

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ...

Interview EXCLUSIVE

An EXCLUSIVE Interview with KNOX from the Vibrators • By Stephen SPAZ Schnee

In 1955, Rock 'n' Roll emerged from the American underground and changed the course of musical history. From Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley in the '50s to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones in the '60s, Rock evolved from its somewhat innocent roots and had become a money-making behemoth by the mid '70s, at which time Prog Rock and sensitive singer/songwriters fought for equal – or better – placement on the charts. In 1976, the year Rock turned 21, Punk emerged from the UK and turned it all upside down. Clearing away the excesses of corporate Rock like weeds being ripped from a garden, Punk tore the slightly-aged genre right back down to its roots. For the first time since its inception, Rock was raw, sweaty, wild, and filled with youthful abandon again. Bands such as Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Jam, The Stranglers, Buzzcocks and The Damned were scoring actual chart hits in the UK while creating a stir in the U.S. as well.

Fighting the good fight right alongside these higher profile bands was The Vibrators, one of the few original UK Punk bands who continues to tour and record nearly 40 years after their formation. Led by original members Ian KNOX Cornochan (vocals/guitar/songwriting) and John EDDIE Edwards (drums), The Vibrators have gone through numerous line-up changes throughout the years, but have remained determined, focused and eager to share new music with their fans. From their early days signed to Epic/CBS and the hits "Baby, Baby", "Automatic Lover", and "Judy Says (Knock You In The Head)" to their 2013 album *On The Guest List*, The Vibrators are unafraid to embrace their past as they continue to creatively move forward.

While Eddie tirelessly tours with The Vibrators, Knox recently retired from the road but has still been active with songwriting and providing creative energy and support. With the band on the road constantly through 2013, their legacy is being celebrated with *Greatest Punk Hits*, a collection that contains recent studio versions of many of their finest tracks. It allowed Knox and the boys to approach the songs with a seasoned yet refreshing attitude, keeping the arrangements pretty darn close to the originals without sounding like their trying to duplicate themselves.



Stephen SPAZ Schnee caught up with Knox, who kindly shared his thoughts on Punk and The Vibrators long and influential career...

SPAZ: There's a new collection on the market, *Greatest Punk Hits*, which features the band revisiting some of their finest songs. How are you feeling about this release as well as the band's most recent studio album *On The Guest List*?

KNOX: It's always great to have more music coming out. It makes you feel that what you are doing, and what you did, is still relevant today and hopefully people will like it. The Vibrators have been continually making new studio albums, we've made something like seventeen. This keeps the band active, as opposed to a touring museum piece, whereby the band becoming its own tribute band. So it's great to have both a new studio album (*On The Guest List* on Cleopatra Records), and a greatest hits album (*Greatest Punk Hits* on O-Rama). The *Greatest Punk Hits* album has different versions of the original tracks and should be very interesting for a lot of people.

SPAZ: While your songs have always been perfectly suited for the Punk movement, they really seem to be rooted in classic Rock 'n' Roll tradition. What types of bands were you playing in before Punk came along?

KNOX: I was in bands at school in the early '60s which primarily only played covers, then at art school I was in several kinds of R&B bands, then a Psychedelic band called The Dream Machine. Years later when I began writing songs I was very influenced by the Velvet Underground, plus I suppose all the cover songs I'd been doing. So the later bands I was in started doing my songs. Despair was doing basically only my songs, whereas a later band Lipstick did a mixture of my songs and covers. They were both three-piece bands, and I liked Metal guitar solos and Jimi Hendrix so that got incorporated into the music as well. Also it's fair to say a lot of it was technologically driven, you know things like fuzzboxes, phasing pedals, wah-wah pedals, that sort of thing. I don't think I'd be doing music if people hadn't discovered electricity and invented the electric guitar and amplification!

SPAZ: When did you first become aware of the initial Punk movement in the UK?

KNOX: I think it was Pat Collier, our bass player and also a songwriter in The Vibrators, who noticed it. It was sort of 'over there' as it were and suddenly, as we were playing fast aggressive songs, we were included in it. Subsequently we had a small part of helping shape Punk because we were in at the beginning.

