Music Theater Film Dance Art Books

Unicorn Times

March 1978/Free

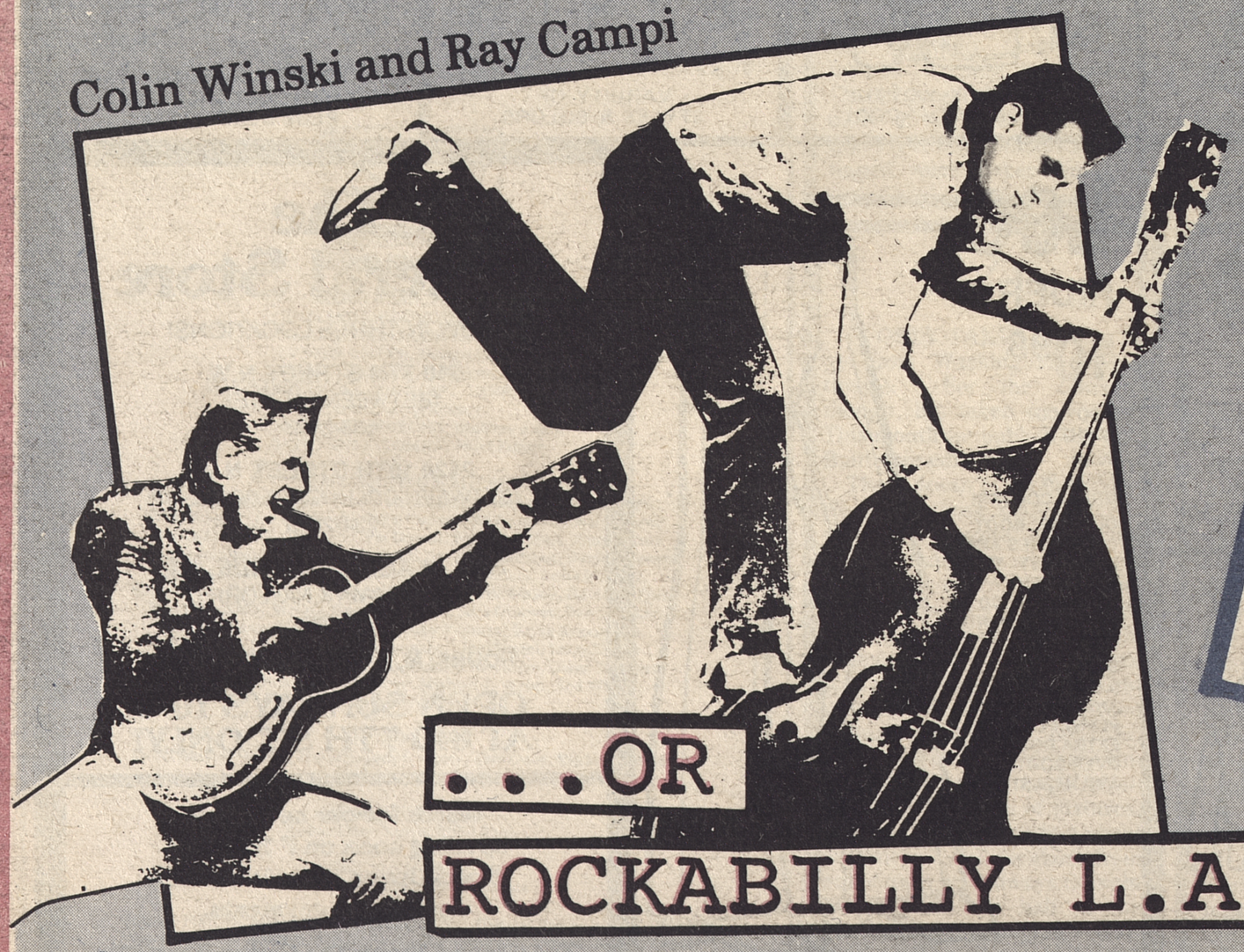
IS ROCK'S FUTURE IN...



The CLASH

...PUNK LONDON?

