


Amboy
Duke s





Revenge can be a powerful motivator.

And so it was for a young Ted Nugent, whose career in rock 'n' roll—starting with the formation of the great but lamentably under-celebrated Amboy Dukes, who get their due on the collection you're now holding—was spurred by a traumatic occurrence in his middle teens.

In 1964, Nugent was a happy Detroit boy, soaking up the early Motown and British Invasion sounds and playing his guitar in a band called The Lords. Then his world was upended; his father, a former Army drill sergeant, was moving the family to Chicago after receiving a promotion from the Uddeholm Steel Co., and "my little hobby of rock 'n' roll didn't matter."

Not surprisingly, this did not sit well with the future Motor City Madman, who had been taught by his father to pursue what he wanted with unbridled passion. He did a little journey to the center of his own mind and decided "I was going to pursue my musical dream with a vengeance, and God help anybody who got in my way."

Ultimately, the move may have proved fortuitous. Almost as soon as he set foot in the windy city, Nugent made his way to The Cellar, where the Shadows of Knight were kicking out their particular brand of jams. It was that night that Nugent met two musicians—guitarist Gary Hicks, who was training horses by day, and Bob Leonard, who was singing on cruise ships—with whom he would form the Amboy Dukes, appropriating the name of a popular Detroit outfit that featured highly regarded guitarists George Cole and John Finley.

"By that fall, we were kicking the Shadows of Knight's ass," Nugent says, reveling in the memory. "I brought every Detroit spirit, every Detroit attitude and just gave the middle finger to Chicago.

"They didn't now what faster and louder meant; when those bands played cover songs, they played them just like the record. When we played cover songs (mostly originals and blues covers from the Rolling Stones repertoire), we gutted them. People in Chicago didn't know what the fuck kind of noise we were making: 'What is he doing with that guitar?!' We were scaring people."

Conquering Chicago was not Nugent's goal, however; as soon as he graduated from high school in June of 1967, he brought the Dukes back to Detroit and plunged them into a rock 'n' roll scene that was far more sophisticated than when he'd left three years before. Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels had already rolled through, and riding in their wake were the likes of the Bob Seger System, the Stooges, the MC5, SRC, the Rationals and the Frost, among others.

"There was an intensification even I wasn't prepared for when I returned," Nugent acknowledges. "When I got back and watched the MC5, I was not quite prepared for that."

But he wasn't intimidated by it, either. Knowing he needed to fortify the troops, Nugent gradually replaced the Chicagoans, homesick and frustrated by the

group's meager earnings, with take-no-prisoners Detroit boys. John Brake (who changed his stage name to Drake when it was misspelled on the Dukes' first album) had sung in The Lords. Guitarist Steve Farmer was in a group called The Gang, and drummer Dave Palmer, bassist Bill White and keyboardist Rick Lober rounded out the Dukes' first Detroit lineup.

Living in a house in the Detroit suburb of Livonia and playing "just enough shows to keep us in cereal and bread, keep the van running and the speakers working with some degree," the young Dukes were either doing shows or rehearsing in the basement. "We would do 12-, 15-, 16-hour jam sessions," Nugent remembers, "playing at outrageous volumes, playing outrageous stuff. We were a bunch of young kids jamming on spontaneous music."

Attention came quick, mostly due to the band's energy and Nugent's inherent showmanship; eschewing the tie-dyed conventions of the time, he would appear onstage in Native American headdresses and in loincloths, adding the image of the hunter-savage to the Dukes' already potent and loud sonic concoction. Says the MC5's Wayne Kramer, "They were good representatives of what was going on in Detroit in terms of bands trying to put on a show and trying to entertain people and bring in the influences of R&B and what was happening at Motown and the influences of the first wave of the British Invasion."

This lineup of the Dukes had one shining moment—it's 1967 cover of Them's "Baby Please Don't Go" for

producer Bob Shad's Mainstream Records, which had established its reputation with the first album for Big Brother & The Holding Company, which featured another burgeoning talent, Janis Joplin. "We were the first ones to get signed out of the (Detroit) scene," Nugent says, "not because we had better songs, but because of the hell I was raising."

He was raising hell within the band, too; adamant about keeping the standards high, White and Lober were out, replaced by Greg Arama and Andy Solomon. Now the notoriously hard-to-please Nugent began to feel some degree of satisfaction. "We were all...nothing short of virtuosos, head and shoulders above musicians in rock 'n' roll back then," he boasts.

