

[MUSOSCRIBE: Bill Kopp's music blog: features, reviews, interviews, essays and whatnot](#)

« [Treasures From the Vaults: The Jazzhaus Series, Part Two Album Review: Steve Barton - Projector](#) »

[DVD Review: Public Image Ltd. - Live at Rockpalast 1983](#)

Time really does change things. It was Halloween night 1983 when **Public Image Ltd.** took the stage at WDR's television studios for a concert. But now, shy of three decades later, somehow **John Lydon's** atonal warbling has transformed into something almost – dare I say it – musical. Really: his vocals have a musicality all their own. Witness the performance on the new DVD *Live at Rockpalast 1983*.

The band on this night features longtime Lydon associate **Martin Atkins** on drums (I met him a few years back; really nice gent) and **Tommy Zvoncheck*** on – perhaps surprisingly – a stack of nearly a half-dozen keyboards. (Right around this same period, Zvoncheck provided similar auxiliary help to **Steve Wynn's** band [The Dream Syndicate](#).) With a Yamaha CP70 electric piano and several Sequential Circuits synths onstage, PiL's setup in 1983 might have *looked* fairly standard for the time, but the music created was anything but ordinary.



Anchored by Atkins' ferocious, insistent drumming and the loudly-mixed, dub-influenced bass guitar of a **Sting**-mulleted **Louis Bernardi**, on this night PiL rocks pretty hard. From the moment that Lydon walks onstage with his cat-got-the-canary smirk, it's clear that he's there at least in part to bait the audience. He succeeds, in part: several members of the mostly -male crowd (most of whom look like guys I knew in college) oblige and do a bit of the old slam-dancing. And when the crowd applauds wildly after numbers like "Annalisa," Lydon politely shouts, "Shut up!" and then grins mischievously. Always the charmer.

Lydon and his associates pummel their way through a selection of tracks from *First Issue*, *Second Edition* (aka *Metal Box*) and *The Flowers of Romance*. And though Zvoncheck and guitarist **Joseph Guida** would be gone by the time PiL recorded *This is What You Want...This is What You Get*, on this night they preview "This is Not a Love Song" from the then-unreleased album. Perhaps running out of material, they finish their encore with a repeat of the opener, the uncharacteristically pop-toned "Public Image." Lydon delivers the same dance moves for both runs through the song.

Barely four months earlier, this same lineup of PiL recorded the often poorly-regarded *Live in Tokyo* album; most reviews criticize Bernardi's playing on that show in particular. Setting aside the relative merits of that release, *Live at Rockpalast 1983* shows a band that's tight, compelling and formidable. The new keyboard introduction appended to *First Issue's* "Religion" adds an ironic twist; the percussion-centric "Under the House" is hypnotic and relentless. And a cover (I *guess* you'd call it

that) of **Sex Pistols**‘ “Anarchy in the U.K.” is given a relatively faithful reading. Taken as a whole, *Live at Rockpalast 1983* is one PiL that’s relatively easy to swallow.

** For reasons unknown, the DVD packaging bills the keyboard player as one Arthur Stead; the DVD’s end-credits roll identifies him as Zvoncheck.*

Follow “the musoscribe” on  [Twitter](#) and get notified when new features, reviews and essays are published.

Tags: [john lydon](#), [johnny rotten](#), [pil](#), [public image limited](#), [sex pistols](#)

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 4th, 2012 at 5:24 am and is filed under [dvd](#), [new release](#), [post-rock](#), [review](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

Leave a Reply

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

Security Code:





Musoscribe (aka blog.billkopp.com) is proudly powered by [WordPress](#) [Entries \(RSS\)](#) and [Comments \(RSS\)](#).