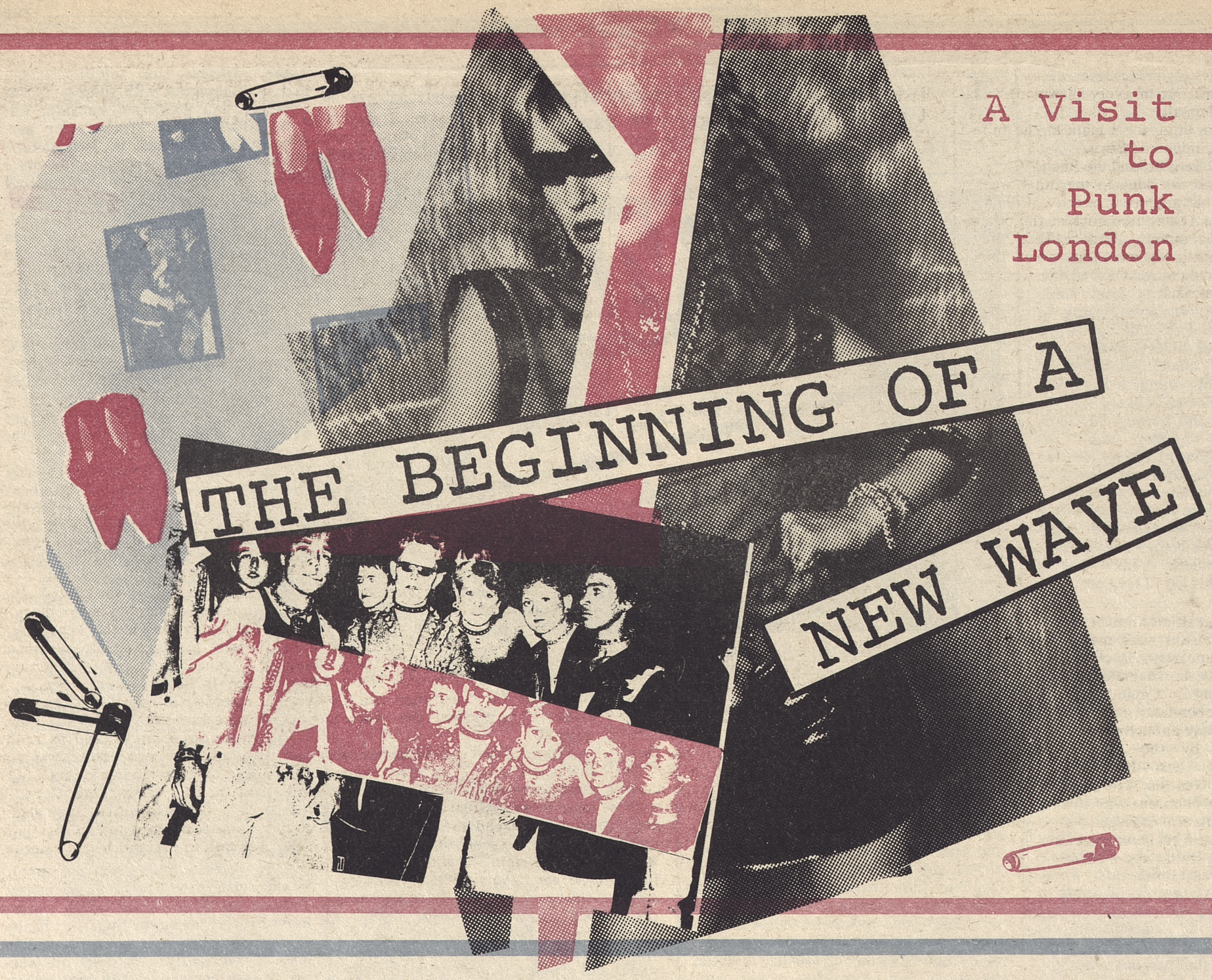
Colin Winski and Ray Campi



...OR ROCKABILLY L.A.?

WJR and the Art of Reviewing Journalism (p.34)

SEE PAGE 36



A Visit to Punk London

By Steven Bialer

THE DIFFERENCE between a barian and a modern is that the latte expected to behave in what we ca civilized manner. In other words, he manners.

But good manners are not just r and taboos. Nor are they merely the of answering an invitation correctly knowing how to introduce your friend one another, in choosing the right pressions in thanking for a party. Th is something invisible and indefina but very real, about genuine good m ners.

