them the virtues of the arts, history, music and literature. I can recall members of my own group the "Prime Movers Blues Band," players like our drummer Jim Osterberg (Iggy Pop), who soaked up all that sophisticated European stuff we knew about like a sponge. Both I and our keyboard player Robert Sheff (composer "Blue" Gene Tyranny) had been thoroughly trained in the intellectual tradition of The Beats. Iggy's tenure with the Prime Movers Blues Band was like a crash course in everything that The Beats and continental

culture had taught us: literature, philosophy, poetry, movies, and the arts. Maybe Iggy didn't know it by chapter and verse but he had been introduced. He had taken the initiation. He knew it was hip.

In this way we communicated what the beats had taught us. I assume this was being done all over the nation. I know my friend John Sinclair did this and he was the one who first pointed out to me that this is what we had done. Thanks John!

The Once Music Festivals 1961-1966

Ann Arbor has been the birthplace for more than one new type of music and here I am talking about the now legendary Once Festivals. Originally held on February 24-25 and March 3-4, 1961 in the old Unitarian Church at 1917 Washtenaw Avenue and then continued annually until 1966, the Once Festivals changed the face of modern classical or avant-garde music forever. It turns out that I met and probably partied with most of these now famous avant-garde composers but I am sorry to say I was a Luddite at the time as relates to this kind of music.

I was lucky enough to have as a good friend Robert Sheff (aka "Blue" Gene Tyranny) who later played keyboards in our group the Prime Movers Blues Band. But in 1961, the Prime Movers were not yet even a twinkle in my eye. Robert and I lived in the same house and I was constantly exposed not only to Robert's own compositions but by association most of the other composers who are now famous.

To the Once musicians, anything and everything was music. I can remember one concert where I believe they played the same note on the piano... was it for hours or was it all night? I got the idea after only a minute or two and the rest was wasted on me. I didn't stick around for it.

Once Composers included Robert Ashley, George Cacioppo, Gordon Mumma, Roger Reynolds, Philip Krumm, and Donald Scavarda. And of course my

friend Robert Sheff. There were six Once Concerts over five years (1961-1965) The last was held on the roof of Ann Arbor's Thompson Street parking garage. Artists for that event included John Cage, Eric Dolphy, Morton Feldman, Lukas Foss, David Tutor, and others. I was there for that event.

Whatever the Once Group did made a splash. They stirred things up. In fact the faculty at the U-M School of Music boycotted the festivals. Of course they did. That only made the group more special. In 1964 the Once Group issued a publicity poster with political activist Martina Algire posing nude on the counter of Red's Rite Spot, everyone's favorite go-to diner for coffee and a grilled pecan roll. If you can remember the original Red's Rite Spot on E. Williams, you really are an Ann Arborite.

The Peoples Ballroom

First, the People's Ballroom was burned down by a disgruntled kid with a grudge. Then, after a wildly successful second edition in September 1973, the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival was undermined and destroyed when a felonious crew chief who had been entrusted with the cash for the payroll of the many workers on the grounds of the festival absconded with the money—something like \$20,000—and lost it all in a failed dope deal.

The Schwaben Inn, 215 S. Ashley Street

Back in 1966 the Schwaben Inn was a large low-ceiling place in the middle of the block at 215 S. Ashley Street. Upstairs were some pretty nice meeting rooms and in later years some gigs (more like catered parties) were held there, but back in 1966 we are talking about the ground floor at street level, a wide room with a cement floor and the bar all along the back. On your left as you came in was a little bandstand raised not more than a few inches where we played.

The place stunk of stale beer and cigarettes. Perhaps it was the low ceiling and lack of air or perhaps they never really washed down the bar or the floors. It kind of caught you when you came in and took a minute or so to adjust. Of course back then we drank and smoked as much as anyone there, well, perhaps we didn't drink as much.

Washboard Willie and his Super Suds of Rhythm would also play there on other nights of the week and we were geeked that we shared a stage (not at the same time) with this Detroit bluesman that used to play behind the great Eddie "Guitar" Burns. I can still remember Washboard Willie singing the line "See the girl with the red dress on; she can do it all night long." When we were not playing there I would sometimes come and listen to Washboard Willie like everyone else.

Our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, would play at the Schwaben and often. There was one problem. Two very different kinds of people liked to come to the Schwaben to hear us play, the townies and the college kids. I was a townie. We called the students “pinheads.” These two did not get along, not hardly ever, and huge fights would break out. When I mean huge, I mean really big. I remember one fight where it took nine police cruisers to break it up.

And there we would be crouched behind our equipment, trying to protect both it and ourselves. We were mostly townies ourselves, but not about to join that fight.

This venue later became Mackinac Jacks, featuring acts like Radio King & His Court of Rhythm, Lightnin’ Slim, The Rockets, New Heavenly Blue, and none other than Washboard Willie and the Super Suds of Rhythm. Some things never change.

