

SO! Amplifies: The Women in L.A. Punk Archive

Sounding Out! Authors

Blog post published December 5, 2016 in *Sounding Out!*

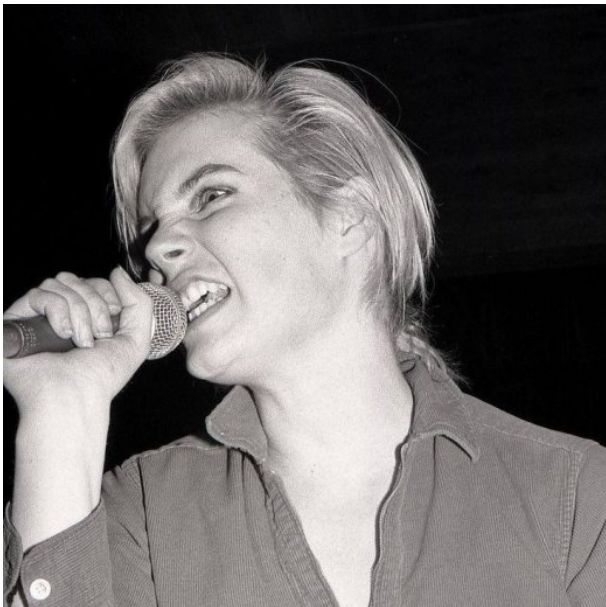
<https://doi.org/10.59350/kf3cz-3vt82>

Abstract

Image of Alice Bag used with her permission (thank you!) **For full intro and part one of the series click here. For part two, click here.** Our Punk Sound series implicitly argues that sound studies methodologies are better suited to understanding how punk works sonically than existing journalistic and academic conversations about musical genre, chord progressions, and/or genealogies of bands.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Archival, Curation, Digital Media, Gender, History



Recommended citation

Authors, S. O. (2016, December 5). SO! Amplifies: The Women in L.A. Punk Archive. *Sounding Out!*. <https://doi.org/10.59350/kf3cz-3vt82>

Copyright

Copyright © Sounding Out! Authors 2016. Distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



*Image of Alice Bag used
with her permission
(thank you!)*

For full intro and part one of the series click [here](#). For part two, click [here](#).

Our Punk Sound series implicitly argues that sound studies methodologies are better suited to understanding how punk works sonically than existing journalistic and academic conversations about musical genre, chord progressions, and/or genealogies of bands. Alexandra Vasquez's sound-oriented work on Cuban music, for example, in *Listening in Detail* (2014) opens up necessary conversations about the "flashes, moments, sounds" in music that bear its meanings and its colonial, raced, classed, and gendered histories in material ways people can hear and feel. While retaining the specificity of Vasquez's argument and the specific sonic archive bringing it forth, we too insist on "an ethical and intellectual obligation to the question: what do the musicians *sound like*" (12) and how do folks identifying with and through these musical sounds hear them?

In this series, we invite you to amplify varied historicized "details" of punk sound—its chunk-chunk-chunk skapunk riffs, screams, growls, group chants, driving rhythms, honking saxophones—hearing/feeling/touching these sounds in richly varied locations, times, places, and perspectives: as a pulsing bead of condensation dripping down the wall of **The Smell in Downtown LA (#savethesnell)**, a drummer making her own time on tour, a drunk sitting too near the amp at a backyard party, a queer teenager in their bedroom being yelled at to "turn it down" and "act like a lady[or a man]". . .and on and on. Today's entry is done in conjunction with our SO! Amplifies series. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. Today we round out our series on punk by diving into Alice Bag's archive of interviews with women in the L.A. punk scene.

SOUND!

NO, SOUND!

—Aaron SO! (Sounding Out!) + Jenny SO! (Sounding Out!)

—



Alice Bag's [Women in L.A. Punk Archives](#) is a treasure trove of interviews that she has conducted with women in the L.A. punk scene. Today we share with you some of the most insightful and exciting gems we curated from her amazing archive. We encourage you to hear punk in a new way, and to explore her archive for yourself.