Barbara Cartla
Eitquette Handbook,

People have had so many rules ready that it's difficult for them to b away. So if they find a new rule th more exciting than an old one th adopt it. But the whole thing inherer punk is that finally you don't need rules, it's a Catch-22 *situation re Young kids might be attracted to it th ing that you have to do things in a tain way.* Honey *magazine wanted m write a thing telling people how to your hair and eyes and things to b punk, but the point is these superfi ities aren't important. It's all about titude. Trust yourself, don't let pe tell you what to do. Take one little so you're living instead of following.*

—Vivienne Westwo
co-owner of Seditionaries,

"You gunna to the Pistols then?"

The train rumbled under the Lon streets. Dressed in a T-shirt patc together with a row of safety pins, ther trousers and a gray suit coat, he

Have you heard the news?

Rockabilly

There's good rockin' again!

By Joe Sasfy

WHEN SILVER-HAIRED Charlie Feathers, one of the earliest and most original Memphis rockabillies, visited England last year, he found more than five Charlie Feathers' albums that weren't supposed to exist. He found bands playing Charlie Feathers' songs, songs like "Tongue-Tied Jill" that had just about faded from memory. Charlie was a little surprised to find his name and music in such currency in England; he was a little surprised he was accorded the respect granted a legend. Afterall, when he appeared at the Psyche Delly in January, he had to apologize to the audience for his band's absence—"I just didn't have the money to fly them up here." Feathers' status overseas testifies to the ongoing Anglo obsession with that one-of-a-kind artifact of 50's Southern culture called rockabilly.

The album cover of a Dutch rockabilly collection called *Rare Rock-A-Billy* (Collector Records CL1019) shows a photo of Memphis with the caption, "Memphis Tenn. Home of every rocker." That kind of distortion colors the fervor and imagination of the European rockabilly fan—Memphis is mecca, Presley its god, and the thousands of lesser hillbillies who rocked are mere saints and legends. This Memphis mania, fixed by an idyllic vision of an authentic and funky Southern culture populated by hep cats, hardly differs from the Sex Pistols own determination to ignore the Northern cities on their recent tour in favor of the South. They hit Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Tulsa, Dallas (proclaiming San Antonio their favorite), and wanted to play Tupelo, Mississippi, Elvis' birthplace. Manager Malcolm McLaren offered his own variation on this Americana theme, "I want to go to Dodge City and Durango."

When I identified a "Rockabilly Uprising" in a *Unicorn* article in April, 1975, I enthusiastically exaggerated the significance of a trickle of rockabilly reissues from England and the few contemporary rockabilly recordings of Rollin' Rock Records in Los Angeles. Since then the trickle of reissues has become a flood, contemporary rockabillies have burst onto the scene here and overseas, some of the original cats have come bopping out of their graves, and rockabilly has found an ideological mate in new wave/punk. I can state now with enthusiasm and without exaggeration that we have a genuine *rockabilly infiltration* taking place.

At least three popular British artists —Dave Edmunds, Graham Parker, and Elvis Costello—have made some use of the rockabilly idiom in their music. Notably, Parker's "Back to School Days," and Costello's "Mystery Dance" are the best examples of nouveau rockabilly extant, both elevated by a lack of self-conscious reference to the style (for example, no obvious stuttering). Edmunds' approach has been more explicit because of his rock classicist stance. On *Get It* (Swan Song SS8418), he let the echo and guitar licks of the Sun studio merge with vintage Chuck Berry. He copied Presley's "My Baby Left Me" too closely; lent the exuberant popabilly touch of the Everly Brothers to "Here Comes the Weekend"; and pushed the rockabilly suggestions of "Back to School Days" firmly into the Sun Records mold. The best rockabilly on the album, however, was Nick Lowe's frenetic and hilarious "What Did I Do Last Night," simply because the break-neck pace and humor are true to the genre.

None of these artists are punks, but they were all closely tied to the pub rock scene that spawned the Count Bishops, Eddie and the Hot Rods, and Dr. Feelgood—the three groups who form the link between 50's and 60's R&B and rock'n' roll and the rhythmically hyper, high volume, bass-heavy approach of the punks. What rockabilly and punk share is simple. Both were (although the final score on punk isn't in) too raw, uncalculated, uncompromising, and unrelentingly rhythmic for their times, or at least for the larger pop audience in this country. For every hillbilly cat who skipped Pat Boone in white bucks in favor of wildman Sunny Burgess in red shoes and red hair (it's true!), there is a punk forsaking Jackson Browne in favor of the Dead Boys. Right now rockabilly and punk are both benefitting from younger and older rock fans who want to be part of the cutting edge of rock culture and can recognize rock'n'roll's unpredictable eruptions in all of their stylistic guises.

