# UREATEST

HE RAMONES ARE on the cover, and to celebrate the Uncut team have dug out their leather jackets and Converse sneakers and compiled a Top 50 of the greatest American punk albums. But what constitutes "American punk" in the first place? After some debate, we decided to avoid the ur-punk groups like The Velvet Underground and The Stooges, or the proto-punk garage scene that spawned Nuggets, and focus on the period between 1975 - where the CBGB's crowd were at their rowdiest - and 1983. when punk had arguably fragmented and mutated into something beyond its original form. Our list incorporates albums by bands hailing from the urban-industrial landscape of Cleveland, the backwaters of the American Northwest, from Los

Another features 14 songs in 15 minutes. A third includes an unlikely encomium to Idi Amin. Here, then, is Uncut's pick of the loudest, fastest, hardest, sweatiest albums ever...



Rarely accorded iconic status. The Dictators' debut is a milestone in: smart-assed, knucklebraded American punk, hymning beer, sunk food and TV in stoopid anthems like "Teengenerate". Formed in 1973 around the these-chord method of songwriter bassist Andy "Admy Shemoff and metal solving of guitarist Ross "The Boss" Friedman, their no-frills New York street gung look and trashculture senthetic predated the Ramones (as did their buzznaw cover of "Caldornia Sun"). Roadieturned singer Handsome Dick Manitoba's antics made there a low favourite, but an antagonistic presence, Maninoba's macho beckling of Jayne County resulted in a brawl that saw The Dictators banned from Man's Kurssau City dat.

MONTHOCOPHONOS "disclations

#### PATTISMITH Samplemen



Improvising with her group, extemporising brics, Smith's muchy shows

werrpitched between Lenny Errore style stand-up and Beat poetry happening. The glory of Horses is howit refines that experimentation into a solid set of songs, while retaining every flutter of Smith's visionary vibration. Her love of French Symbolist poetry informs the lever

dreamlyrior, but equally important is the album's pop literateness. collaging old songs ("Gioria", "Land Of A Thousand Dances") as the foundations from which she takes flight. John Cale's production leaves the rough edges on the jama driven by guitariot Lenny Kaye, while Tom-Vestaine contributes inimitable Dushes as guest pulturist. BE. www.newww.patri.smirb.SNL Gloria"

#### RAMONESIMENT



Dolly Parton famously joked "it costs a lot of money to look this chesp\*. By the same token, to sound as

stugid as the Ramones managed on their debut required considerable intelligency, Superficially a piledriving record, European actually all about variety: noise and silence, punk and pop, black and white. So it was with the songs. From hustler's lament to high-school romance, United Fruit and Castro to assault with a deadly weapon... the Ramones had it all covered. The extremity makes it punk. The subtlety makes it an enduring classic # MERCHANIS. "SAMONES MAK'S 1976".

