

Shake Your

FORTY years ago, Max's Kansas City was in the frontline of New York's downtown cultural revolution, its reputation and relevance exceeding even its previous incarnation as a '60s artistic hotbed. More broadminded than CBGB's, Max's boasted trans-pioneering DJ-singer Wayne County as its DJ and provided early audiences for outsiders such as Suicide, the Cramps and the nascent No Wave movement. When Max's was recently rebuilt for Martin Scorsese and Mick Jagger's HBO 'Vinyl' romp, it exacerbated a legend that has grown since the club closed in 1981.

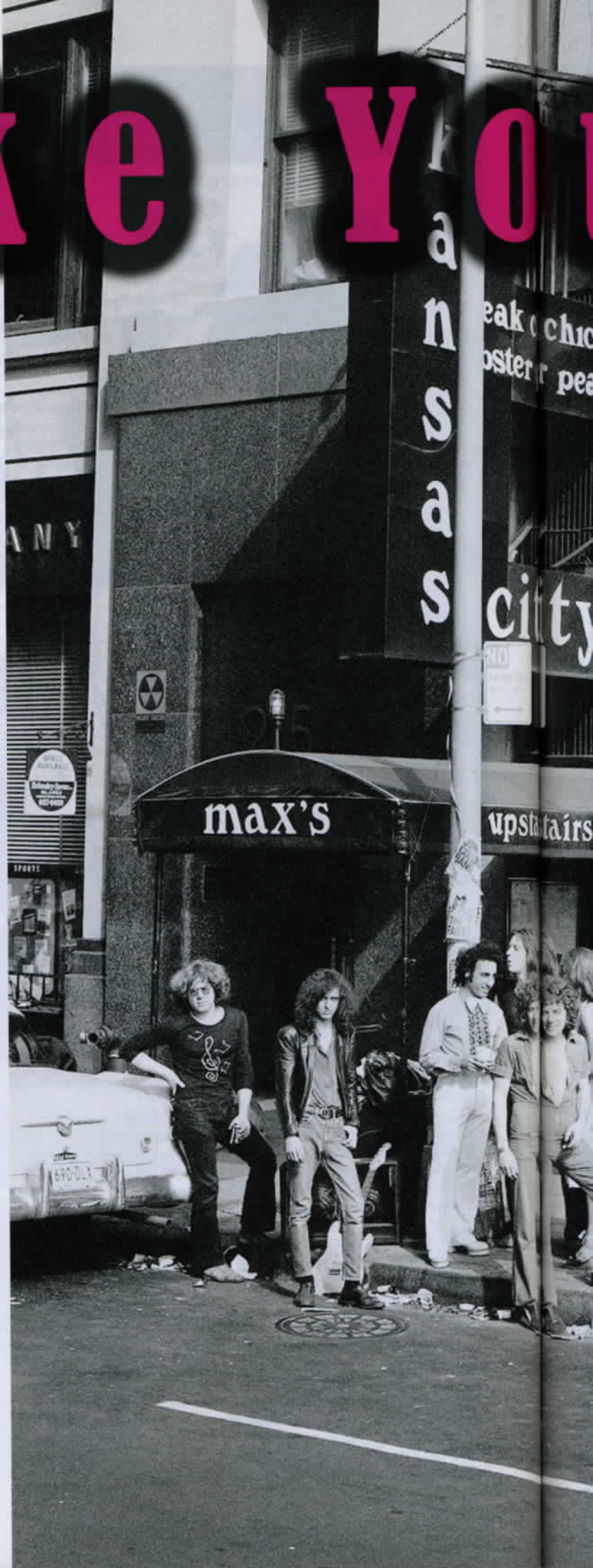
'Max's Kansas City 1976' was one of the first albums to give the world a taste of the downtown action. To celebrate the set's 40th anniversary, it's been vastly expanded by original musical director Peter Crowley to present an even fuller picture of the acts that graced the venue on Park Avenue South.

Max's was opened by former poets-promoting entrepreneur Mickey Ruskin in December 1965 to provide a meeting place and watering hole for the art movements gaining steam in New York, attracting prime movers with the liberal manifesto and turned a blind eye to the pill-popping and shagging going on in the infamous, red-bathed back room. With his Factory just over Union Square, Andy Warhol and his freeloading cavorters made Max's their second home. "Max's was famous for its freaks," says Jayne County.



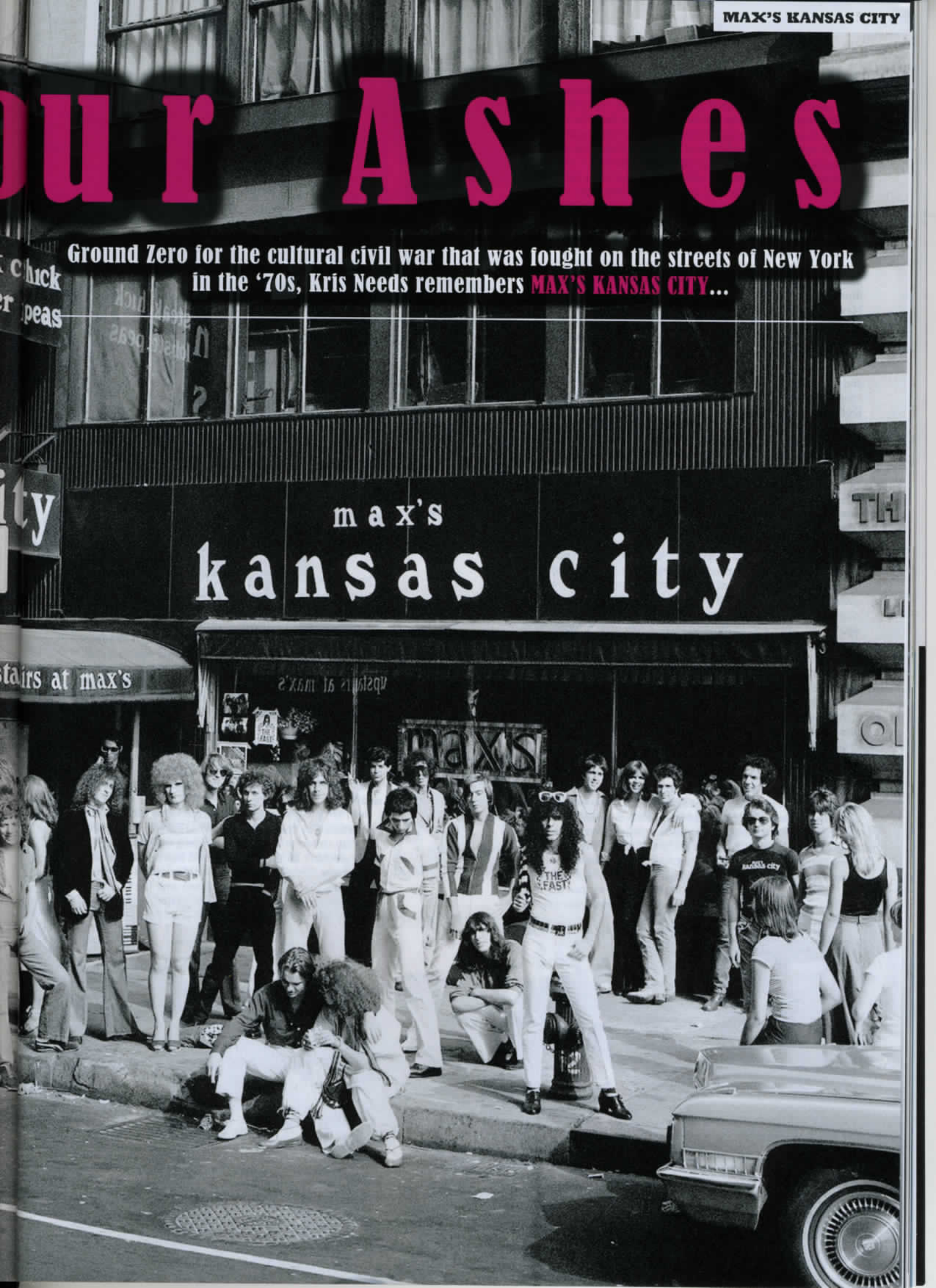
"MAX'S WAS FAMOUS FOR ITS FREAKS..." JAYNE COUNTY

The roots of Max's mid-'70s resurrection can be traced back to Eric Emerson and the Magic Tramps; New York's first glam band who, literally, built the stages at Max's, the Mercer Arts Center and CBs in their quest to find a place to practice their glitter-rock hoodoo. Emerson was a Warhol superstar who, in 1970, went to LA and joined experimental rock band Messiah, whose guitarist Youngblood he had met on the set of 'Lonesome Cowboys'. Also featuring drummer Sessu Coleman and violinist Lary Chaplan, Messiah were offered a record deal but, according to Coleman, "We realised we couldn't conform to the label's artistic direction, so Eric suggested we relocate to New York City. He spoke of Warhol, and a club we could play at called Max's Kansas City." ▶



Our Ashes

Ground Zero for the cultural civil war that was fought on the streets of New York in the '70s, Kris Needs remembers **MAX'S KANSAS CITY**...



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✦ **M**essiah was renamed the Magic Tramps by the time Eric brought them back to New York in early 1971. "The very next day Eric and I visited Warhol's Factory," recalls Sesu. "Upon arrival, we met Andy and his film assistant, Paul Morrissey. Eric told Andy he had brought his band to create a new sound and look in the multi-media arena of New York City. Andy was very happy to see Eric and very receptive towards me."

Eric and Sesu then crossed Union Square to Max's to meet Mickey Ruskin, who Eric knew through Warhol. They convinced him to let them play a showcase in the upstairs restaurant, which had lain dormant since the Velvet Underground had played their last shows there the previous summer (the band's first shows at their favored watering hole). The Magic Tramps commenced a riotous Friday night residency that, according to scenester and future Stilettos/Blondie found Elda Gentile, "was the start of new music in New York. Eric was the spark that ignited the built up fuel in New York's need for a new direction when the '60s ended. He was encouraging and supportive of so many artists from the new era, who later became famous."

This period also saw the landmark show where Bob Marley and the Wailers were supported by an unknown singer-songwriter from New Jersey called Bruce Springsteen, the Dolls and Iggy famously slashing his chest when the Stooges returned with 'Raw Power'. The back room still played host to the Warhol crowd, its low-lit ambience attracting the stars, manic new bloods and artists behaving badly. Slowly "us younger kids, like Patti Smith, Wayne County, David Johansen and the New York Dolls began to have more relevance," says Elda Gentile. "Max's focus went to music and the days of Warhol's dominance began to wane."

By 1974, CBGB, a few blocks down on the Bowery, had opened its doors to new bands such as Wayne County, Patti Smith, the Ramones and Television. "CBGB's was a unique animal unto itself as the place was a right shit hole that had this desolation row type of charm," says Heartbreakers guitarist Walter Lure. "The place stunk and was in a rotten neighbourhood, but that was part of its attraction. Max's was at the other end of the spectrum. It had been a trendy Warhol gang hangout and really was sort of decadent and glitzy. After the Warhol gang faded away, the punks took over and gave it a bit of street credibility. The place still was a nice-looking club that had a decent restaurant on the ground floor and good music on the second floor."

Although they had already been going for four years, Suicide were attracted to Max's artistic legacy and less self-conscious cliques. After applying some pressure they finally got a gig at a showcase for a major label glam band in August. In the audience was Craig Leon, already working in the studio assisting producer Richard Gottehrer, who had founded Sire Records with Seymour Stein in 1966. Craig had already done some work at Sire when he found out from his friend Paul Nelson (who had signed the Dolls to Mercury) that London Records was planning to launch an American branch of Jonathan King's UK Records in New York, and were looking for an A&R scout. Craig went for an interview with "this old school, cigar-smoking kind of A&R guy," who assigned him to "go around this weekend, then tell me what you've got. If I like your observations, maybe you can work for us instead of Sire."



Above: Martin Rev and Alan Vega from Suicide
Photo Mel Austin

"MAX'S FOCUS WENT TO MUSIC AND THE DAYS OF WARHOL'S DOMINANCE BEGAN TO WANE."

ELDA GENTILE

Craig was about to leave after the glam band's undistinguished set, but impetuously decided, "I'm gonna stay and check out this thing called Suicide that's playing next." He was glad he did. Craig's most abiding memory is of Alan "swinging these chains and hitting the table in the front row. One of the important things about the gig, that I thought was cool, was that he was going one step beyond Iggy Pop. Suicide were the first people in New York who really coined the punk thing. Marty was making like loud Velvet Underground walls of noise, but it had rhythm. Alan was jamming and doing a kind of James Brown thing over it. I thought they were phenomenal, because it was something totally new."

As 1974 progressed, Max's started falling on hard times, exacerbated by fires and the Warhol crowd drifting on. The club closed in December, marking the end of an era, but it wouldn't be the last the world heard from the venue. Enter Peter Crowley, who became Max's musical director and is now the name most associated with the club's late '70s heyday. Peter was born in Providence, Rhode Island, but lived for his visits to New York City. After dropping



FIRST N.Y. APPEARANCE IN 3 YEARS
THE VELVET UNDERGROUND
MAX'S KANSAS CITY JUNE 24-28 JULY 1-5



Left: Eric Emerson and Elda Gentile

out of school in the late '50s, he landed in New York and discovered the action going on in Greenwich Village's coffeehouses and bars. After getting a job dragging tourists into one of the coffeehouses, within weeks he had risen to manager, befriending Warhol's crowd. After spending 1966 travelling, he ended up in Hollywood, where he helped design and construct a club, whose owners were marketing the new Coloursound machine, which professed to translate music through lights. The venture didn't last after neighbours complained but Peter was given a dozen of the machines and returned to New York to light up the city with the new invention. First he lit the Velvet Underground's residency at the DOM on St Mark's Place. "It was absolutely brilliant. I lucked out. I was in the right place at the right moment."

Peter stayed on after the Velvets residency ended but quit when the new owner bought the venue. Through his Warhol connections, Peter Crowley soon became a Max's regular, loving it so much that, after setting up the first mail order head shop, he rented a loft just a block away. His company, Cosmic Truth, distributed for a firm that manufactured hash pipes and rolling papers but, after Warhol-affiliated junkies started siphoning his profits, he went back to the west coast until 1974, when New York's gravitational pull proved too much and he returned to find the beleaguered city facing bankruptcy and imminent collapse.

"New York was sleazy and getting worse by the day, which didn't bother me any," recalls Peter. "I came back around the



time of the first CBGB's explosion. Then I discovered Wayne County at the Club 82."

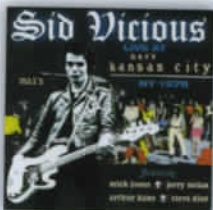
Situated at 82 East Fourth Street, Club 82 briefly filled the void left by the disintegrated Mercer as one of the only downtown venues willing to embrace glam-leaning local bands. Witnessing Club 82's glammed up decadence and Wayne County in his long blonde wig brought Peter back into the downtown loop. "When I arrived back in New York it was the first place I went to," he recalls. "I didn't know Wayne as a rock 'n' roller, only his previous incarnation in the theatre. I ended up becoming his manager. I went to Hilly for a gig and he turned me down. I couldn't understand it because Wayne was one of the biggest draws in New York at that time. So then I went and did Mothers."

Mothers was a tiny bar on 23rd Street and Eighth Avenue, over the street from the Chelsea Hotel, that Crowley transformed in what can now seen as a test run for Max's. Peter put Wayne on for a week in mid-1975 and Mothers became a hotspot, with Suicide given a weekly residency that October. "It worked very well. Then everybody came saying 'Can we have a gig here?' Blondie, Television, Ramones, the whole CBGB's crowd, because they were starved for anywhere to play. Hilly caused himself all this misery and competition because, being forced into finding a venue for Wayne, I made my own."

Max's Kansas City was reopened in autumn 1975 by Tommy and Laura Dean, who initially sought to re-establish its reputation as a vital artists' meeting place. At first, the Deans devoted Fridays and Saturdays to a Puerto Rican disco, which drew a large enough crowd to alleviate any need to pay live bands. But the rest of the week was barren, the restaurant had failed to find a suitable chef, and Tommy was a rock fan. Wayne had long been a Max's regular so told Tommy to consult Peter about booking bands. Peter naturally started by promoting Wayne on a Sunday night. After that was successful, he stretched to Mondays and Thursdays until he was putting on bands every night except Friday and Saturday.

"I was in the right place at the right time again," says Peter. "Tommy Dean's failure as a restaurateur when he reopened Max's saved my life because I was able to go in and dictate terms to him. 'You have to promise me you're not gonna give me any crap, because a lot of the stuff I'm gonna do, you will never understand, but I'm gonna save your venue.' And I did."

Suicide's Martin Rev recalls the "Brooklyn, Italian, very New York" crowd which started flocking to Max's, adding, "The new Max's was run by someone much more New York. Mickey Ruskin had been the elite maitre d', all the pop artists had their living room there, and that was the scene which dominated. After Mickey moved on, Max's got much more down to earth. It connected with the Vietnam war winding down and then ending. There was a different sensibility. They weren't the most peaceful of times because of what was going on in the city. It was getting worse and worse. New York went through a very steep economic decline. ▶



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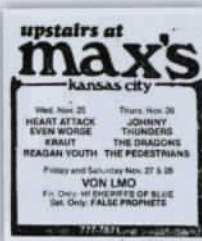
DECEMBER 12-1977

FIRST TIME AT MAX'S

“Peter never had any doubts about us. He had the mentality and aesthetic to know exactly what was happening. He never had any doubts about us and totally seemed to know what we were about right away, in a very positive way. He started putting us in slowly to build up audiences. Eventually he got us in at weekends and we started making some money for the first time.”

“By the time I came to Max’s, Suicide had enough following to warrant being the headliner,” confirms Peter. “That strategy worked. I don’t think a lot of people understood what I was doing, but I continued to do it.”

Suicide played their first show at the rejuvenated Max’s on Tuesday, March 9, 1976, followed by the landmark Easter festival, which presented bands of the day such as Wayne County, the Heartbreakers, Ramones, Tuff Darts, Marbles and Blondie between April 11 and 22. On June 5 and 6, Suicide commenced the regular Max’s shows that built their legend. Playing two shows a night, until 4AM, the duo hit new heights of confrontational carnage, Rev now wielding a drum machine and Vega regularly stalking the narrow, folding tables coming out perpendicular to the stage. “Nobody ever got hurt but me!” protested Vega. “I did used to stop them trying to leave. I used to jump on tables, upset their drinks, but never hurt them, man. Maybe they got a little wet! I used to have a knife and chain, and used to hurt myself and shit, cut myself.”



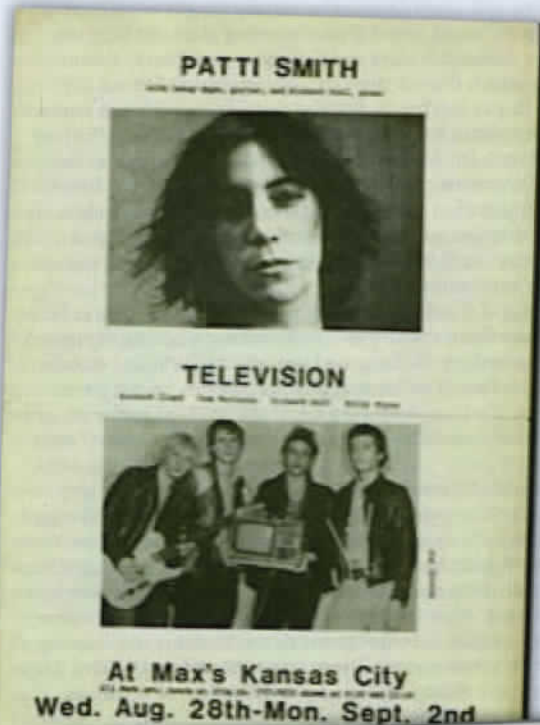
“Alan was going into the audience before we even had those tables,” recalls Peter Crowley. “On the live ‘Rocket USA’ you can hear a glass break at one point. That’s Alan taking a sideways swing with the microphone into somebody’s beer bottle that was sitting on the table. You can hear the bottle shatter. Alan was like a cross between Gene Vincent and Iggy Pop.”

“CBGBs wasn’t our natural home, but Max’s was, in many ways,” recalls Rev. “There were carpets on the floors, windows and a dressing room. It was more artificial, in a sense a Vegas kind of décor, but that artificiality was very cool in clubs and much more relaxing. You could go to Max’s at any time of night, and sit in a booth with other musicians that you knew. When I went to Hilly’s, as much as I respected it, I never felt that it was a place I was going to be lounging in. It was a harder kind of experience, but some bands gravitated there, like Talking Heads and Television. That was always like their place and they were CBs bands. Max’s was like our living room. We ended up playing there regularly. That’s where the audience gravitated to us.”

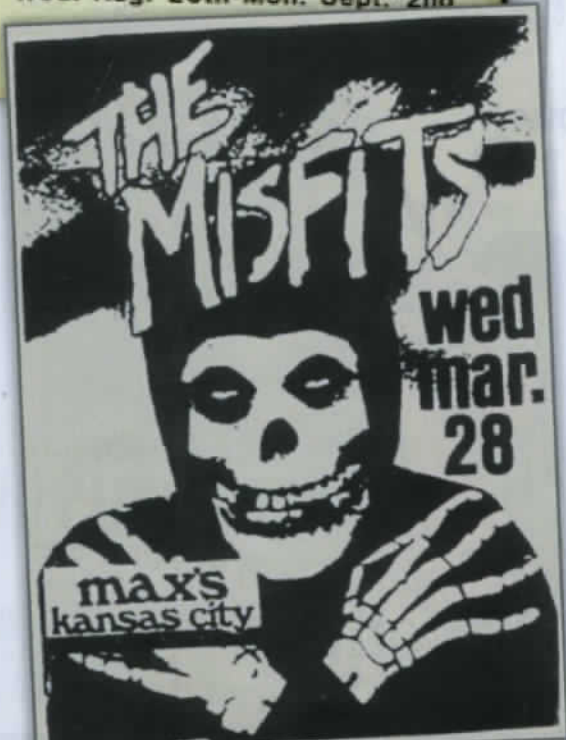
As Vega told me, “That’s how we got started. Peter opened up the world.” Suicide ended up clinching their first record deal after Red Star chairman Marty heard their specially-pressed single on the Max’s jukebox that Crowley kept stacked with classic rock ‘n’ roll and hot new punk imports.

“MANY FEEL THAT IF MAX’S HADN’T COME INTO BEING WHEN IT DID, MANY OF THE TRENDS, BANDS AND ATTITUDES THAT WE NOW SHARE, MAY HAVE NEVER COME TO PASS.”

JIMI LA LUMIA



TEENAGE JESUS AND THE JERKS



The Max's album came from Crowley's ongoing mission to bring Wayne County to a wider audience. In 1976, Hilly Kristal released a double album called 'Live At CBGBs: The Home Of Underground Rock', which gave the world a somewhat flaccid impression of his supposedly happening club. Crowley's most recent attempt to get Wayne on wax had taken him to ESP-Disk, former home of the Fugs, Albert Ayler and many experimental giants. "We did a whole album at a Brooklyn studio, then brought the cassette tape back to ESP. Bernard Stollman played it and said 'This music is too commercial, we're not putting it out.' By too commercial, he meant everything was in tune and songs had a beginning, a middle and an end. The songs had titles like 'If You're In Luck And If You Wanna Fuck, You Can Stick It In Me', so were hardly commercial! Bernie wouldn't pay the studio, so we couldn't get the tapes. All we had was a cassette. So that was a disaster."

Peter suggested a Max's compilation to Tommy Dean with the argument, "It'll serve to make them more famous, which means more people will come to see them, so it will make the club more famous," now adding, "So, basically, I was putting the Max's album together with the primary motivation of getting Wayne County recorded." Tommy agreed and gave Peter a minuscule budget, his decision clinched when Wayne's 'Max's Kansas City' sparked a buzz on 45. The song saw Wayne running out a roll-call of star revelers, including the Dolls and their fellow underground New York bands, over 'Sweet Jane' chords. The problem of finding a studio for Wayne had been solved by budding disco producer Bobby Orlando. "He was just a kid then, and his daddy bought him a studio," says Peter. "They offered it to us for free, just to get the publicity."

Peter's initial wish-list was Wayne, Suicide, the Fast, Blondie, the Heartbreakers, