

Punk, new wave, etc.: an analysis

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By DANNY YOUNG

Well the kids are all hopped up and ready to go. They're ready to go now. They've got their surfboards. And they're going to the discotheque a go go.

But she just couldn't stay. She had to bread away. Well New York really has it all.

Oh yeah, oh yeah. Sheena is a punk rocker...

The Ramones may just be four punks from Whitestone, Queens, yet the simple, stupid, pro-

found and prophetic lyric to Sheena is a Punk Rocker combined with the unmis-takable, hoppin', boppin', rockin' rif has made the song a classic of sorts.

In a period when the music industry is declining into a recession, thousands are making the "Sheena" move from disco and progressive rock (acid, spaceship, Southern Cal, etc.) to punk or more appropriately, "New Wave Rock 'n roll". A brief look at the history of New Wave will clarify the relationship between these two terms.

While the musical roots of Punk stem from Fifties and Sixties British rock, the movement on this side of the Atlantic grew out of the East Village area of New York City.

The club C.B.G.B.'s (Country-Blues Grass-Blues) was the original format) was reopened to accommodate a newly formed band, the Patti Smith Group moved out, in came the loudest and wildest rock 'n roll bands around. Among them was what you might call New York's first big Punk group, the New York Dolls. Lead singer David Johansen's hard driving vocals and powerful performances became the models for other artists to follow.

Though these bands developed a loyal following, the scene remained confined to C.B.G.B.'s and a few other clubs which had opened in New York and cities like Boston and Los Angeles. Many of the bands were moving to England where the Punk was in full tilt.

Then the "rock 'n' roll discotheque" concept was introduced in New York,

providing places to dance and cavort for scores of rock fans who rejected the disco scene. Naturally, the demand at these clubs was for the most danceable rock. Punk groups and other bands playing music which was more an extension of Fifties and Sixties rock than Seventies rock were in demand. Generally speaking, it is this kind of music which falls into the New Wave category.

Faced with declining enthusiasm and productivity in progressive rock, records companies radio stations hesitantly accepted New Wave as an addition to the rock world. Their early reluctance was eased by the extremely positive response to New Wave given by the press.

In December '78, John Rockwell of the New York Times selected the Talking Heads' *More Songs about Buildings and Food* as the year's most outstanding album. Simultaneously, Time Magazine picked an album by the British punk group The Clash as one of their top five.

New Wave had arrived. As bands returned to New York to England, the British influence became a dominant force affecting the American scene. This influence consisted of three segments - punk, pure pop, and crude sophistication.

The Clash exemplify pure punk. Intelligent, satirical lyrics reflect the plight of the working class amidst a hopeless economy. The music is perpetual, hard driving, reaching new levels of invigoration.

Nick Lowe's album *Pure*

Pop For Now People retains the satire of punk, but the music resembles early Beatles. Lowe's current single, "Cruel To Be Kind" has invaded the local AM charts, demonstrating the mass market potential of New Wave pop.

Sophisticated New Wave is epitomized by British artists Elvis Costello and Graham Parker. Their sound is dominated by creative vocals limited only by the imagination and attitudes of the lyricist. The role of the music is a complementary one, intended to drive home the lyrics with a penetrating sound.

These three segments of New Wave have also emerged from the New York scene. The Talking Heads have won critical acclaim throughout North America for their own brand of sophisticated New Wave. The distinct, snappy lyrics and vocals of band-leader David Byrne teamed up with the magical producing of Brian Eno make the Heads leaders of the environment they grew out of.

On the pop side, Blondie has become the most commercially successful New Wave band. Conceived and developed in New York, Blondie gained support in Europe and then stormed the American market with their third LP, *Parallel Lines*. The popularity of the group was further enhanced by the instant acceptance of lead singer Deborah Harry as a genuine cult hero.

Although the Ramones have been at the forefront of the Punk scene since the 1977 release of their spectacular *Rocket to Russia* album, their reign may not last that much longer. There are now more punk bands playing in more clubs in more cities than ever.

As the rapid growth of New Wave becomes apparent, we should realize that we may be witnessing the introductory stages of a new musical era, perhaps our first glimpse of 1980's rock 'n' roll.

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