

The Prime Movers

www.primemoversmusic.com

“Spooked,” besides being the title of the Prime Movers’ 1988 release on Birdcage Records, is also an apt description of the haunting effect this band’s atmospheric rock has on the listener. Drawing you in with familiar Western imagery, patches of neo-psychedelia and ethereal guitar, the band takes the listener on a sobering journey through the soul of America. It’s an evocative music mixed with determination, guarded optimism and dark pessimism, and one that’s strangely life affirming.

The Prime Movers, though virtually unknown in their own country, scored two Top Forty hits in England with the songs, “On The Trail” and “Dark Western Night.”

Hailing from Sierra Madre, California, the Prime Movers - Gary Putman on guitar and vocals, Severs Ramsey on vocals and bass and Curt Lichter on drums - formed in 1983, adapting their name from a favorite episode of the science fiction TV series, The Twilight Zone.

The Prime Movers first garnered attention with the Mini-LP, “Museum,” released in 1984 on their own indie label, Birdcage Records. It’s brooding songs, post punk energy and Putman’s eclectic guitar flourishes (played on a variety of homemade guitars) earned the band glowing critical notices.

Indeed, Cashbox Magazine wrote in their Aug 6, 1988 edition, “Gary Putman weaves an ethereal tapestry which blends technical wizardry with pure emotion to create one of the most stylistically unique guitar sounds ever (Did you hear that, Les Paul?).”

While playing the Southern California club circuit, the band landed a major label deal with Island Records UK. A&R reps saw The Prime Movers at the legendary nightclub Madame Wong’s Chinatown and immediately signed the band to the label.

Island Records UK released two singles and a self-titled EP that found favor with the English record buying public and were critically acclaimed by the British press. The band received coveted support slots on the BIG COUNTRY “Seer” tour in the UK and The THOMAS DOLBY “Aliens Ate My Buick” US tour and received prominent airplay on The BBC in the UK. The well-received UK tour with Big Country resulted in Big Country guitarist and lead man, Stuart Adamson, contributing an emotional E-Bow guitar part to their single, “Dark Western Night.”

A song from the EP, “Strong As I Am,” was selected by film-maker Michael Mann to be the featured song in his movie, “Manhunter” (the prequel to “Silence Of The Lambs”). The motion picture introduced Thomas Harris’ infamous anti-hero, HANNIBAL LECHTOR. Critic Leonard Maltin called Manhunter better than SILENCE OF THE LAMBS. Strong As I Am was included in the Manhunter Soundtrack album and later released by MCA as a single. MICHAEL MANN liked it so much that he personally financed the making of the Strong As I Am video.

In 1987, The Prime Movers definitely fell from favor with Island Records founder, CHRIS BLACKWELL, although the reason is unknown. A German Manhunter website opines that it was bad blood between Island and MCA who issued the Manhunter soundtrack album and the Strong As I Am 45 that caused the rift. Others say that it was caused by Island A&R man IAN MATTHEWS, famous as a founding member of FAIRPORT CONVENTION, who had originally signed The Prime Movers and wanted to take them with him to a new label when he was sacked by Island.

Island would not let the Prime Movers put out new material, nor would they release them from their recording contract. Despite offers from other majors, especially Rhino Records who were very interested, The Prime Movers found themselves virtually out of business with absolutely no label backing.

It was then that the band hit on the bright idea to record new music under an assumed name - the crazier the concept the better. Ramsey and Putman, as Jah Paul Jo and Put-Mon, recruited some old friends and entered their own, self-induced Musical Witness Protection Program: DREAD ZEPPELIN was born. Started as a joke in 1989, little did The Prime Movers know that DREAD ZEPPELIN would get signed to IRS/MCA Records and sell over a million copies of their classic first album, Un Led ED.

Between 1989 and 1995, DREAD ZEPPELIN went on to record five more albums, all produced by RAMSEY and former Prime Mover sound man, RASTA LI-MON (LEE MANNING). Dread Zeppelin's extraordinary popularity continues to this day and they are described by the Internet site Wikipedia as "The Ultimate Tribute Band." Led Zeppelin's ROBERT PLANT loved the band and called Dread Zeppelin's version of YOUR TIME IS GONNA COME better than the original. High praise, indeed!

In 1996, Severs Ramsey was finally able to secure the rights to all of the Prime Movers music from Island for his own Birdcage Records. At that time, he shared management with a popular UK band called THE CHRISTIANS who just happened to be Island Records' top seller. The Christians refused to deliver Island any new material until the label signed off on The Prime Movers and restored all rights to their songs and albums. Saved by The Christian's Crusade!

Ramsey and Putman, with new drummer Gary Falasco, reunited in 2006 for several one-off reunion gigs to support the CD re-release of their first album, "Museum." With the help of LEE MANNING and a huge ladder warehouse in South El Monte, CA, a handful of new recordings were produced. The late stages of recording were rudely interrupted by a robbery which resulted in the loss of all the recording equipment. Momentum was never regained. However, Manning, Ramsey and Birdcage Records founding partner Chas Maselli are currently working with mastering engineer DOUG SCHWARTZ to compile a release which will include some of those recordings.