When Erics (a new Liverpool rock club built on the site of the Cavern Club) opened, it featured new wavers like the Jam, Clash, Talking Heads, Ramones, and that master of the high-pitched hiccup, Charlie Feathers! When *Who Put the Bomp* ran their all-time punk poll, they were shocked at the results. "There are a startling number of votes for fifties' rockers," the magazine reported, "more than any of us here expected. And these votes aren't just from our older readers, they also come from our newer readers . . . ." I wasn't surprised to find Elvis, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and Jerry Lee Lewis among the top ten punks with Iggy Pop, Patti Smith, and Keith Richard. I was surprised to find Johnny Burnette in the also-rans. He

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Barbara Cartland, *uette Handbook*, 1962

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—Vivienne Westwood, of Seditionaries, 1977

e Pistols then?"
ed under the London in a T-shirt patched w of safety pins, lea-gray suit coat, he ran his hand through his hair (carefully blown dry to stick out in every direction) and continued to talk.

"I was waiting for a mate at the tube station at Shepherds Bush."

"Lots of Teds around the Bush."

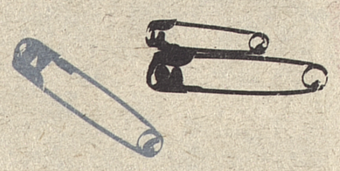
"Yeah, I was done in the other week after the Stranglers concert. Coming back down I saw three guys at the other end of the street. They're Teds they were, fucking big ones too. Well they grabbed me, they smashed me face in. I was petrified."

In the seat across the aisle, another of Britain's famous punk-rockers sat quietly, respectful of the dues paid by his companion. On his black leather jacket were a Sex Pistols "Never Mind the Bollocks" button and a button made from a color Xerox of a picture of the Clash.

Elsewhere on the train were women with ultra tacky pink vinyl raincoats and heavy black makeup on their eyes, teenagers with torn shirts with the names of bands written all over them and thin ties dangling from their necks, and a few ordinary Londoners on their way to Uxbridge, last stop on the Picadilly Line.

There, at Brunel University, the notorious Sex Pistols were making their first London appearance in almost a year. A short notice in a tabloid and a 2 am announcement on Capital Radio, Britain's only independent rock'n'roll station, were the only publicity accorded this performance by the group just voted England's best—beating out Led Zeppelin, Genesis, and the rest of Britain's pop hierarchy—by the readers of the *New Musical Express*. Nobody on the train seemed to know exactly where to get off the train, where exactly to go, or what to expect there.

At Brunel, a newly constructed University in the outskirts of London, a crowd of several thousand gathered in the drizzling darkness, trying to find a way into the sold out concert.



With all the imitation British stuff we get in the U.S.A., it's a relief to see London itself. Men walk by in bowler hats clutching their umbrella and copies of the *Times*. Turkeys hang in the butcher shops, their heads and feet still on them. The large black taxis and double-decker red busses drive along thin streets past small European cars.

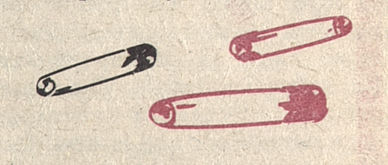
I heard an American voice singing from the juke box in a pub: "Roadrunner, Roadrunner . . . I'm in love with the modern world . . . ." It's the Modern Lovers, certainly not something you'd hear too often at home. I was on my way to the Marquee club on Wardour Street. The Marquee has, though its many years of existence, featured everyone from the Rolling Stones to Jimi Hendrix. The decor is reminiscent of thousands of rock clubs all over the world, that is, pretty grungy. A pinball machine bangs away at one wall while people buy drinks at the bar. I looked around for something significant to write down, but despite thousands of miles, it's really not that much different than the Keg or the Bayou back home (give or take a strange hairstyle or punk button here or there). I happened in on a not-so-punk night; Greg Kihn (an American from Baltimore who now lives in Berkeley) was the featured act, and a not-very-original punkish band was playing an opening set as I sipped warm beer.

