



PunkBrighton Alldayer at the Albert Sunday 17th October 2010

The 10th anniversary of the PunkBrighton website at the Albert on October 17th was much anticipated. Some of the keynote Brighton punk and new wave acts were magically regrouping for the event and the prospect was truly mouthwatering for those of us of a certain age.

And what a bill: the Lillettes, the Mockingbirds, Airtight Garage, Helen McCookerybook from the Chefs, the Parrots and the Piranhas, reforming after some 30 years. Later in the evening would see a second set from the Piranhas, followed by the Vandells/Depressions, Jonnie & the Lubes and Peter & the Test Tube Babies.

This review is a personal recollection of the day, my impressions of the event and what I felt about it. I only attended the daytime session, being unable to go to the evening bash due to family commitments.

Julie Blair and myself represent what's left of the original Brighton punk record label, Attrix Records. We met up at Brighton station around 2pm and strolled down Trafalgar Street to the Albert, a hostelry similar to ancient dives such as the Alhambra, the Buccaneer and the Richmond. As we entered, our ears were pleasantly assailed by a non-stop selection of Brighton new wave classics relayed over the sound system.

The word was out that the place was going to be packed, and it was. The early part of the afternoon saw a leisurely trail of punters but larger numbers began streaming in about an hour later.

Look! over there, it's Alan, who used to provide the sound system for all the bands. Fantastic! What a great guy, and so friendly and, who's that leaning against the bar? James 'Buv' McCallum, rhythm guitarist with the Chefs. And yes, it really is Gary Turner of the Dodgems, natty in Panama hat and brandishing an elegant walking-stick. Darris Golinski in his trademark dark coat and hat, cutting a hypnotic dash as he paced out a Madness-type 'nutty' dance routine to one of the live acts. Hello, Zoot! What songs are you playing later on? And Mick Perrin, Lillettes bass-player and now a hugely successful figure in the world of stand-up comedy, promoter of such stars as Paul Merton, Ross Noble and Eddie Izzard, to name a few.

Punkdaddy had done a magnificent job in arranging, organising, promoting and designing the entire thing. This gifted man also played a sterling set with the Lillettes, a real treat for me as I never saw the group first time around.

First let me attempt to describe the galleries of original punk posters, framed and sitting proudly on the walls of the pub - up the staircase leading to the live area (upper bar), lining the halls between the outside bogs and the stairs. Beautifully refreshed by Phil (a professional and skilful graphic artist), they looked astounding - some of them enlarged to vast proportions.

There were more of these in the cloakroom on the ground floor, where a computer had been set up with an ever changing assortment of hundreds of archive photos, many taken in the arches of the Vault. Also in this room were impeccable facsimiles of original Brighton punk fanzines, including one of my own humble efforts 'Situation Butane' (1979).

Julie and I were approached by a film crew who were making a feature-length documentary about Brighton's

crucial part in the punk explosion and requested an interview with Julie. Shy of media as always, she politely declined and instead told them that I could probably tell them everything they wanted to know. This has always been one of my roles for Attrix, a promotional duty I've always been delighted to carry out. I agreed to do the interview after the last of the day's live acts. Just one of many interviews on the day.

Sounds from above: the first band were coming on. A quick dash up the stairs, near the front of the stage and there were the Lillettes. I'm afraid I don't know the names of the excellent musicians who helped out the original members of all the groups, but they did a splendid job indeed. What a blast to see Phil, Barb, and Mick on stage, pounding out my all-time favourite Lillettes gem, 'Air Conditioning', issued on the now rare 'Attrix Tapes' compilation of 1981. Phil's guitar solo sizzled and twanged gorgeously. Then we had a ripsnorting 'Nervous Wreck,' with Mick on second guitar and Barb air-punching in fine style - a great start to this historic day.

They were followed by the Mockingbirds, who made their only appearance on record with their superb bubblegum treasure 'Money' on the third and final Attrix compilation LP 'Vaultage 80'. This line-up, with two violinists, only featured the one original member, Rose Barnard. She was actually the drummer back in 1980). Rose did a fine job singing lead, taking the group through the fiscal tribulations of the aforementioned 'Money'. A zeroxed wad of 'cash' was joyously flung in our faces as the one-song set came to its conclusion. I always thought the Mockingbirds should have had issued an EP or something. They had some good songs.

Next up were the Airtight Garage, a combo I hardly remember from the old days. Perhaps they were before my time. They must have rehearsed for this quite a bit, on the evidence of a solid and enthusiastic performance. The singer had to have the lyrics held up in front of him, which is perfectly understandable really - it's been thirty years, after all. I could see the camera crew filming it and wondered when, and how, we would see the results.

Punk poet Attila the Stockbroker was due to appear onstage about now but Phil made an announcement - a car accident of some sort, happily not too serious - and Attila was not going to make it to the gig. Most of us trooped downstairs and swapped memories and anecdotes, gazing at the impressive posters, many of them originally hand-drawn, including a couple of my own, done in about two minutes in the Attrix shop one rainy February day in 1980.