#### THE RUNAWAYS HE RUNAWAYS

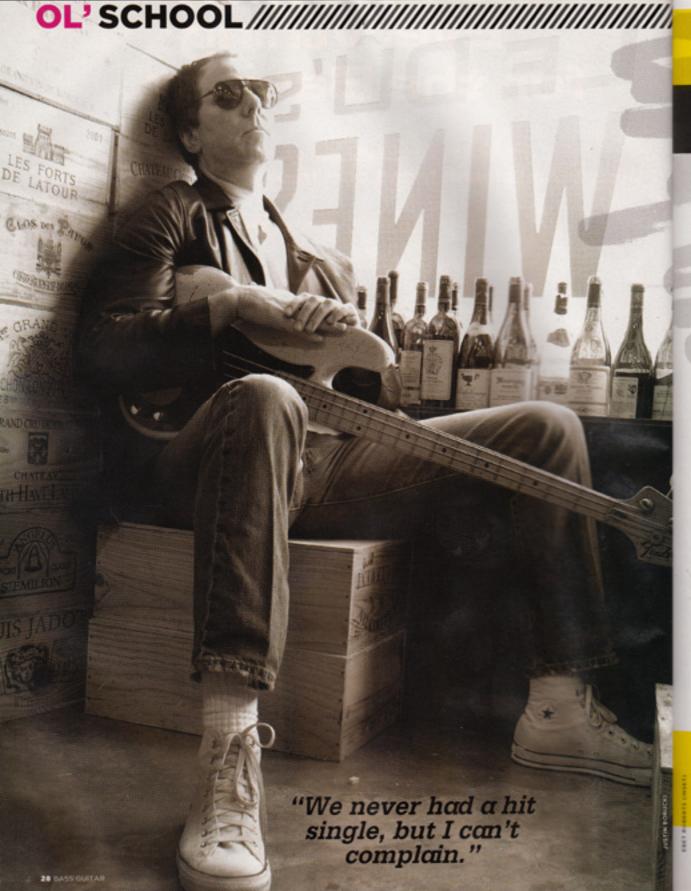


Chugga chugga pacrd bardrock sufficiently rudimentary to pass for punk, the debut by Kim. Fuwley's teen-gid rock

group is the missing link between the glitter firtishings of Rodney's English Dioco and the day glo punk of Los Ampeles' Manque club. Constructed an undlingerie clad singer Cherie Currie and moody guitarist Joan Jett, The Runaways cut up rough on "You. Drive Me Wild", with attitude aplenty on "Cherry Borab", but lett felt these was preclutionary intent, too. "Girls playing rock'n roll means that they're being blatantly sexual," she said. "And in America, gids and women aren't allowed to be." JW

MENEROUS FEET DESIRENCES cherry 1976"





## FRST WORM THEADD

### Andy Shernoff and the Dictators, New York's original punk-rock auteurs, are still going strong

IN 1975, a year before the Ramones defined the punk genre, another New York band, the Dictators, released the testosterone-infused proto-punk classic The Dictators Go Girl Crazy!, whose standout cuts—"(I Live for) Cars and Girls," "Weekend," and an absurd cover of Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe"—simultaneously embraced and lampooned the shameless self-indulgence of rock 'n' roll junk culture. As singer, bassist, keyboardist, and songsmith Andy (sometimes spelled "Admy") Shernoff later commented in Legs McNeil's 1996 oral history of punk, Please Kill Me, "You were supposed to have a sense of humor about it, but it wasn't supposed to be a joke."

Unfortunately, the band's riotous blend of hubris and self-mockery worked against them, and Girl Cruzy! failed to generate much interest. While their counserparts Patti Smith, Television, and the Ramones were staking claims to New York's Lower East Side, the Dictators were being dumped by Epic Records. In the ensuing years, they were besieged by personnel changes, a mastering faux pas, and record-company instability, thwarting any hope of sharing in the mega-popularity enjoyed by peers such as Blondie and Talking Heads.

Today, however, without a single hit song or album to their credit, the Dictators are recognized as arguably the most influential proto-punk band to emerge from New York, and Girl Cruzyf is revered as the template for dozens of bands that followed the Dictators' lead. With much of the original lineop still intact and touring, the group has finally, by way of sheer endurance, earned a place in the annals of punk history.

Shernoff assembled the Dietatoes in the Bronx in 1974 and honed his satirical worldview with the help of rock theorist and critic Richard Meltzer. Musically, he sought to emulate the catchy, riff-oriented guitar rock of songwriters like Ray Davies and Pete Townshend. And though Shernoff loved the Beatles, his role as bassist differed greatly from Paul McCartney's: he was there solely to push the band. "Tm an AC/DC-type

player," he says.
"You don't listen
to AC/DC and say,
"Wow, this rhythm
section is great.' You
say, "Wow, this band
is kickin'—and it's
kickin' because the
bass player and drum
mer are great."