The Teen Circuit

For some of the new-style Ann Arbor bands there was the teen circuit. You had to have a manager for that and for a while we worked with Jeep Holland who also managed our friends “The Rationals.” Jeep tried real hard to get us all into matching suits and run us through the teen circuit. We gave it a good go, but teeny-bop venues were just not our thing. We liked to play concerts in clubs when we had the chance and in bars at any other time. The teens had never heard blues before and our repertoire of rock tunes got a little thin after perhaps the first set.

I can remember one gig when my brother Daniel (lead guitar) and I (rhythm guitar) were playing in I believe it was Daniel’s Den in Saginaw, Michigan. We had smoked some reefer before we went on and it was a lot more powerful than we had expected. There we were in the middle of the stage, lights shining us, several feet from one another and looking into each other’s eyes. We were in the middle of a song and I swear we had no idea whatsoever what the next chord could possibly be. Everything was in slow motion and as the chord change came around somehow, miraculously, we found it. There we all were with our suits and ties.

It didn’t take us long to find that wearing suits & ties and minding our Ps & Qs was not our bag and it didn’t help that Jeep Holland, our manager at that point, was not someone we cared for that much. Although

he knew a lot about pop music, he still managed to creep us out and so we just let that whole shtick go.

We did have one more near brush with fame when a subsidiary of Motown took an interest in us, a white band playing black music. They would drive up from Detroit in their black limousines and cart us around. And some fun things happened. For example, they arranged for my brother Dan and I to have lunch with the Everly Brothers, just the four of us. Now that was cool because we loved the Everly Brothers.

However, it did not take very long before they made it clear to us that they would provide the Black music that we would then play and that we would not choose our own music. Say what? Well, that was not about to happen because, if no one else, I was totally into doing the great Chicago blues standards and was not about to sell out my rights even for the occasional perk or two. As I look back, I probably passed up a chance at some sort of fame and some of the other band members might have benefited. But I never thought twice. That was not about to happen and that did not happen. Nor were there any more limousines or lunches with the Everly Brothers.

U-M Folklore Society

THE FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL IN ANN ARBOR (LATE 1950s-EARLY 1960s)

In 1957 freshman students Al Young and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Today Young is a Poet Laureate of California. Although oriented toward the campus and students, the Folklore Society was also a natural interface between the university folk and the townies – music. As a high-school dropout, I had no trouble integrating and being accepted in the folk circles. No questions were asked. We were all just ‘folk’ and it was a culturally rich scene.

And the University of Michigan was not the only campus with a folklore society. Folk music was popping up on campuses all over the nation and we were interconnected by what came to be called the folk circuit, a constant stream of folk enthusiasts that traveled from campus to campus playing and sharing folk music. The circuit went from Cambridge to New York City to Ann Arbor to Chicago to Madison to Berkeley and back again. We were hitchhiking or piling into old cars and driving the route. Musicians like then unknown Bob Dylan would hitchhike into town, hang out, play a gig or two, and be on down the road. And well-known folk singers also came to Ann Arbor.

Folksingers like Ramblin’ Jack Elliot and groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country

Gentlemen were regular visitors to Ann Arbor and this was before anyone was famous. They didn't stay in fancy motels, but with us. They stayed in our houses, where they slept on a couch or in the spare bedroom. And we all hung out together and played music or sat in the Michigan Union and drank coffee all day. Whatever music and culture they brought with them really had a chance to sink in. They shared themselves and their time with us and we with them. They were just like us, only better. We knew we could be like them.

Ann Arbor had its own players. The president of the Folklore Society was Howie Abrams and the society sported folk musicians like Marc Silber, Al Young, Dave Portman, Peter Griffith, and Perry Lederman. And we put on festivals and events. For example, the folklore society raised money to bring Odetta to Ann Arbor where she gave her first college performance. And a young Bob Dylan gave an early performance as part of a small folk-music festival in Ann Arbor put on by the U-M Folklore Society. I can remember sitting in the Michigan Union with a very nervous Dylan drinking coffee and smoking while we waited for the review of Dylan's performance the night before to come out in the Michigan Daily newspaper. It was something like 10:30 AM when the review surfaced and it was positive. With that good news Dylan gathered up his guitar and backpack and proceeded to hitchhike on out of town. And when Odetta sang at the Newport Folk Festival in 1960, Al Young, Perry Lederman, and Marc Silber hitchhiked to Rhode

Island to see her. There was also a subtle change taking place.

Folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s was part of what is now called the “Folk Revival,” and those of us who were part of it were very much aware of the need to protect and revive our musical heritage. Dylan and Baez were not writing their own tunes back then but rather reviving and interpreting songs that harkened from other generations. What made you a good folksinger in the later 1950s and early 1960s was the ability to authentically reproduce, reenact, and revive a particular song. The keywords were “authentic” and “revive.” Folksingers went to great lengths to locate and reproduce the most authentic versions of a song. Writing our own songs only came years later. Back then we were busy rescuing this part of our cultural heritage from oblivion. We were on a mission, that and growing up.

Folk music at that time was mostly White folk music with maybe a peppering of Black country blues artists or a virtuoso Black singer like Odetta. They were the exception but were treated like the rule: revive them too and be authentic. When we heard the country blues, we wanted to revive and sing them as authentically as we could, Ebonics and all.

It was not too many years ago that, while giving a young White musician voice lessons, my first suggestion was that the song he himself picked out and wanted to sing for me “Mississippi Mud,” with the lyrics “It’s a treat to beat your feet on the Mississippi

mud” might sound better if he dropped the Ebonics. I doubt that this young man even knew the song was written in Tin Pan Alley and not by black Americans. LOL.

So it was somewhat confusing folk enthusiasts in the early sixties when we eventually found out that the blues not only didn’t need our reviving but were alive and well, playing at a bar just downtown, where they were perhaps separated by a racial curtain. We didn’t go there because... well, just because. Another insidious form of racism.

But in fact blues, especially city blues, was very much alive, still seminal, and very, very available. In the early and mid-1960s young White Americans began the trek to the other side of the tracks, not only taking the trip downtown, but eventually the journey to Chicago and other places where electric blues were being played. Ann Arbor played a very significant role in introducing White America to city blues. The original two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals were landmark events and the three succeeding Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festivals just opened it all up to a wider audience.

There is more on this general topic in my book “Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals,” which was picked as one of the top 20 books published in Michigan last year. You will find it here:

http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1321295671&sr=1-1

Prime Movers Blues Band

Although they never released any records, the Prime Movers were a pivotal band in Southeastern Michigan during the late '60s. Where many of their Michigan contemporaries played straight, frat-house rock & roll, the Prime Movers were a blues band. They were purists, inspired first by classic Chicago blues and then by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, the group who proved that white boys could play the blues. Led by brothers Michael and Dan Erlewine, the Prime Movers set out on the same path as Butterfield, playing countless gigs at clubs, frat parties, and festivals around the Ann Arbor and Detroit area. They were slightly older than their contemporaries like the Rationals, the MC5, and the Amboy Dukes, and were a core part of the scene - not only as a blues band, but they also touched on folk and avant-garde music, as well. And they earned a large local following. The Prime Movers also ventured out to San Francisco, playing a few opening dates at the Matrix, Straight Theater, Haight "A", and Fillmore West, yet they never quite achieved national success. Nevertheless almost all of the core members of the group made their mark in music one way or another.

The Prime Movers were formed in the summer of 1965. Initially, the group featured Michael Erlewine on lead vocals and rhythm guitar, Dan Erlewine on lead guitar and vocals, Robert Sheff on keyboards and vocals, Robert Vinopal on bass, and Spider Winn on drums. Before long, all the members lived in a large house at 114 N. Division Street in Ann Arbor. Michael began playing amplified harmonica in addition to lead vocals and also rhythm guitar. Vinopal left the band and was replaced by Jack Dawson, while James

Osterberg, a former member of a local band called The Iguanas, took over the drums. (Since Osterberg played in the Iguanas, the other members called him "Iguana," which soon became shortened to "Iggy," which led to the name he became famous as – Iggy Pop.) As it turned out, this would be the classic line-up of the Prime Movers - the one that rose to popularity in Southeastern Michigan, the group whose members went on to greater fame after their disbandment.

Initially, the Prime Movers played frat parties, leaning toward bluesy rock & roll, but they soon decided to concentrate on blues, spiked with a little soul and gospel. They became known for a cover of the Swan Silvertones (a key gospel group) ' "Seek, Seek and Ye Shall Find." They played frequently around Ann Arbor, travelling from gig to gig in a Dodge van with the phrase "Gonna Ring a Few Bells in Your Ear" on the front, a quote from New Orleans singer Jessie Hill's "Oop Oop Pah Do," and "The Prime Movers" emblazoned on the sides; occasionally, they were mistaken for a moving company.

Early on, they worked with local band promoter Jeep Holland as their manager. Holland is perhaps best known for managing "The Rationals," a local group he brought to national attention and he attempted to push the Prime Movers in a similar direction. He wanted the group to play rock & roll and wear matching jackets, just like a British Invasion group. Although they did play some shows on the teen-rock circuit (Mt. Holly, Daniel's Den, etc.) in Michigan (as well as a couple of shows in Chicago in places like Mother Blues), the Prime Movers obstinately refused to abandon Chicago Blues. One of the hallmarks of

the Prime Movers was their dedication to the blues and their stubbornness.