Joanna Spock Dean of Backstage Pass

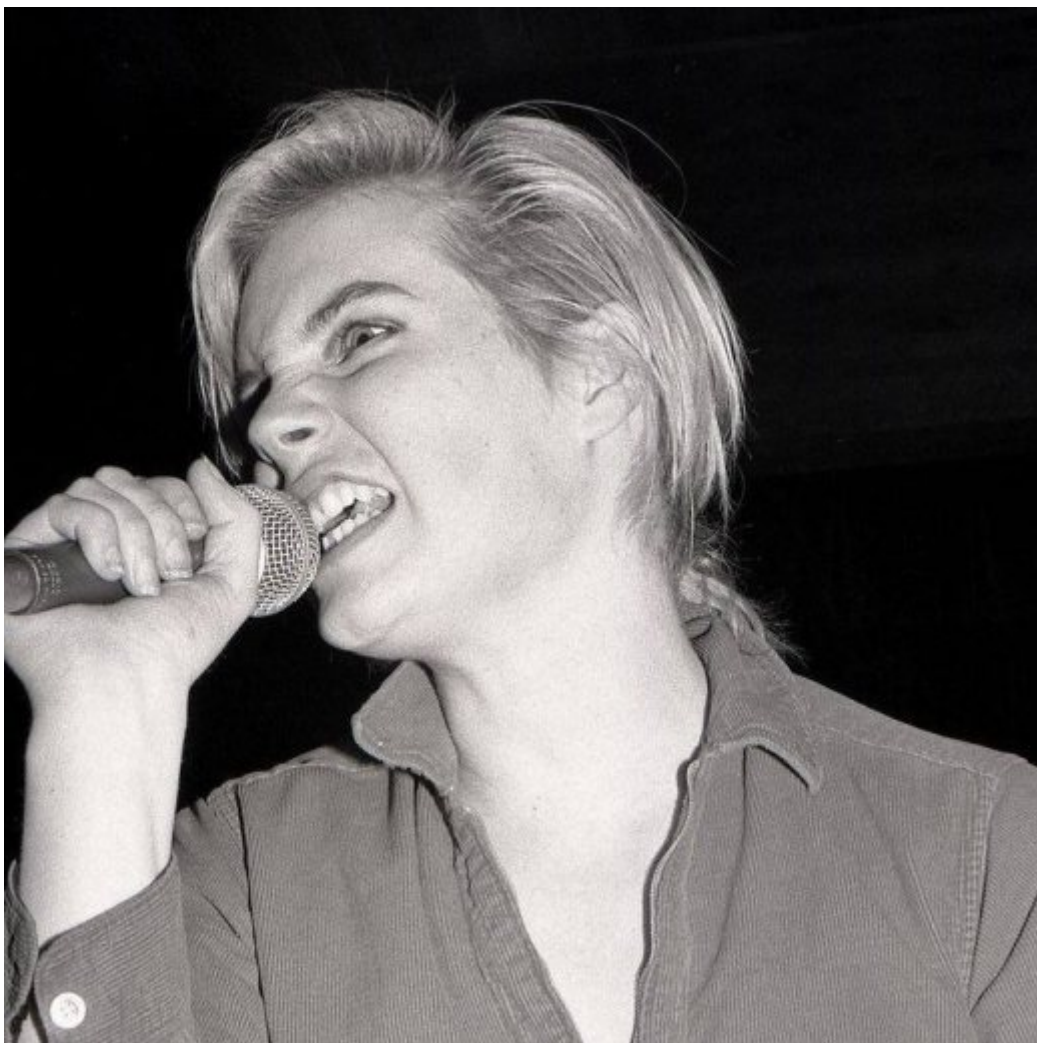
[Excerpt from an interview on March, 2006]

Alice Bag: What was/is your contribution to the punk community?

Joanna Spock Dean: I was the ONLY bass player in Backstage Pass (since we had more rotating members than any other band!), and one of the singer/songwriters. I always felt that Backstage Pass was one of the first bands to come out of the Punk Scene (which we loved, of course), and move into the poppier “New Wave” scene, and others were able to do the same thing. We also were unapologetic groupies, and I think the fact that that was a big part of us, and that we were proud of it, added to the band.

AB: Do you have any funny or interesting stories to share?

Joanna Spock Dean: I [do] remember one. We were in San Francisco @ The Mabuhay, maybe opening for Devo, so it was a 2 night thing. The first night, I remember walking into the bathroom, and finding some girl harassing Genny and Marina, and I told her to leave them alone. (I was always the 'leader' in that way.) The second night, the same girl comes up to the stage, and starts screaming and throwing popcorn at me as we're onstage – hey, she probably just thought it was a 'punk' thing to do. Well, I exploded. I threw off my bass, jumped off the stage and started pummeling her – I heard that Rod came flying over the top of his drum kit to pull me off. I do remember that as I'm swinging away, she's yelling "*I changed my mind, I changed my mind, I love your band, I love your band!*"



Penelope Houston of The Avengers

[Excerpt from an interview on June 2007]

AB: What was/is your contribution to the punk community?

Penelope Houston: As singer/lyricist of the Avengers in the late 70's and now again leading the band to play all over the world.

PH: What was the role of women in the early punk scene?

Penelope Houston: It seems like there was more freedom and fewer rules in 1977-79, before hardcore took over the mantle of punk. The early scene embraced all comers, be they female, gay, non-white or even older. There was no dress code. Women were pioneers along with everyone else involved. I noticed no separation. I knew women who were musicians, bookers, managers, photographers, visual artists, film makers, journalists, label owners... etc.



Heather Valiant Ferguson, scenemaker, style breaker and hairdresser

[Excerpt from an interview on November 2009]

AB: What was/is your contribution to the punk community?

Heather Valiant Ferguson: My name is Heather Ferguson. I now go by the first name Valiant. I became a hairdresser at age 18 and went to San Francisco to work for Vidal Sassoon. I did a lot of free hair for a lot of fellow punks, including The Avengers, The Cramps, The Ramones, Belinda C., The Dils, etc.

AB: Which artist, band concert and/or show had the most impact on your life?