Shemoff's songwriting skill may be his greatest contribution to the Dictators' sound, but that skill is matched by his dedication to the art of bass. "There are a hun-

dred variations to downstroking," he says with the enthusiasm of a scientist revealing his latest discovery. "Twe been getting into the minutiae of how to use a pick—it's like how the Eskimos have a hundred different words for snow!" Shernoff believes that the bass is by nature a muscular instrument, and that "the sound is mostly in your fingers, whether you're using a pick or not. It's only going to sound good if your fingers know how to hold the instrument."

In 1977, the year of the punk explosion, the Dictators released their second album, Manifest Destiny. Despite the presence of Shernoff-penned classics like "Science Gone Too Far!" and "Steppin' Out," the quality of the recording was damaged in the mastering process, rendering it somewhat ineffectual upon its release. The album featured Shernoff on keyboards and future Twisted Sister Mark Mendoza on bass, but that lineup was short-lived, "a minor episode in the history of the band," as Shernoff puts it. Despite having switched to keys, Shernoff says he remained "a bass player first and foremost," while continuing his quest as

a songwriter to come up with "a good riff and catchy chorus."

With Shernoff back on bass in 1978, the Dictators recorded Bloodbrothers, a last-ditch effort to catch the wave they had helped create only three short years before. They broke up soon thereafter, with the 1981 live album Fuck

Em If They Can't Take a Joke (later rereleased as New York, New York) serving as an epitaph of sorts. But in 1991, the original Dictators reformed and began periodically touring. A decade later, they released a new studio album, D.F.F.D. With rousing numbers like "Who Will Save Rock and Roll?," the album received positive reviews from critics; it would seem that Shernoff the songsmith was finally getting some long-overdue respect.

Today, Shernoff is still using the first bass he ever bought—a white 1968 Fender Precision Bass with its original pickups, For ses-

sion work, he primarily uses an ESP Precisionstyle bass with EMG pickups. "I bought the white Precision because Brian Wilson played one," he says, noting his early obsession with the Beach Boys' bassist and chief songwriter, "but the ESP has more muscle live." A true audiophile, Shernoff has been fine-tuning his tone over the years; he long ago switched to a bi-amp system. "When I started using the ADA B500B power amp and separate Tech 21 SansAmp RBI bass preamp," he says, "I was really able to finesse my sound and fit it into the overall mix." For cabinets, he uses a Marshall 1540 4x10 and Marshall 1525 2x15, both with Celestion speakers.

In 2005, 30 years after their debut, the Dictators released ¡Viva Dictators!, a live disc showcasing 15 of the band's proto-punk classics. "The CD is sort of our 'greatest hits,' in the Dictators' world," says Shernoff. "We never had a hit single, and we never got the big money, but the fact is people are still interested in the band, so I can't complain. When I was young, I wanted that hit. At this point, just to be able to keep going is a blessing."

- FREDDY VILLANO

#### THE DICTATORS DISCOGRAPHY



The Dictators Go Girl Crazyl (Epic, 1975)



Manifest Destiny (Wounded Bird, 1977)



Noodbrethers Dictators fultimedia, 1978)



New York, New York (Live) (ROIR, 1998)



D.F.F.D. (Dictator Multimedia, 2001



/Viva Dictators/

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# The Great Dictators By PETEY E. MENZ, CRIMSON STAFF WRITER Published: Thursday, April 05, 2012 2 retweet 2 retweet 1 COMMENT EMAIL PRINT 2 retweet Finding High Fidelity

My punk-rock years were unexpected. I grew up an hour away from Manhattan and decades away from the mid-seventies, and there was a time when these circumstances seemed the greatest tragedy of my life. That was when I spent all of my money on records and CDs, when I spent days listening to Patti Smith and Richard Hell, when there was a thrilling sense of danger in the band names "Dead Boys" and "Sex Pistols."

Punk was about disaffection, but I loved it with unfettered and unironic enthusiasm. Every band had something distinctive to listen to, and every band was amazing for it. It was during this manic stage of exploration that I discovered the Dictators, a short-lived group of Noo Yawk punks who cheerfully endorsed hamburgers, cheesy pop hits, and the suburban lifestyle. Fourteen years after they broke up, I was born, and fourteen years after that I discovered and soon fell in love with their debut album, "Go Girl Crazy."