SPAZ: Do you feel that the movement's hype became more important than the music?

KNOX: Possibly. It was a gift for the press: the look, the aggressive music, trouble at gigs, the political thing, so of course the press had a field day dressing it up and exaggerated it to sell papers, plus half-orchestrating things. If you stick a camera on someone something will happen. I don't think the bands minded - after all it was great publicity. Nowadays it's a kind of trade-off. People like using the term and the clothes and the attitude, but hopefully some of it rebounds back to shine a light on the music. Also I think it's both funny and also a shame that sometimes people wearing a Punk T-shirt with a band name on it probably know nothing about the band or the music. Plus what it was like in 1976-7.

SPAZ: During the early days of Punk, were you friends or competitors with a lot of your contemporaries like The Clash, The Jam, 999, The Stranglers, et al?

KNOX: I think it must have been a mixture. You wanted the attention but then again initially it was a small movement and felt very much like an 'us against the world' kind of thing. So for that reason you were very friendly towards the other bands.

SPAZ: What do you remember about those first few years of the Punk movement?

KNOX: I suppose it was the fact that when I grew up I might have dreamt of being in a slightly famous band, and then somehow I was. When I was at the grammar school it was never even a remote career option, being in a band was something that only seemed to happen to chosen people and was going on somewhere else. I know that's all changed now. Everyone today knows people in bands. When we started The Vibrators we were just a very small band, lugging our gear around to pubs to play, often to people who probably weren't terribly interested. Then a year or so later we had roadies, trucks, and were on the TV, it was astonishing. We were often the first Punk band in some towns and there'd be people there who'd read about Punk and violence and you'd get your fair share of stuff thrown at you and spat on. Sometimes it was funny

and sometimes quite frightening, but you wanted to play so you carried on, and in the end, we won the day.

SPAZ: The Vibrators didn't adhere to any Punk formula when it came to their records. Whose brilliant idea was it to feature a sax solo on "Judy Says"?

KNOX: That would have been Don Snow's idea. He was in that particular line-up of the band and played keyboards and sax. He was a very talented musician and added a lot of bits, for instance the ending of that song, that very obvious up and down bit, etc., and the extra bits on the end of one line in the chorus, I think they were all his ideas. Also I think people now think of Punk music as this... what I call 'identikit' Punk - you know the one look and the one sound. When Punk started, it was really varied - although maybe it was also partly New Wave as well.

SPAZ: The band has been releasing music on a semi-regular basis for over 30 years. Are you frustrated by the band's 'cult' or 'underground' status over the years? Or is this where you prefer to be, success wise?

KNOX: I'd have liked the band to have been more successful, but I think it's entirely our fault we weren't. The name kept us off the radio and TV, enough to make a difference and we never got a manager after the first few years and I think without that you will have trouble getting noticed, you know, getting on the right tours, the radio, interviews, etc. Without it you're condemned to being a cult band. It has its advantages, I mean I don't have to fight my way through a load of photographers to go down to the shops. And I don't have to talk to accountants and gardeners. But sometimes I wish I had a bit more money, but that's life.

SPAZ: What did Punk mean to Knox?

KNOX: It basically gave me the most exciting years of my life and I'm very grateful for accidentally being lucky enough to have been in it when it happened. Also I think you can use its philosophy in everyday life, you can recognize that things don't have to be perfect to be OK.

SPAZ: When you went into the studio to re-record some of the band's older songs for *Greatest Punk Hits*, were you able to reconnect with some of the memories of recording the original versions?

KNOX: Probably, though like a lot of bands, you have these very real time constraints in the studio so you push on with recording and there's not really any time for reflection. If you stop and reflect there go the backing vocals or the tambourine. I'm always moved by my opening guitar sound on the original recording of "Baby Baby", it's very evocative. Also the original version of any song, even if it was rubbish, is always the best version. It has this other thing added to it, the time and place it was made. The recording sort of carries that with it.



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