Heather Valiant Ferguson: I lived in Pacific Heights on Broadway and Laguna. It was around 1974-75. The punk rock scene was making its way over the waves from Britain through Sassoon's. At the very place in time that punk rock came streaming into consciousness, I was hanging around with some very dark and edgy people like myself. We used to go to a place in North Beach and I would smoke Black *Sobranie* cigarettes in a short black cigarette holder. I wore black clothing and Hats with veils. I was dating a musician lead singer named Bobby Death. He kept crooning on about this band from New York called 'THE RAMONES'. One night he got tickets to their SF debut at a place called the Savoy Tivoli. Well, he disappeared somewhere, but I didn't care.....WOW, who were these brilliant moptops?? *Beat on the brat, with a baseball bat, Oh yeah, yeah, oohh oohhh*. I was in my version of Nirvana. I felt something growing inside me and it wasn't a baby. It was life alright, but they just knocked me out. Bobby appeared near the end to tell me that he had invited them over to my apartment for champagne and coke.....WOW again. We stayed up all night long telling each other all our stories. That was too kewl for words. So that show was me plugging into me, plugging into the whole synchronistic punk scene. I moved to Hollywood a year later to work at Sassoon's there.



Connie Clarksville, a *Blackette* with Black Randy & The Metro Squad

[Excerpt from an interview on January 2008]

AB: What was/is your contribution to the punk community?

Connie Clarksville: When I moved to Hollywood from Orange County in 1972, I moved into the Canterbury Apartments. Back then it was full of drag queens and pimps and gays. I was a Bowie fan and liked the array of different people. After (the era of) Glitter, Rodney Bingenheimer's (English Disco), The Real Don Steele Show, The Rainbow, disco and hanging out on Sunset, I went to a show at Larchmont Hall one Saturday afternoon. There was a show at the Whiskey where I met Bruce (Moreland) who would become Bruce Barf (of the Weirdos) later. He told me how this guy named Brendan Mullen was wanting to open a place where we could hang out and bands would play in the basement of the Pussycat Theatre on Hollywood Blvd. He took me over to this mess of a basement where I met Brendan. I loved his accent and had a crush on him rite away. He said he's naming this mess "the Masque." I loved the idea and wanted to do something to help so I hauled trash out of the basement. There was a small, cut-out room in the middle, so when bands started playing and people started showing up, I decided to ask Brendan if I could sell sodas. He said, "sure, Clarksville." Nobody had ever called me that before, so I got used to the name. Brendan was really the only person who called me that.

Soon after, I met this girl named Sheila (Edwards) and we needed a place to stay. I was going to beauty school and had a little money and with her half (of the rent), I suggested the Canterbury. It was close to school and the Masque. Soon after, many bands moved in: The Bags, Nicky Beat from the Weirdos, The Germs, Geza X lived across the hall... so, so many to list.



Debbie Dub, scenemaker, producer, management and booking

[Excerpt from an interview on July 2011]

AB: What was/is your contribution to the punk community?

Debbie Dub: In the early days, I think just being part of the scene was a huge contribution. There weren't very many of us, and we were just making it up as we went along – which means I helped create it! Producing the first *Negative Trend* single is one of my lasting contributions. The record is famous now but we couldn't give them away at the time.

AB: Are there any punk women from the early scene that you feel have not been adequately recognized?

Debbie Dub: All of them. I don't think you can underestimate the impact that women had on the scene. We were equals in standing but also in numbers. When you think about it, for a phenomenon filled with such over the top aggressive music and attitude, it's amazing how many women played vital roles in shaping the scene. I don't think there had ever been anything like it before in terms of women's participation.

Read More in the Women in L.A. Punk Archives

—

All text and images reproduced with the permission of Alice Bag. The featured image is of the Bags Live at the Mabuhay Gardens, January 1978.

—

Alice Bag is a punk rock singer, musician, author, educator and feminist archivist. Alice was lead singer and co-founder of The Bags, one of the first wave of punk bands to form in the mid-1970's in Los Angeles, CA.

Her first book, *Violence Girl, East LA Rage to Hollywood Stage* is the story of her upbringing in East LA, her eventual migration to Hollywood and the euphoria and aftermath of the first punk wave. *Violence Girl* reveals how domestic abuse fueled her desire for female empowerment and sheds a new perspective on the origin of hardcore, a style most often associated with white suburban males.

An outspoken activist, feminist and a self-proclaimed troublemaker, Alice has remained active in music since the late 1970's and published her second book, *Pipe Bomb for the Soul* in 2015. The ongoing influence of Alice's style can be seen in the traveling Smithsonian exhibition, *American Sabor*. She has been profiled by PBS, AARP and has been an invited speaker at colleges including Stanford, Wellesley and USC. Her memoir, *Violence Girl*, is now required reading in gender and musicology courses throughout the country.

—



REWIND!...If you liked this post, you may also dig:

SO! Amplifies: Ian Rawes and the London Sound Survey—Ian Rawes

SO! Amplifies: Cities and Memory—Stuart Fowkes

SO! Amplifies: Feminatronic

SO! Amplifies: #hearmyhome and the Soundscapes of the Everyday—Cassie J. Brownell and Jon M. Wargo