I had purchased the record on vinyl during my freshman year, which meant I could only listen to it in my family's living room, where my mother's record player was permanently installed. It was not the finest of arrangements. I didn't mind. I loved the Dictators.

Though their sound was less up-tempo than most contemporary punk rock, it was blunt, spare, and muscular. Most importantly, their songs were defiantly catchy. "(I Live For) Cars and Girls" seemed to have as many hooks as any of the Beach Boys songs whose lyrics it parodied. "The Next Big Thing" featured their most propulsive riff, a hard-rocking gem that backed up the song's exaggerated air of confidence. "Weekend," via one of the most anthemic choruses in all of punk rock, managed to encapsulate every teenager's desire, including mine, for it to be a lazy Saturday afternoon.

That sounds hyperbolic now, but I recall that the sound of the Dictators blew me away from the very first listen. A great deal of this effect had to do with the abundance of hooks, which meant that the Dictators didn't come across as a self-consciously confrontational group. For me, "Go Girl Crazy" exemplified an extraordinarily friendly sort of music. Listening in my living room, I considered it an appealing ideal.

If that welcoming nature was hinted at by the record's catchy punk sound, it was wholly evident in the humor and the personality contained within its grooves. The Dictators had two lead singers, the smart-alecky Andy Shernoff and the force of nature Handsome Dick Manitoba. Between the two of them, the band had enough charisma to make silly songs like "The Next Big Thing" and "(I Live For) Cars and Girls" into what I considered stone-cold classics.

Shernoff had a knack for sounding simultaneously chipper and sarcastic. "Who's that boy with the sandwich in his hand?" he asks at the beginning of "Teengenerate," singing in a way that both mocked and praised his adolescent subject. Manitoba was simply overwhelming, delivering absurd lyrics with self-assured bombast. It was impossible for me to listen to the album's highlight, "Two Tub Man," without chuckling at Manitoba's self-mythologizing outbursts. My personal favorite was the immortal couplet, "I drink Coca-Cola for breakfast / I've got Jackie Onassis in my pants."

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This is juvenile stuff, to be sure. But stupid humor has its place, and "Go Girl Crazy" is exactly that place. I was able to laugh when I listened to the Dictators, which was crucial: punk rock made me feel elated, but it also elicited occasional feelings of inadequacy. I wanted to mosh when I listened to Black Flag, to riot when I blasted the Clash, to pogo when I heard the Ramones. In those days, I didn't really have people who might have gone along with that, which was part of why the punk era seemed so much more attractive. But I could laugh with the Dictators in my living room, alone but in stitches.

My punk rock days are over. I no longer listen to the Dictators obsessively, but I cherish "Go Girl Crazy." There is no vast significance in a bunch of songs about cars, girls, and television, but there is some in an old friend. Legs McNeil, founder of the epochal Punk Magazine, said that he created the publication so that he could hang out with the Dictators. That sort of desire, I suppose, was why I listened to them.

-Staff writer Petey E. Menz can be reached at menz@college.harvard.edu.

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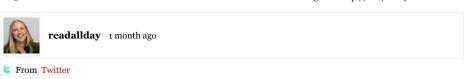
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# Faster and Louder with Andy Shernoff of The Dictators

Written by Ian McFarlane on 30 March 2014.



Proto-punk legends The Dictators have a Best Of compilation "Faster...Louder: The Dictators Best 1975-2001" out on Australian label *Raven*. Compiler Ian McFarlane spoke to Andy Shernoff, bass-player/keyboardist for The Dictators, in January 2014. Here's the full interview.

Great to talk to you Andy. Firstly, some standard questions – who were your earliest musical influences? And what inspired you to start a band?

Andy Shernoff: For my generation it all started with the Beatles on Ed Sullivan, everybody and I mean everybody watched their performance. A few days after the show, some friends and I got inspired and decided to do a little presentation in class. We bought some Beatle wigs, slapped on 'She Loves You' and started miming to it. As soon as we

dropped the needle, the girls started screaming and the teacher threw a fit and stopped the performance. My first rock and roll experience ... I knew I wanted to play music after that.