In the outside room, I struck up a conversation with one of the Londoners, trying to get to the bottom of all this punk rock. From the mouth of a 19 year old city government worker:

"Punk rock is the greatest thing that has happened for us teenagers. I missed the rock revolution and all this sort of gives us identity from the old folks; middle age people, anything over 25, even over 20, I dunno. Because we didn't know where we were, because all they think of is getting a mortgage house and getting married. There's more to life than that, so punk helps us live. But punk doesn't commit itself so we don't really know where we are yet. Punk bands are very influential and they themselves are influenced. Once they make it, all they want to be is rock stars and that defeats the whole object of punk.

"I was out pogoing with my friends the other night," he continued, referring to the exultant, leaping dance that NBC's "Weekend"—and many of its complacent viewers—found so alarming. "It looks violent and the press blow it up. I've been to see most of the punk bands and there isn't all that much violence. But I will say that punk isn't suited to rock venues where you have to sit down to listen to a punk band. That's where they have the frustration and the violence. I'm against the violence personally.

"Many of the punk bands are not great musicians, no. You don't want to be Santana and do what they do. You don't have to be a great musician to be in a punk band and the punk guitarists are all good in their own field, they play all the stuff right and with feeling. What do you want them to be Hendrix for when they're doing what they have to do fantastically, perfect. They do what they have to do perfectly."



Walking out of the Sloan Square station of the London Underground, I looked around for a street sign saying Kings Road. Kings Road, long a street known for its boutiques and restaurants, has gained a new distinction. On Saturday mornings, punk rockers rise from all over the city and come to Kings Road to meet with fellow punks, walk up and down the street, and sneer at passersby.

I passed a Safeway (just like back home). A wall was plastered with large bright posters advertising appearances of the Suburban Studs, The Adverts, The Jam, The Tom Robinson Band, The Ramones, and various other acts. Boy, a punk fashion shop, was manned by two stern looking fellows dressed in black leather. There you can buy leather pants, strange T-shirts, and other punk-oriented apparel. Further down the road is Seditionaries, the shop run by Sex Pistol managers Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood. Started in 1971 as Let It Rock with a collection of 50's records, 12 pairs of Lurex drainpipe trousers, and very little money, the store originally catered to Teddy Boys, people who wear 50's style zoot suits and have an affinity for such 50's artists as Richie Valens and Gene Vincent. Soon bored with that, they changed the name of the store to Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die and began catering to the

continued on next page

surely was not included for his pop hits like "You're Sixteen"; no, it was his rockabilly stuff like his storming version of "Train Kept a Rollin" that earned him punk status. The point is Burnette's rockabilly material is legendary, but not that easy to find; these rock readers obviously had found it and heard it.

In the last few years, a wealth of obscure rockabilly has become available. The number of British reissues of original 50's rockabilly has become astounding in just the last year as the vaults of MGM, Imperial, Columbia, MCA, Capitol, Mercury, and Hickory have been scoured and albums constructed. Most of these companies followed the lead of smaller independents, like Sun and King, into the rockabilly field following Presley's success. The *MGM Rockabilly Collection* (MGM Super 2315 394) is especially recommended because of its inclusion of eight tracks by Andy Starr, a Texas rockabilly who walked on the musical wild side. Starr's "Round and Round" exemplifies the shift rockabilly made in the mid-50's from a country-based sound to "a harder, increasingly decadent form of rock'n'roll." The beat has assumed a thunderous quality, the metallic guitar solos jump out of nowhere and run like headless chickens, and Starr's singing is a raunchy apocalypse of bogus hysteria.

Rockabilly originated at Sun Records and had its finest moments there with Presley, Cash, Perkins, Billy Lee Riley, Warren Smith, Sonny Burgess, and others. The reissue of Sun material long ago exhausted the actual releases and has since turned to anything ever captured on a scrap of tape at the studio at 706 Union Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee. The current Sun series on the British Charly label now numbers well over 30 albums! Significantly, for the first time, it looks as though some American companies are preparing to release old rockabilly material domestically, which should mean lower prices and better distribution here. Gusto Records is planning on following its successful R&B reissue series with albums of King and Starday rockabilly material. Sun International Records (who leased the Sun material to Charly) has an eight album series in the works, but has been stymied with litigation by RCA. Two of the albums were to present the legendary "million-dollar quartet" tapes, featuring Lewis, Cash, Presley, and Perkins *together*.

