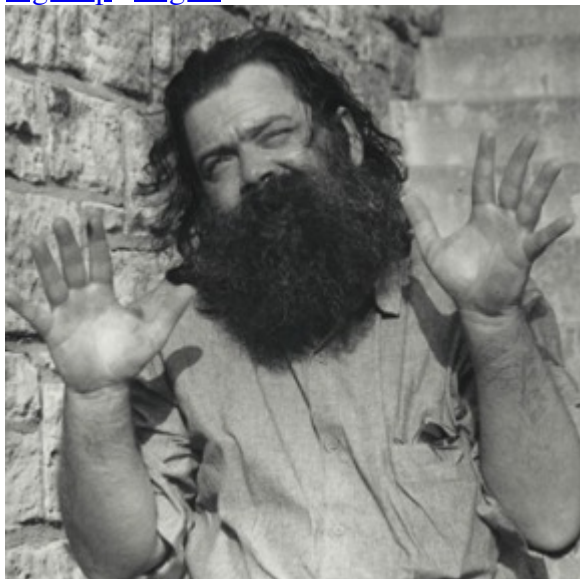


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YOU'RE MISSING: Roky Erickson

- Article by: Justin Guinn
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In 1965, The 13th Floor Elevators pioneered the psychedelic music scene. Before Hendrix engulfed his guitar in flames; before The Beatles grew out their hair; before the Stones had any “Sympathy for the Devil”; even before Pink Floyd’s “Piper,” The 13th Floor Elevators went there. They bounded over moons and soared to the outer realms of the cosmos. At their helm was Roky Erickson.

Roky was praised for his wailing voice, of which many claim inspired Janis Joplin’s signature sound. He’d let out primal barks during performances that wailed through the rafters to the moon. His lo-fi, garage rock approach certainly influenced the multitudes of punk and garage rock that followed him. His lyrics weaved words wistfully, without ever really bunching up or losing touch. With The Elevators, Roky’s music touched musicians from his ‘60s peers to bands today.

From Austin, Texas, The 13th Floor Elevators rose to counterculture stardom with the release of their 1966 *The Psychedelic Sounds of The 13th Floor Elevators*. The album’s single, [“You’re Gonna Miss Me,”](#) written by Erickson, gained much praise in and around Austin and received some national attention, making it to #55 on national Billboard charts. The praise for the album came not only for its lo-fi, garage psychedelia, but also for its sleeve insert, which advocated the use of psychedelic drugs as a means of entering a new state of consciousness. Thus, it’s no coincidence that band members became a target for Austin police. Still, they kept playing shows and recording music. They released *Easter Everywhere* in 1967, which features many wonderful songs, including the 8-minute lyrical spectacle “Slip Into This House.” The album was adored by fans but only ran through its first print.

Things began falling apart after the second album. They played their last show in April of 1968. Shortly thereafter, Erickson was diagnosed with schizophrenia and sent to a psychiatric hospital where he received [electroconvulsive therapy](#). One year later, he was arrested for possession of a single joint. Facing up to 10 years in prison, he pleaded insanity. He ended up in the Rusk State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, falling victim to more electroconvulsive therapy and [Thorazine](#) treatments. He would remain there until 1972.

The next segment in Roky's life is dark. His mind slipped further and further into the abyss. So much so that, in 1982, he claimed a martian had inhabited his body. He went as far as getting a notarized statement saying he was an alien.

Even though these times were tough for Roky, he continued recording great material. He formed a new band called [Bleib Alien](#), which was renamed Roky Erickson and The Aliens. Songs from them include "[Two Headed Dog](#)" and "[I Think of Demons](#)," which were released in the earlier '80s.

Roky continued to put out albums after The Aliens. None of them did much, but they're still respected and adored by his fans. During the time after The Aliens, he fell into an obsession with mail and was arrested on mail theft charges. Still, The Elevators stayed on the map by means of a tribute to Roky featuring covers of his songs by ZZ Top, R.E.M., Butthole Surfers, and more. Released in 1990, the album is a testament to the influence Roky and The Elevators had on the music scene, especially in Texas -- an influence that spanned nearly 30 years.

In 2001, his youngest brother, Sumner Erickson, took legal custody of him and, for the first time in his life, Roky received excellent care, both medically and legally. He began seeing more money from the slew of contracts and deals that littered his past musical career. He curbed his schizophrenia. And, he began performing live again. A film called [You're Gonna Miss Me](#) was made and released in 2005 by Kevin McAlester chronicling Roky's life. In the same year, he played his first full-length show in over 20 years at Austin City Limits.

Since then, Roky has performed alongside Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, the Black Angels, and Mogwai. He played Coachella in 2007 and even took a trip across the pond to play to a full audience at Royal Albert Hall in London. He put an album out, *True Love Cast Out All Evil*, in 2010. And earlier this year, he toured Australia and New Zealand. Redemption hath truly beset this psychedelic genius who may forever be ahead of his time.

<http://rokyerickson.net/>

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"You're Gonna Miss Me" Official Trailer

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