So I became hooked on rock music. I initially went through an intense Beach Boys phase, followed by the Stones, Kinks and Who. Eventually I got hooked on the hard stuff; the MC5, the Stooges and Lenny Kaye's *Nuggets* compilation, all of which were direct influences on The Dictators. I'd never played in bands. I just dabbled, playing guitar to records in my room. It took running into Ross the Boss one fateful day to force me to make the leap. His confession that he was leaving his current band and was thinking of starting a new one, led me to audaciously suggest that I should be the bass player ... even though I didn't even own a bass!

I believe that you were publishing you own fanzine at the time (*Teenage Wasteland Gazette*), but when you did get the band up and running, were you aware that you had created a unique combination of hard rock guitar mixed with a proto-punk aesthetic, almost a cross-over blend before anyone else?

I knew we were doing something out of the ordinary but there was no way to predict the consequences. We formed in 1973, which was not a particularly fertile period for rock and roll. It was full of long-winded musical pomposity and sensitive singer songwriters. The fun element had completely disappeared because everybody was taking themselves way too seriously. That left a huge vacuum for the high energy, rebellious rock and roll that we loved and grew up on. It is important to remember that rock and roll was still a relatively new art form in the 70's, so it was

much easier to create something original. If the essence of R&R is three chords and a backbeat there are only so many permutations before you start repeating yourself, which unfortunately is the situation we find rock and roll in today.



Early line-up promo shot with Andy Shernoff pictured left.

Do you think BÖC producers Murray Krugman and Sandy Pearlman were instrumental in helping you find your musical voice and style on record?

Murray and Sandy were the first people to support and encourage us even though there was absolutely no precedent or blueprint for what we were doing. We hooked up with them in 1973, years before CBGB's, The Ramones, or any kind of "punk" scene existed... and except for Ross we were barely competent on our instruments. Those guys saw something in us and for that I am eternally grateful.

The songs you were writing featured some of the wittiest lyric lines in all of '70s rock ('Master Race Rock', 'The Next Big Thing') but do you think the irony / satire just went over the heads of the general record buying public? Were you disappointed when the early albums didn't sell in big numbers?

Thanks, I was inspired by the lyrics of Brian Wilson and Chuck Berry and always felt they epitomized rock and roll. I wanted to capture the teenage experience as they did but from the perspective of a boy growing up in New York City.

I have always felt that The Dictators lyrical approach was our major contribution. Unfortunately satire, sarcasm and rock and roll didn't inspire the masses, so yes it was disappointing.

On the first album you handled most of the lead vocals, with Handsome Dick Manitoba making various contributions. What was the thinking behind getting Handsome Dick out front as a full-time singer? Was it showmanship / one-upmanship / sheer contempt in the face of adversity?

Showmanship certainly lays a role but I think to be a great lead singer you have to have the desire to be the center of attention. Consider Iggy, Mick Jagger, Bono, even Bruce Springsteen. I don't have that desire while Richard does.

Did you share an affinity with any of the other bands on the New York stage – the Dolls, Ramones, Television etc? For example it wasn't until fairly late ('76/'77) that you got to play at CBGB, and then there was the infamous Handsome Dick / Wayne County confrontation that apparently divided the scene: you were either for or against the Dictators, no half-measures.

I did share an affinity with other bands. It was a very small scene, so everybody knew each other and hung out together. Musically I related more to the "fuck art, let's rock" school of bands like the Ramones, the Dead Boys and the Heartbreakers but I truly liked numerous people in the other bands and have maintained friendships with many of them till this day.

I always found it interesting that even though all the bands were lumped together, no two bands sounded alike. There was no CBGB's "sound". The only connecting tissue was that everybody followed their own muse.