After a breather we returned to the upper bar to see that icon of Brighton punk pop, Helen McCookerybook, take to the stage for a solo spot suitably clad in a bright yellow jumper, . As one of the duo of vocalists and bass-play) in the Chefs, Helen created some of the most memorable and much-loved songs of the whole scene. Heroically representing her old group on her tod, she explained how she had not played any Chefs stuff for years and warned us that, bereft of her erstwhile comrades, things could be a bit wobbly as a result. She needn't have worried. Waves of good feeling drifted from the audience towards this talented songwriter and gave loud vocal support whenever a lyric went astray.

Alongside some of her newer material, Helen, emanating fragility and charm, delivered delightful versions of four fabulous Chefs classics: a folky 'Let's Make Up,' the wittily observant 'Northbound Train,' a fascinating rendition of 'Records and Tea' and best of all the awesome '24 Hours', one of my favourite tracks of all time. How magical to see and hear her singing it again. A touching moment, one of many on this remarkable day.

After a quick trip to the bar the place began to fill up in time for an intriguing reformation of Attrix head honcho Rick Blair's very own band, the Parrots. Nick Greenwood, brother of the late Russell Greenwood (former Parrots and Chefs drummer) helped out on bass alongside three very familiar faces: Nick, Jay and Brenda from the VolSec period of the band's career. But who would sing those matchless Rick Blair songs? Who could possibly play anything like as good guitar as the great man himself? The answer: Rick's eldest son, Sam. Sam has inherited a lot of Rick's musical talent and has been playing and composing for years, having attended a music course at university prior to forming his own bands.

A masterful guitar player and one half an electropop duo who recently released a self-produced album, he was surely the only choice for this much anticipated, difficult role. The Parrots were brilliant and Sam Blair was one cool dude. Lashing out scorching solos one after the other, he was the reincarnation of his famous father. It was incredibly emotional.. I used to babysit for Rick and Julie on many evenings and I grew very close to the kids. Years later, when he was in his late teens/early twenties, Sam became a friend all over again and we socialised a lot. Seeing him playing Rick's old guitar with such verve brought me to the brink of tears. His father would have been immensely proud. All of the Parrots tracks from the various record releases were performed, sounding better than their vinyl counterparts. This line-up played an absolute blinder..

Approximately fifteen minutes later the historic, unique event forming the finale to the daytime portion of this thrilling day finally took place. Standing on the small stage in front of us were three original members of the town's most famous group, the Piranhas. I honestly could hardly believe my old eyes. Standing centre stage: 'Boring' Bob Grover, to his left the tall figure of Zoot Alors and to his right, amazingly, John 'Johnny Piranha' Helmer. Aided and abetted on drums and bass respectively by a couple of the guys from Bob's current combo Dates, they crashed straight into 'Jilly,' reminding us all what a strong song it always was.

There were hilarious jokes and exchanges with the audience from John and Bob but apart from a couple of silly moments (when Bob forgot a lyric, John unsure about the ending to a number), it was an accomplished performance of power and precision. Intense nostalgia hung suspended in the air, wafting between punters and musicians: our collective youth seemed to be on display on that stage. Watching Johnny's fingers fly across the fretboard during the intricate guitar solo on the fade of 'Coloured Music'! See Bob's irrepressible facials during his hangdog vocals on 'I Don't Want My Body'! Howl along to the chorus and the verses of 'Getting Beaten Up'! Blimey. They were tight as hell and it was as if they had been playing together all those years since the early eighties. I was expecting something like 'Yap Yap Yap' as the last song but, thrillingly, it was an electrifying 'Things Could Be Worse, one of two early gems recorded at the same sessions as their legendary 'Vaultage 78' tracks but unissued until their inclusion on the 1981 'Attrix Tapes' cassette collection. Here's Bob with those absurd lyrics – live: 'I could have been born a slug, I could have been born too soon and flushed down the plug' The crowd went mental and yelled for more but that was that, at least as far as the daytime part of the celebrations were concerned.

Then it was up the fire escape with the film crew for the interview. I rattled off as much as I could recall from those heady days, pretty much a potted version of my memoirs, long since published on this website. The film crew seemed genuinely fascinated and excited by the origins of the punk movement here in Brighton, a marvellous thing to see in guys of their age group.

I said my farewells and headed home, feeling hugely proud of my involvement with it all. So many fantastic groups, so much dazzling music, good times.

Hats off to all the people who performed, to Phil Byford for his endless patience, astounding work-rate and committed enthusiasm and above all, to the late, great Rick Blair without whom as Phil, Helen and Jay remarked from the stage, it would all not have taken place in the way that it did.

Stuart Jones, Brighton, October 2010