

Feedback Jack (The Shower Scene from Psycho, Tombstone Hands)

In the process of transcribing and editing many of these (Punk Journey) interviews - it took me back to those initial days in the late seventies- punk was a kind of generational ground zero - this is where the bomb went off and the radioactive fallout that followed still spreads outward to this day...and many of the experiences shared here were familiar to me, from the days of the Tiger Lounge and the Crystal Ballroom (not to mention the Wheelhouse Tavern in Freemantle!) and the Kingston Hotel in Richmond, a great venue that few seem to remember – I saw BND and JAB and various others there-

I was about 15 the 1st time I actually heard the words “punk rock”- a friend who was a mad Bowie fanatic had bought Raw Power purely on the strength of it being produced by Bowie - it’s called “punk rock” he sounded a bit embarrassed to say it, like it was something a bit, I don’t know, silly...he showed me the cover. This was the era of glam, and I liked Alice Cooper, Sweet and Lou Reed in his RNR animal phase. (I had yet to discover the Velvet Underground and I did like Bowie, but I never joined the cult.) So it was no shock seeing this skinny boy in makeup contorting in a leather jacket but I wasn’t sure what to make of it, they looked a bit rough...they sounded even rougher- I remember feeling a bit ambivalent about whether I liked it or not- by current standards of music production that my teenage ears were accustomed to from listening to Zep, Stones et al, I thought it sounded a bit thin, but I liked the sound of the guitars, fast and dirty, I thought, this would be great if they made everything louder. But I didn’t really connect with it till a few years later, when another school friend Allan, who would eventually be the singer in my first band- we’d sit in his basement and listen to the New York Dolls, Raw Power and Lou Reed. Allan moved to Perth, and we kept in touch by mail (’70’s, remember?)- this punk rock thing was really big in Perth, I should check it out- he was rehearsing with a band- you don’t have to be good on guitar, anyone can do it! I could almost play 3 or 4 chords at the time.

Another moment I recall with startling clarity was the first time I saw Johnny Rotten (on Countdown, of all things! Molly showed a ten second clip of the Pistols as a preview of next weeks show (it was never shown) The story goes that Meldrum approached Rotten and asked for an interview and Johnny, thoroughly disgusted at being hassled by idiot journalists all day, didn’t like his attitude and either spat on him or threw something- so, no pistols on countdown)

But what I remember is the instant shock I got at sight of him, sneering, hunched over, I didn’t really understand what it was- in hindsight, it was a shock of recognition- he looked somehow familiar, he reminded me of a particular friend, even though there was absolutely no physical resemblance, but something is his demeanor, and what was familiar was his age, and his rage; look - this kid is the same age as me expressing my own adolescent anger and angst(this is me self-analyzing it some 40-odd years later) It seemed transgressive, somehow- there was nothing of the sixties and early seventies hippie culture and progressive rock, and those of us with older siblings were told it all sounds the same, it’s crap they can’t play etc. etc.

PERTH NOTES – November 1977, I got to Perth and Allan introduced me to some of his punk friends. There was a house called ‘Victim Manor’ where they and they rehearsed and it was a but of a hangout- this is where I first heard the Ramones and Johnny Thunders solo stuff - I’d never heard of “minimalism” at the time - but found the simplicity oddly alluring, like some of the 60’s psychedelic garage bands I’d heard on “Nuggets”.

The original attitude towards fashion was to be as tasteless as possible- anti-fashion. I wonder what the little old ladies in the op shop made of these strange spiky headed boys- one holding up some awful seventies multi-hued monstrosity of a shirt – “check this out; it’s really tasteless!” Of course, it all became stylized and commodified pretty quickly, but in those early days it was a manifestation of the ‘temporary autonomous zone’ of expression that punk initially represented- more than merely the sensationally aggressive rock’n’roll ‘youth fad’ that the media portrayed- the explosion of opportunities and experimentation which followed in its wake.

I ran into an old school friend who was mildly bemused by my punk attire – said- but surely, you can't be a nihilist! I said, I don't think I am (I didn't really know what it was) and don't call me Shirley! I did eventually read up on nihilism and Anarchism, but I found very few punks in those days had any sort of political attitude at all, aside from NEWS.

PERTH NOTES - I was advised strongly to go a gig by the victims and the cheap nasties- it was the nasties last ever gig- guitarist Kim was starting a new band called the scientists- that gig changed my life- the nasties were pretty good, but the victims were incredible- so loud, raw simple- this is what guitars are supposed to sound like- I pogo-ed for the first time! I had grown blasé about heavy music- I liked the guitar sound, but the music of the old metal icons didn't move me anymore- punk had the distorted aggressive guitar sound of heavy metal, but it felt more personal somehow- someone said about it-that late 70s rock n roll was when the rhythm guitar and drums were pushed to the front of the mix, became the lead instruments...

A year later I moved to Perth and nye eve 78 into 79 I played my first gig with "the secret lives" who I am glad no one remembers- and whilst we certainly didn't set the world on fire, (or even Freemantle, as it happens) although our bass players and drummer IAN SHARPLES NICK.... went on to play with the Scientists IN THE 80's. We played 5 or 6 gigs and I went back to Melbourne and had a crappy day job. It was a good learning experience and I realize I had gotten a little but better at guitar, at least enough o play a few songs...I played in a succession of forgettable garage bands that never went anywhere, a few shambolic gigs – now, I knew I was better at guitar than I had been because I could play things now that I couldn't before- but I found many of the musicians I played with did not share my enthusiasm for regular rehearsing and such concepts as "arrangements "They had learned what they thought was the bare minimum required and that was quite enough.

I kind of missed the whole Little Bands scene-the tail end fit-I was in a band called **MISSION IMPOSSIBLE** with DAVID HOY, KATE BUCK, TIM COSTIGAN, LEI INGLEBY- We used a rehearsal room in a big terrace house in Langridge Street (now a car park) used by many bands- this is where I met Simon Grounds and heard about the **PASTEL BATS**. Sometime later - I remember being at party and someone put on 'Sugar Sugar' by the Archies- it might have been Simon- and some progressive minded hippie tried to take it what is their crap - Simon and I refused to allow him to change the record - I found we had both always liked cheesy bubblegum pop, especially the psychedelic sounding ones that always featured a wild fuzz guitar solo – Simon expressed the idea that it would be fun to play that sort of music in a more modern experimental way...Captain Beefheart, etc.

I think this shows how punk led to so much other stuff- if it weren't for the punks o77, there wouldn't have been a Little Bands scene, and without the LB, there wouldn't have been a SSFP—definitely not a punk band- but an entity t hat evolved from the aesthetic of the DIY nonconformist transgressive attitude of punk- as indeed many people considered our combining 60's bubblegum pop with avant-garde experimentalism to be polarisingly transgressive in varying degrees of approval or outrage.