

The Persistence of Fate: Jim Morrison and the '27 Club'

*After 4 years I'm left with a mind like a fuzzy hammer
regret for wasted nights & wasted years
I pissed it all away
American Music
End with fond good-bye; plan for future—Not an actor
Writer-filmmaker
Which of my selves will be remembered
Good-bye America
I loved you
Money from home
good luck
stay out of trouble*



Jim in a suit...people are strange

- Jim Morrison (Wilderness Vol. 1)

Looking back on the day September 13, 1969, a friend of mine, George, can recall exactly where he was: "I had a job," he says, "to look after Jim Morrison, the singer for The Doors. And it was fucking horrible."

That's the day of **Toronto Rock n' Roll Revival**, a 13-hour concert at the University of Toronto's Varsity Stadium. Although John Lennon showed up, The Doors headlined.

George was attending the **University of Toronto** at the time, and to make some money, signed on as an event organizer. Somehow George became a reluctant member of a small group waiting at the airport for The Doors to show up and escort them to the stadium. He'd been told to stay close to Jim Morrison, as it was rumored he was an alcoholic.

"I think he was already drunk when they landed," George explains, "or just acting weird. Regardless, he was a difficult guy to be around and I knew it was going to be a tough night because The Doors was on last."

I ask him if he regards his time with Morrison as important, given that Morrison has become a cultural icon, one of the great die-young gods, like Jimmy Dean and Marilyn Monroe. "Not

at all," says George. "I never liked The Doors. I still don't. That organ they play reminds me of a cheap Bar Mitzvah quartet. I wanted to see Chuck Berry and Little Richard and John Lennon, but had to hang with Morrison, so I kind of missed the whole thing."



Mr Mojo Risin'

George is careful to add that as The Doors' performance time grew closer, Morrison began to settle down, and in fact was quite sober, if not catatonic, as the band hit the boards. "There was something about his eyes that wasn't quite right," George adds as an afterthought, stepping into his sedan this bright Sunday morning, on the way to a golf course. "I don't think it was a question of no one being home, so to speak," he says, tapping his forehead. "I think the wrong kind of people were at home. Anyway, that was about forty years ago. It's important to remember how young all those people acted. Morrison was around twenty-five years old but he seemed younger than me, and I was nineteen. Just think about that." Then he's off to the Emerald Isle Country Club.

So I think about that. Maybe George is on to something—something about reckless youth, something about certain people who flame bright with life because they're burning at over three times the rate than the rest of us. An aunt of mine knew Jimi Hendrix, and she said that even though he seemed okay ("dressed a little wild"), you got the sense that *he didn't belong anywhere...it was just 'a sense'*.

And I think about George's affection for numbers: he's a good golfer, but he's a great numerologist, recognizing patterns and proclaiming hidden truths. He once told me that Einstein regarded math as an art, not just a science — an attitude that comes naturally to most people who are terrible with numbers.

Let's go back: it's July 7, 1983, and I'm hanging around **Père Lachaise** cemetery, just outside of Paris. I'm on an assignment (okay, freelancing) for a city arts magazine covering the twenty-second anniversary of Morrison's death. I'm five days late, as Morrison split on July 3, but I figure it doesn't matter, he was interred on July 7. Anyway, Morrison will wait around.



This is The End

He lays about ten meters away from where I sip coffee and pretend to adjust my camera, but really study a clump of hippies nested by the **grave**, wrapped in blankets and sweaters, swaying to an execrable, grating interpretation of People Are Strange provided by a thin, blonde young man who, judging by his accent is of Swedish descent.

It begins to rain, which is expected, even encouraged in Paris, because it makes the whole place even more beautiful. Nobody seems to notice; in fact, the Swedish kid has segued into an up-tempo, cheery version of The End. He sings phonetically, free from the encumbering meaning of words.

So enrapt am I with this revolutionary interpretation of Doors' music, I fail to notice a very short (and I mean short) old woman who has sidled up to me. She's built like a barrel with legs. Her skin is very white and her wonderful eyes are large, green and startling. In French, (which I kind of speak and interpret in **dimwitted** slow motion) she asks me if I'm a reporter.

"Yes," I reply, "I work for a newspaper," which is true in a **Clintonesque way**.

"There are no other reporters here," she observes. "Just you. Have people lost interest in the American singer?"

"Perhaps," I reply, mainly because I know how to say 'perhaps' in French. "Why are you here?" I ask. "Did you sing his music?" which is highly unlikely and not really what I want to say.



Drive, he said

She shakes her head. "No. My brother was buried here just the same time as the singer died. I live near here and I like to walk here. I have done this for many years. Au revoir monsieur."

Forward we go: Twenty-five years later I tell my story of the old woman to George, Morrison's disgruntled Toronto amigo. "You think she witnessed Morrison's burial?" I ask. "No," George replies, "I mean 'the same time' doesn't imply at *exactly* the same time. It could have been months apart either way. It's a language issue. Look, I could figure out the odds of you meeting a witness to the burial of Jim Morrison, and I can tell you now, they'd be freakin' slim."

I'm about to introduce a variation on the theme of Morrison's private internment, but George's attention is drifting. He flicks his smoke away and turns to walk home. "You know what Morrison said to me that day at Varsity Stadium?"

"What?"

"He said something like 'This is the last time I'll ever play Toronto.'"



He knew how to party

"You think he was suicidal?"

George laughs. "No. It's just numbers. He was less than five-hundred days from death. I worked it out once. And I suppose somewhere, deep down, like Hendrix and Joplin and Brian Jones and Kurt Cobain and Robert Johnson—if you're marked for the **Twenty-Seven Club**, you're toast. It's fate. There's no escape."

I never did finish that 1983 article about Morrison. I could never get it in focus. I didn't have the strength of character to appreciate fate. I myself was in the middle of a strange, dark apprenticeship and didn't even know it.