

Cleveland Proto-Punk Band Mirrors Reuniting to Play Studio-A-Rama

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Cleveland proto-punk legends Mirrors are reuniting for a rare appearance at Case Western Reserve University's Mather Memorial Courtyard as part of radio station WRUW's 32nd Annual Studio-A-Rama. The free event takes place on Saturday.

Mirrors were active in Cleveland's pre-punk underground rock music scene in the early '70s until they disbanded after their last performance at Mather Memorial Courtyard on September 18, 1975.

"Thirty-eight years ago we played the Mather Courtyard under the auspices of a DJ named Michigan Mom [longtime WRUW DJ and future host of 'The First Church of Howard Devoto']," Mirrors guitarist and mastermind Jamie Klimek recalls. "I don't think there had ever been a live show out there before and after Saturday, they may never do it again," he laughs.

Mirrors were only active for only a few short years in the early to mid-'70s, but, as documented extensively in Clinton Heylin's "From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World" (Penguin, 1993) and "Those Were Different Times" (Scat Records, 1997), they were gigging, recording and sharing members contemporaneously with other pre-punk notables like Rocket from the Tombs, electric eels and the Styrenes while laying the foundation for the punk explosion.

Mirrors played the "Special Extermination Music Night" at the Viking Saloon on December 22, 1974 with electric eels and Rocket from the Tombs. This night, along with a handful of others, can convincingly lay claim to being punk rock ground zero. Klimek, along with fellow Mirror and Styrene bandmate Paul Marotta operated Styrene Studios in the mid-to-late 70s at the Tyler Elevator Building on E. 36th and Superior Ave. (the same complex that currently houses Gotta Groove Records) and recorded true Cleveland punks the Pagans, among others.

But Klimek is hesitant to gloss historical about the significance of Cleveland's underground rock scene in the early '70s or to identify Mirrors too heavily with punk rock.

"One thing I hate about the history of this: People from outside trying to create a scene, trying to create some linear logical timeline of how these things happen instead of just recognizing that it's just like anything else — it's random."

"There was nobody organizing any of this. There was no manager saying, 'Come on boys, we're going to get you there. We're going to get you to the Agora. We are going to get you opening for the Who instead of the James Gang. We couldn't have handled it anyhow.'"

"When people categorize Mirrors as punk rock, I think it might have been for the attitude, for

one, but people have always been playing original material.”

But that’s not exactly true. There were covers in Mirrors’ history as well as original music - Velvet Underground covers — and the Velvets covers are one of the best parts of Mirrors’ story. It has been repeated enough times that there has to be some truth to the statement that the Velvet Underground did not sell many copies of their influential first record, but every single person who bought a copy started a band (“ . . . and there is another part of that quote ‘all of those bands blew except for Mirrors,’” Klimek interjected with a loud laugh.) For as influential as the Velvets’ first record is, there are only a handful of people who actually saw the band live and left that experience inspired enough to start a band themselves — Jonathan Richman’s Modern Lovers and Klimek’s Mirrors are two of the most notable.

Klimek provides a bit of history: “I saw the Beatles at Cleveland Stadium in August of ’66. I saw the Monkees when they were on tour. It must have been ’67. I don’t know why I went. My musical tastes were not that refined at the time. And the first band that I saw at a club was the Velvets in either late June or July ’67.”

Klimek excitedly recalls hearing the Velvets’ “Venus in Furs” on Martin Perlich’s pioneering progressive late night radio show on WCLV, the “Perlich Project,” in late 1966 or early 1967.

“Talk about getting a wakeup call.”

“Jim Crook (future Mirrors guitarist) and I went to La Cave. It was really the first time that I had ever been to the east side although I was born there and spent my first five years there. Going to a club? We had no idea what to expect. We were white boys from the west side of Cleveland.

“We get there, and it’s a coffee house. They didn’t sell hard liquor. They served 3.2 beer, pitchers of ginger ale for a \$1.50 and they had pretzels and coffee and stuff like that. We ended up getting a front table right in front of Lou Reed’s amplifier.

“Jim had a cassette recorder at the time. He recorded the show and all you can hear on the tape is RHARRRHHHHH!!! — this huge roaring sound of modulations as they are going through the chords. I don’t even think you could make out what they were playing.”

But Klimek certainly got the idea. Inspired by the Velvets, Mirrors started playing a handful of Cleveland clubs like the Viking Saloon, Clockwork Orange and Pirate’s Cove armed with a collection of obscure underground rock covers that eventually gave way to Klimek’s original compositions.

“I guess it takes a long time for every band to break away from that sort of thing but it didn’t really matter because the club owners were equally as unimpressed with us doing Velvets or Pink Floyd stuff as they were with our original material.”

After their last WRUW show, Mirrors morphed into the Styrenes while their legend grew with each posthumous reissue of their recordings — none of which were released while they were an active band.

For Saturday's show, original Mirrors Crook, Marotta and Craig Bell, plus new Mirrors Tom Fallon, Dave Franduto, and Tom Madej will join Klimek, and all seven band members (four guitarists!) will be on stage at once playing Mirrors classics as well as some new songs.

"I am teaching old Mirrors new songs and teaching new Mirrors old songs."

"We're all very excited about this. I always get a big kick out of playing with Jim, Craig and Paul — especially Jim, who has been known, on occasion, to play the unknown note. You never see it coming, but when he cuts loose, it floors you. Fallon, Franduto and Madej play beautifully as well. I'm a lucky guy — I've been fortunate to have had such accomplished musicians play my ridiculous songs — I only wish we had a few more guitarists."