There is an active, contemporary rockabilly scene overseas to complement the historical compulsion. Crazy Cavan and the Rhythm Rockers, Matchbox, the Riot Rockers, Shakin' Stevens and the Sunsets, and Hank C. Burnette are popular and recorded (many on the Dutch Rockhouse label). A new album, *It's Rock'n' Roll* (Bemp 001), provides an excellent encapsulation of the current British rock'n'roll scene. The Pirates, Shakin' Stevens, Freddie "Fingers" Lee, and others romp through on original and non-original rockabilly and R&B with the stylistic abandon and heavy hand that has always marked the English treatment of American music. Some down home aficionados may be turned off by the lack of "authentic" feeling here, but at this point in rockabilly history, there's no point in putting on boots or using a string bass unless it fits. The Flying Saucers' original "Keep on Coming" is the best Jerry Lee Lewis takeoff I've heard since Lewis decided to let his cousin, Mickey Gilley, do all the boogie-

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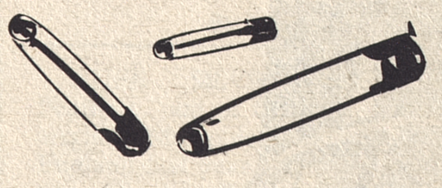
less static Rockers, people who wore tiny skirts, chains, bike T-shirts, fringes, and silver studs. For a while the shop was called Sex and sold sexually oriented clothes made of rubber, leather, and other unusual materials. The name of the store was last changed to Seditionaries; it was remodeled, and is now decorated with posters of bombed out Dresden and filled with several racks of fairly high priced strange clothing, resembling straight jackets and bondage wear, with pants with zippers in all the wrong places and strange flaps on the back and T-shirts with all kinds of chaotic artistic visions silk screened on them in day-glo colors.

"The fact is," says Vivienne Westwood, "that if you really want to find out how much freedom you have in this British society, at the moment the best way is just to make an overt sexual statement and you'll have the hounds of hell on your back. Certainly in this country it's the thing that brings out everyone's emotional prejudices so much that by the time they've finished they're really quite lunatic. A young girl wearing a rubber skirt to the office is going to produce a reaction. That's what clothes are all about and that's why people wear them. You can't walk down the street in anything I ever made and not have people stare."

Into this show wandered a young man now known to the world as Johnny Rotten, one of thousands of teenagers left unemployed or underemployed in one of the biggest tailspins in England's economic history. Malcolm McLaren found in Rotten's contemptuous biting wit the makings of a fitting lead singer for the band he had rehearsing for the past year. Overtly political, Rotten mocked the social and rock establishments of England. While the top bands seemed to have forgotten their origins, the Sex Pistols and other punk bands struck a raw nerve in Britain's body politic, screaming the rage felt by a new generation of disenfranchised youth.

The store wasn't easy to find. There's no sign, just a small neon light over the door. At the back of the small, thin room, a man was riveting together mats in the shape of a half-circle to hang over the back of a pair of bondage-style pants. A woman sitting behind the counter was reading a comic book.

Discovering that I'm from Washington, she asked me why the punks in Washington don't blow up the White House with Jimmy Carter in it. "Then he'd be dead," she reflected. She scoured the *Unicorn Times* I brought along, looking for unpleasant hippie connotations. Despite the rough talk, the atmosphere seemed similar to that of late 60's hip activism. In their own way they seemed sympathetic to my interest. The man was polite and businesslike, willingly accepting a traveler's check for my purchases.



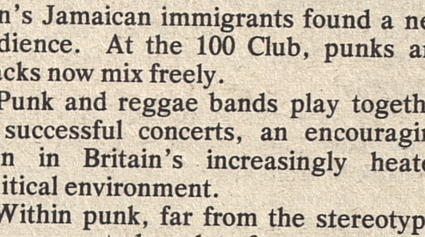
At the 100 Club, another London nightspot, reggae, another style of music by another British minority, is performed.

Early in punk's history, there weren't enough punk records to fill an evening at punk clubs. Not wanting to play records by the hated established rock bands, the dj's filled the gaps with reggae records. The kids liked it, and the music that had previously appealed chiefly to collectors, cultists, and London's Jamaican immigrants found a new audience. At the 100 Club, punks and blacks now mix freely.

