

KATHY X



Those familiar with our last musical menagerie, *Fancy Mix Vol. 3*, undoubtedly recall the inspirational toe-tapper "O.K. U.K." by Kathy X (from *Ready for Anything* on Cosmic Records). This Berlin based rockabilly trio is led by Kathy Freeman backed by Rob Raw, on stand-up bass, and Dave Crome on drums. Kathy, a native Londoner, has been playing in bands since the late Seventies. While marginal talents who can barely sling a few chords together are lauded as geniuses for acting like pouting, hissy fit brats, Kathy is a brilliant guitarist who has gone unrecognized in the US. Kathy began playing guitar at age 12. She went to art school in Liverpool and there she got into her first "real" band, *the Accelerators*. She later went on to play guitar in many bands, including *Joyride* and *the Birdhouse*. Kathy provided us with not only a history of her career but the late Seventies Punk scene in North England, as well.

I was jamming around in the *Biggles Blues Band*, which I put together with my boyfriend. We both played guitar and we recruited this dreadful hippy bass player. My boyfriend ran a small second-hand shop in Liverpool 8. One day a guy walked in and bought this massive Chinese gong. Turned out he was a drummer, so we invited him to join (not realizing the gong would be going to all of our gigs for the next four years). I think we found a singer in a pub. The year was 1977, a very heady time, when punk spread from London up North and suddenly everything changed forever. We found our rambling blues jams turning into fierce, sharp, two-minute blasts of hot punk rock. My boyfriend shaved off his beard and I started wearing panda eye makeup. We instantly changed our name to *the Accelerators* and were soon offered our first gig. The hippy got a cold and refused to get off his sick bed so we did it without a bass player. Brian Damage (our drummer's punk name...I was "Kathy Apathy") had one of the few double bass drum sets in the country at that time. I just took all the treble off my rhythm guitar and turned it up louder. I guess that gig was my baptism into whatever it is I've been trying to achieve ever since, maximum adrenaline. We played like magic. The audience went crazy. That show as a four piece, was a one-off and we shortly found our first punk bassist, "Miles from Nowhere" (later replaced by "Tony Monotony"). The band formed in 1977 and split in 1981, after playing circa 400 gigs. We played original punk/new wave songs we wrote ourselves. We recorded a version of *Green Door*, which still exists, but never did it live. Chris Martin was the lead singer. Besides rhythm guitar I doubled on keyboards and contributed backing vocals. The lead guitarist for most of the band's history was Martin Yarker.

Those Naughty Lumps helped us build a regular local club gig at the "Havana Club" in 1978, so naturally they played a few shows with us. We shared bills with *the Buzzcocks*, a support gig at the Liverpool Empire (the other band on the line up was *Subway Sect*). We also played with *XTC*, *Cheap Trick*, *The Rich Kids*, *Siouxsie*, and *Discharge* (Brian wouldn't let their drummer borrow his kit and their fans bottled us offstage). *Siouxsie and the Banshees* actually supported *the Accelerators*, not the other way 'round. They were still relatively unknown and wanted to get the last train back to London that night, so they went on first. Everybody used to spit at the bands back then. That hasn't come back with the punk revival, thank God. I remember a gig we did in Blackpool, where there were some totally crazy audiences and the stage was soaked within the first two numbers. Yuk! Also, hung out at the legendary *Eric's* and saw so many great bands, including *The Ramones*, *Stay Cats*, *The Cramps*, *Adverts*, and *Stranglers*.

Things were a lot different then. In fact, at that time I think I was the only female punk guitarist in Liverpool or possibly the entire North of England. The only other female guitarists I ever came into contact with then were these dreadful dungaree-wearing "women's lib" types who did 12 bar ditties about hating men. Being in a band full of macho pigs was actually much more fun.

When I moved to London and quit the *Accelerators* it was a very difficult time. I didn't really connect with anyone. Synthesizer bands had killed the music I loved. So, the exciting stuff went on hold for a few years and I concen-

trated on low-key cover gigs. I got to dep with this crazy pub singer, Bobby Jo, who could reduce a Stevie Wonder cover to three chords on her Bontempi organ. Her regular guitarist disappeared, which gave me an opportunity to develop my lead guitar playing. No boyfriend trying to outplay me, no-one telling me off for getting a wrong note. Bobby Jo would never have realized if I had and the punters were too drunk to care.

