

Issue #126 Nov. '09

Punk, was not a genre, it was an attitude.

Punk was happening before The Sex Pistols blew it up in 1977.

In the mid-70s in New York City, Max's Kansas City and CBGB's were hosting a semi-rivalry with musical artists that were creating music on a different level. Coined Punk, it had attitude, whether it was 3-chord power, power bubblegum, power pop, pop rock, experimental, funk, synth, classic, rockabilly, and on. It was being done with an attitude, an attitude that the music relayed no matter what genre it was participating in or skewering. An attitude that spoke what the youth movement at that time was about, all the while fostering another fertile grooming ground for artists that went on to inspire other generations - much like the early-60s NYC singer/songwriter coffeehouse circuit that was the breeding ground for Dylan and countless others.

Punk as an Attitude is Old School.

The Down-Fi is Old School Punk.

Look no further than Craig Willis Bell. The man is 70s Punk personified. Every Artist who wishes to understand Old School Punk should familiarize themselves with and study Craig Willis Bell - I suggest here, that you Google him, as well as Rocket From The Tombs (sub categories: Pere Ubu and The Dead Boys), Saucers, The Plan, The Bell System, and possibly others that this reviewer is unaware of - pst: if you want a head start, you can start here: <http://www.independisc.com/saucers.htm>.

Well-versed and talented, Craig W. Bell's new band, The Down-Fi, presents America Now with Classic jangle pop that defines both '76 - '79 London and '75 - '78 New York City. The two opening songs, Let It Go, which could have been a Nick Lowe Rockpile classic, and Tears In Her Eyes, which is the best Mink Deville song ever written and sung by someone other than Willie DeVille, set the playing field perfectly.

'62 Hawk grabs Classic Chuck Berry Rock-n-Roll in a Teenage "I Love My Car" love affair that nods to Buddy Holly, Duanne Eddy, Link Wray, and even Commander Cody, all the while slammin' a swamp surf a la Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers. You can't argue with the American Graffiti tale of buying that first car to impress the girl - "I needed a ride to satisfy this lust / She wouldn't go out / if we took the bus / Oh, she was tough" - or finding out that \$100 didn't buy you a whole lot of car, even if it was your dream - "It was a Hawk / A '62 Hawk / It was a Hawk / A Studebaker Hawk" - so eventually you trash it and move on, but it will always be your baby; after all, it was your first. Smile, because you do remember.

Ballads in the NYC '75 - '78 Punk/New Wave scene were big and sweeping, yet beautiful to the note. A lot of ballads went under the radar because the scene was eventually renowned for its loud 3-chord, in-your-face attitude music. But the attitude can be applied to the ballad as well. Don't Keep Me Waiting is the Ramones on 'Ludes; it gives us Television and Richard Hell & The Voidoids showing passion. The Down-Fi gives another piece of what was a vital part of the re-creation of music during the heyday of Punk - music delivered with a passion to present your heart and soul with the attitude that best represented it. Presentation in all aspects fueled this artistic form and The Down-Fi delivers a textbook example of it here.

To show you just how perfect they are with their primer of Classic Old School Punk, The Down-Fi comes out of the heavy ballad and launches into You Be You, a Son-of-A-Bitching Rocker. It's a love song done with pogo/slam dancing, infused with 3-chord bashing and dirty shredding all built around Classic Ramones lyrics where everything is "I Don't Wanna..." until the singer spits out his love by proclaiming "I just wanna hang around / With you / While you be you."

So Cold takes Alice Cooper's I'm 18, nails it to the wall, then tears it down using Neil Young leads while embracing Bell's Rocket From The Tombs past, and mirroring The Velvet Underground. Craig Bell is a musician that embraces the artistic quality of music crafted in the musical explosion that came about during, and as a result of, the Prog Rock & Disco era and before '80s hair metal overtook the saturated commercial pop that was cashing in on the New Wave pop explosion that Punk (as an attitude, not a genre) begat. He was part of that history and like a tenured Professor, he passes on his knowledge by forming a group that fits nicely among this era, yet can be considered from the Punk era. Bell is a historian in the truest sense of the form, because he is a living reference, because he chooses to share his knowledge of the Punk music scene and all it embraced.

What many overlook is the real sense of anarchy the music-creating youth of those days had in regards to the world's governments. A lot of the "Punk" groups of those times were very politically outspoken. Taking their cues from the 60s protest singers, the 70s youth identified with the "No Future" persona being relayed by the Cold War governments of the time. Global recession, high unemployment, oil shortages, weapons stockpiling, rising terrorism, serial killers, energy crisis. Protest. Attitude. Punk.

The Down-Fi closes the CD with 4 modern day protest songs that empower, incite, enrage, and rally us to take notice of what is happening, to understand it, to realize our part, and to take a stand where and when we need to, however we can. And, to do it with Attitude.

Today is a Call-and-Response style protest song that brings to mind England's Tom Robinson Band; it's energetic and empowering, it has a raw Anthem quality that forces itself out there. Network takes the catch phrase from Sidney Lumet's 1976 movie, spills it for us - "I'm Mad as hell / I won't take it anymore" - and smacks it against a blistering, pedal-to-the-metal, smoking exercise in stamina. Shit City, with its riveting drums and rolling, hammering power chords that are struck and held in a down and dirty hard machine gun delivery, recounts the horrors and desperation of trying to survive when everything seems to be against you. Pure Attitude.

Now that we're all hopped up...

America Now.

It's not so different from the America Now of the Punk/New Wave generation, or that of The Woodstock Generation, or the Grunge/Slacker Generation, or the Rebel Without A Cause/Rock-n-Roll Generation. Each of these and more would (and should) embrace it. If I were to start quoting lyrics, I'd have to reprint them all... You should buy this disc just to play this song for everyone you know. It is the most important protest song I've ever heard. It should be required listening for everyone who calls America home. It has Attitude, it's Punk, and it can be identified in every genre.

Punk, was not a genre, it was an attitude.

The Down-Fi is Punk.

Gary Gone

Independisc.com