But the group members were still at odds with each other when it came to drugs. Nugent was staunchly against them, raised strictly to neither drink nor get high; he got his kicks—and the subject matter for many of his songs (including this collection's "Dr. Slingshot," "Good Natured Emma" and "Loaded For Bear")—in the woods, where he hunted and communed with nature. His bandmates, however, were more typical residents of the psychedelic era.

"Everybody was doing opium and heroin and hashish—and they were just a wreck," Nugent says. "I saw pop art and Peter Max. I saw all the LSD-relative stuff in all the marketing of the day. But I didn't understand any of it, 'cause I never hallucinated. I could twist a phrase with the best of 'em."



That seems ironic considering that the Dukes' biggest hit, "Journey to the Center of the Mind"—a Top 20 hit in 1968—was something of a drug anthem. But Nugent contends to this day that he never gleaned that meaning from Farmer's lyrics.

"I didn't have the faintest idea," he maintains. "I didn't know what those (opium) pipes were on the album cover, either. I thought 'journey to the center of the mind,' yeah, it's good to be reflective, to journey inside yourself, to think before acting.' That still makes sense to me, actually, although for Steve Farmer it was more of an 'LSD will open the mind to the many colors of the rainbow...'

"If you look at the lyrics, it reflects either one of those philosophies, really."

The Dukes' journey became rockier as time went on, however. A combination of playing 300 nights a year—which Nugent calls "the road destructo-derby of the spirit"—and the other members' increasing drug use led to lineup changes. The Dukes also label-hopped from their abysmal Mainstream deal to Polydor and finally Frank Zappa's DiscReet label, where the group was billed as Ted Nugent's Amboy Dukes, reflecting the gunslinger reputation he was earning via a series of guitar duels with the MC5's Kramer, Mahogany Rush's Frank Marino and Iron Butterfly's Mike Pinera (it also marked the arrival of bassist Rob De Lagrange, who would remain with Nugent through his mid- and late-'70s glory years).

The Dukes were a dead issue by 1975, when Nugent embarked on his solo career. In his wake, the group's legacy has been sadly relegated to "Journey..." and "Baby Please Don't Go," which savvy fans know is entirely unacceptable. "Loaded For Bear," then, is a primer of the primal rock with which the Dukes carved their particular niche while recording for Mainstream during 1967-68.

The title track and "Dr. Slingshot" offer whooping fun in the prime Nugent tradition of "Live it Up," while more ambitious pieces such as "Migration" and "Prodigal Man"—two of the group's in-concert show-stoppers—spotlight the skills of the individual players. "You Talk Sunshine, I Breathe Fire," meanwhile, combines the dual and dueling visions Nugent and Farmer brought to the band.

Over the course of 18 songs, then, *Loaded For Bear* provides illuminating proof that there was more to the Amboy Dukes than the couple of songs you might have heard. "For better or for worse," Mike Stax wrote in the liner notes of the celebrated *Nuggets* collection, the Dukes' brash, toothy attack "pointed the direction for countless groups as the '60s drew to a close." After listening to this set, chances are you'll agree it was for the better.

—Gary Graff

Gary Graff is an award-winning syndicated music journalist and Supervising Editor of the *Music Hound Essential Album Guide* series on Visible Ink Press.

1. **Journey To The Center Of The Mind**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
2. **Baby Please Don't Go**
-J. Williams-
3. **Psalms Of Aftermath**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
4. **Colors**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
5. **Down On Phillips Escalator**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
6. **Night Time**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
7. **Mississippi Murderer**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
8. **Scottish Tea**
-T. Nugent-
9. **Dr. Slingshot**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
10. **Flight Of The Bird**
-T. Nugent-
11. **Why Is A Carrot More Orange Than A Orange**
-S. Farmer-
12. **Saint Phillips Friend**
-S. Farmer-
13. **You Talk Sunshine, I Breathe Fire**
-T. Nugent-S. Farmer-
14. **Migration**
-T. Nugent-
15. **Prodigal Man**
-T. Nugent-
16. **Good Natured Emma**
-T. Nugent-
17. **For His Namesake**
-S. Farmer-
18. **Loaded For Bear**
-T. Nugent-

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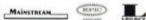
Tracks 1-5 taken from *The Amboy Dukes*, rel. 1967
 Tracks 6-12 taken from *Journey To The Center Of The Mind*, rel. 1968
 Track 13 single release, 1968
 Tracks 14-18 taken from *Migration*, rel. 1968


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