Eventually, in '87 the rock beast manifested in the form of *the Birdhouse*, a full-on, mega-attitude, volume-11 five piece in which I was one of the guitarists. The original line up was Mark Nicol (guitar), Johnny Rev (vox), Billy Scarr (bass), and Max Cantara on drums. It started off as a *Stooges/MCS* vibe and sadly, after getting signed to *Beggars Banquet* two years down the line, the band decided they wanted to be the new *Guns n' Roses*. I was with them long enough to have the privilege of recording the album *Meglamania* (distributed by *Glitterhouse*) with the late Vic Maile as the producer (who also produced *Motorhead*, *the Who* and *Girlschool*). We also released a live 10" called *Raw and Alive* (*Glitterhouse*). I quit in the summer of '89 and the band split in '90. *Birdhouse* did a UK tour with *The Celibate Rifles* from Oz. Played with *Thee Hypnotics*, *Bad Brains* and *Spaceman 3*. *Birdhouse* played a few times with an Anglo-Italian band called the *A10*. I recorded lead guitar on a single *Declaration/Terminal Beach* (*Innocent records*) in '88 for the *A10* with Robin Wills.

I finally put my own band together, the ill fated *Joyride*, after leaving *the Birdhouse*. We played high velocity punk metal in the early '90's, a time when everyone else in the UK was listening to indie music or DJ's. Formed in '91, we signed to *Kill City* in '93 and released *Not a Hope in Hell*, a four track CD and 7" single. A few months later *Kill City* released our second four track, *Rumorosa*. The original line up was me on lead vox and guitar, Claudia Preda on rhythm gtr and bvs, Eno on bass and Mat Fraser on drums.

I was soon playing with a Rockabilly band called *Death Valley Surfers*. We gigged a lot in Germany, which opened my eyes to the wider picture. On Dec. 31st 2001, I arrived in Germany with *DVS* carrying a couple of large suitcases and some *Link Wray* collections. Life in London was coming to a full stop. Just to pay for a rehearsal room was a day's wages. It's so goddamn expensive to live there. We did a gig at *Wild at Heart* and they drove home without me.

A mutual friend who knew I was looking for a slap bass player introduced me to Rob Raw at a record hop in *The Franken Bar* in *Kreuzberg*. We had a couple of rehearsals and we knew it would work so we started looking for a drummer. I had met Mr. Crome months ago at a jam session in a dive called the *Flöz*. We got a hold of him and within two months did our first gig at the *Mad n' Crazy Club*.

Soon thereafter we recorded a demo and landed a deal with *Cosmic Records* out of *Warsaw, Poland*. We played a show there and they loved us. The promoter was starting up the *Cosmic* label at that time and signed us. We recorded in *Olshzyn*, two hours drive from *Warsaw*, in Northern Poland, with a brilliant producer, *Marcin Kielbaszewski*, and very good equipment. We did 15 tracks in 5 days. From the two gigs we've played there, I get the impression there are a lot of people into the scene, but it's tough because they don't have a lot of money and there aren't so many places for rockin' bands to play.

Clubs we gig are the *Pirate Cove*, *Wild at Heart*, *Mad and Crazy*, and in former squat venues. We played a lot at *WAH* and got to support *Horrorpops* a couple of times. We also jumped on the train to *Warsaw* to open for *the Meteors* at "Punk" last year. Psychobilly bands in this area that come to mind are *Damage Done by Worms*, *Thee Flanders*, and *The Ripmen*. The coolest band we played with is a surf band from *Leipzig* called *the Twang Marvels*. For a snapshot of what's going on, go to www.rockin-wildcat.com. To check in with *Kathy X* visit www.kathy-x.de, or get the CD on-line at www.raucoushop.co.uk, cdbaby.com or the *Apple iTunes Music Store*.