Punk and reggae bands play together in successful concerts, an encouraging sign in Britain's increasingly heated political environment.

Within punk, far from the stereotype, there seem to be a lot of currents of discussion, with small punk-style anarchist and socialist periodicals springing up. There is also the danger of punk becoming just another fashion. The fellow I talked with at the Marquee commented:

"Now everyone wants to get into punk, even the old ones. It's ludicrous. Even in the rich people's circles and magazines such as *Roxy*, they're trying to fashion themselves into punks. Yes, because it's hip. If you buy the *Roxy* magazine you'd see that it was only for the top class, the rich, even in its price. It was made for people of lower standard of living to see what they're missing and a pointless newspaper altogether. They have no news, nothing. All it used to say is who's been with who at what top nightclub."



Walking out of the Finbury Park tube station and under a bridge, I faced the Rainbow Theatre. Convincing the guy at the door to let me in halfway through the show, I walked past a fountain in the lobby and through the doors of the auditorium into a sea of bobbing heads. The audience (mostly teenagers) was on its feet, jumping up and down triumphantly, enjoying the loud music. In the aisles were burly bouncers with Clash security T-shirts, keeping the crowd back from the stage and by their seats. The musicians lept, sang, and played a hard driving music of, well, liberation, urging the audience to tear out of their straightjackets of passivity and acceptance with songs full of vitality and life. The audience leaped together, alive.

Above the band were two giant photographs, one (circa 1955) of a woman watching television and one of a German airplane. The year before, the audience had torn up the seats of the Rainbow at a Clash concert. This year the band had asked them not to, creating some controversy about the role of a self-proclaimed revolutionary band. People later told me that, due to the seats, it was a pretty restrained concert; by Washington standards, it was a real blowout. The audience pogoed and sang along with the band:

Black men have got a lot of problems but they don't mind throwing a brick.

But white men have got too much school where they teach you how to be thick,

So we're content, we don't resent, we go reading pages and wearing slippers,

White riot, I want to riot

White riot, a riot of my own.

All the power is in the hands of people rich enough to buy it.

While we walk the streets too chicken to even try it.

And everyone does what they're told to.

And everybody eats supermarket soul food.

White riot I want to riot.

White riot, a riot of my own. ●

GARAGELAND

Where to Find English Punk

England's do-it-yourself punks have produced more records than a reasonable person could audition (or a reasonable budget afford), but a fair sampling is available on American lp's. Foremost, of course is *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* (Warner Brothers); the strongest stuff is available on singles, but it's cheaper to buy this album, and the flip sides you'll miss are eminently missable. The Jam's *In the City* and *This is the Modern World* (Polydor) are both fine pop-punk, with the first being the more frenetic and the better composed. The Vibrator's *Pure Mania* (Epic) shows how easy glitter rockers can become punks of a sort, form without function. The Tom Robinson Band provides the melodic, adult counterpoint to punk anarchism; so far only "2 4 6 8 Motorway" is out here, but an ep and an album are due soon. Eddie and the Hot Rods (Island) and the Boomtown Rats (Mercury) where punk rock meets pub rock, the proper home for such r&b-based performers as Elvis Costello (Columbia) and Graham Parker (Mercury). The Stranglers (A&M), sham sociopaths with artrock roots, are to be avoided.

There are many punk rock samplers of documentary interest in the import bins, but only one import lp is essential: *The Clash* (CBS), which is raucus, anarchic, and yet melodic—a classic, as is their new single, "Complete Control." Most of the other great imported punk is on singles: the Adverts, the Buzzcocks, X-Ray Spex, Celia & the Mutations, the Cortinas, ex-Pistol Glen Matlock's Rich Kids, and many more. The stores that specialize in such stuff will play 45s, so you needn't buy blindly.

Those stores are chiefly Yesterday & Today in Rockville and Hit & Run in Kensington. Kemp Mill, Record & Tape, Penguin Feather, and Peaches all stock import singles, and the Record & Tape on L Street NW has the few Anglopunk singles that have been released by American labels so far. In Baltimore, the outlets are more limited, but Record & Tape Collectors and Recordmasters have good supplies of imports, including singles in most cases. ●