A subsidiary of Motown at one time courted the band, pulling up in their limousines and driving the band around in them. They even arranged to have brothers Michael and Daniel Erlewine have lunch with the Everly Brothers – that kind of thing. But when pushed came to shove, Motown wanted the Prime Movers to play music they would provide, as a way to showcase a “White” group that played Black music. As soon as the group realized that this was the game, they said they would not do it, preferring to play their own mixture blues from the great Chicago bluesman.

The Prime Movers would travel to Chicago where they heard such blues greats as Little Walter, Magic Sam, Big Walter Horton, Buddy Guy and Junior Wells play. Legendary producer Bob Koester of Delmark Records showed the band around Chicago, taking them to the Chicago’s south and west sides, into the bars and clubs where their blues heroes were playing. In this way, the Prime Movers got to hear many of the greatest blues musicians playing live on their home turf.

However, it was the Paul Butterfield Band that really turned their heads. Butterfield and his band illustrated that not only were the blues alive, but that White boys could play it - not only credibly, but astonishingly well. The Prime Movers went to hear the Butterfield Blues Band whenever they could and soon became friends and fans of the band; Butterfield himself was not the

easiest to approach, but Mike Bloomfield and Mark Naftalin were friendly and supportive of their younger contemporaries.

After hearing the Butterfield band, the Prime Movers became more dedicated to the blues than ever. Unlike other bands in the areas, they now played frat parties only rarely, concentrating on clubs like Schwaben Inn, the Town Bar, Mr. Flood's Party, the 5th Dimension, and Clint's Club - the only Black bar in Ann Arbor. They also played free concerts and in concert halls like Mothers (the old armory in Ann Arbor) and the Depot House. Among the Detroit venues, they played at the Grande Ballroom, the Chessmate, Wisdom Tooth, and a number of times at the prestigious Living End.

Despite earning a local fan base, the group (like most musicians) never had much money. They all lived at the same house, and they often took as much catered food from frat parties as they could possibly carry. Nevertheless, they all stuck it out for the love of music - not just blues, either. Michael and Dan Erlewine had a deep love of the blues, but they also knew folk music well. Robert Sheff, the keyboardist was a classically trained musician, involved with the avant-garde "Once Group," a collective that performed the work of modern classical composers like Bob Ashley, Gordon Mumma and John Cage. Iggy - who, by all accounts, was a shy, well-mannered, quiet guy during his time with the Prime Movers - worked hard on his drumming, and he also sang the occasional song, often the Muddy Water's tune "I'm a Man." Iggy left the group somewhere around early 1967 and he was replaced by J.C. Crawford; Crawford also became known as an emcee and announcer at such places as the Grande Ballroom.

During the summer of 1967 - the Summer of Love - the Prime Movers journeyed across the country to San Francisco in their van. Mike Bloomfield, the former guitarist in the Butterfield band and the founder of the group "The Electric Flag," helped the group secure a place to stay at the Sausalito heliport, which is also where they practiced. The group played a couple of shows at a rib joint (for food), and spent their days auditioning for headlining gigs. When the Electric Flag couldn't make a gig in San Francisco, Bloomfield asked the Prime Movers to fill in for his new band at the Fillmore Auditorium. At that show, they opened for Cream, the first time that British group ever played in the U.S.

Upon returning to Michigan, the Prime Movers returned to the bar/frat/teen circuit. They also became the honorary house band at the teen club Mothers, where they backed up travelling R&B bands like the Shang-ri-la's and the Contours. The Prime Movers also were a big part of the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festival's and the first Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival; Michael Erlewine interviewed most of the major players at those festivals. The group also became regulars at the 5th Dimension, where they often played as an after-hours band, starting their shows after they completed their set at Clint's Club around two AM.

The Prime Movers did make some recordings, but they were never released. Michael Erlewine also contributed some harmonica to Bob Seger's first album, 1968's Ramblin' Gamblin' Man. The band continued in various incarnations. According to Michael's estimation, some 37 musicians passed through the band over the years, as the group added keyboards and horns, and then shed them - until

1970. Throughout it all, Michael and Dan Erlewine were at the core of the band. Following the group's slow disbandment, Dan became an internationally-known guitar repairman and a monthly columnist for Guitar Player magazine. Michael played as a solo piano act for about a year; after his marriage in 1971, he gradually stopped playing music. In 1977, he founded Matrix Software, which was the first astrological computer software company in the nation. In 1991, he founded the All Music Guide, which became the largest music database in the world; he also helped found AMG's companions, All Movie Guide and All Game Guide.

Robert Sheff became a well-known avant-garde composer under the name Blue "Gene" Tyranny. Jack Dawson became the bassist for the Siegal-Schwall Blues Band. Iggy Pop, of course, became a punk rock legend.