True, there was some tension at the time of the Handsome Dick/Wayne County incident but it dissipated and I don't recall any lingering effects outside of the fact that The Dictators never performed at Max's Kansas City, Wayne County's home base.

(**Note:** The "infamous Handsome Dick/Wayne County incident" referred to above occurred at CBGB's in March 1976 when a drunken Handsome Dick heckled County while he was on stage. Then the Handsome One approached the stage on his way to the men's room (apparently you had to bypass the stage to get to the toilets), County took it as a direct threat, words were exchanged and County clobbered Dick with a microphone stand. Dick ended up with sixteen stitches in the head and a broken collarbone.)



Cover of the NY News: Guitarist Top Ten and Handsome Dick Manitoba

When the UK scene started to embrace the band and you toured there (and Europe), did that inspire you to come up with the *Bloodbrothers* album which in some ways is the strongest of the first three LPs?

Experiencing the intensity of the UK punk scene first hand was a total game changer in my eyes. Rock and roll had finally become the incredible life force I always thought it should be. While it was tangential in America, across the ocean the music was not only topping the charts, but it had extended its influence into fashion, art and politics.

When I returned from England my songwriting became more precise and focused which led to the simpler, more organic direction that *Bloodbrothers* took. By this time we had finally developed some skills on our instruments, which made the recording process easier and quicker.

I guess the band never really split up as such, but the reformation in the late 1990s resulted in a new level of acceptance – the *D.F.F.D.* album was a success, you toured the world, played at Little Stevens' Underground Garage Festival etc – did that fire you with a real sense of achievement or validation that you had always been on the right track?

Over the years the band had played occasional shows in the New York area but around 1996 there was renewed interest in the band so it was either make a new record or become a nostalgia act. Everyone knows that when bands "get back together" the reunion records invariably suck, so it was a difficult, creative challenge. We hadn't made a record together in 20 years, so the trick was to retain the outrageous attitude and youthful enthusiasm of the teenage Dictators while still maintaining our adult dignity. I also felt the legacy of the band required one more record. I think we broke the comeback jinx and I'm particularly proud that *D.F.F.D.* yielded what became our most popular tune 'Who Will Save Rock and Roll?' I can't think of another band that's accomplished that on a record recorded long after their supposed heyday.

You've long had a loyal cult following in Australia; there were a number of bands that took a leaf out of the Dictators book or covered your song (Hitmen, Eastern Dark, Screaming Tribesmen, Psychotic Turnbuckles for example), Stuart Coupe issued the *D.F.F.D.* CD here, your tour a few years back was successful etc. I also think it's just that Aussie music fans just like bands that really rock! How does that make you feel?

Australia is home to many great bands that attended the same rock and roll school we did. It's flattering to think we had an impact on the scene down under. I might add that the door swings both ways as another band I play in, Master Plan covered Walking an Eastern Dark tune on our first album.

Finally, could you nominate a couple of songs that are your favorites from the Dictators' impressive repertoire? Or is that like asking you to pick out your favorite child? Maybe the question could be: could you nominate any songs that you consider best represent what the Dictators are about, and why?

What are the Dictators about?? Not sure; as a songwriter, I never wanted to repeat myself and always tried to paint with a broad palette. The Dictators only made four records but each is very distinct from each other. *The Dictators Go Girl Crazy!* was about teenage anarchy, while *Manifest Destiny* was our very poorly timed commercial bid, *Bloodbrothers* was The Dictators as street gang and *D.F.F.D.* was punk rock for adults.

My favorites include... 'Who Will Save Rock and Roll?' because it successfully captures the bands zeitgeist in three minutes. '(I Live for) Cars and Girls' is my tribute to Brian Wilson who inspired me to become a songwriter. I like 'Pussy and Money' because it reveals the secret of life. Finally I really love well-crafted pop music and I think the demo version of 'Sleeping with the TV On' is the best representation in the Dictators catalogue.

Faster...Louder: The Dictators Best 1975-2001 is an Australia-only release on *Raven Records* and is reviewed <a href="https://hereiden.com/hereiden

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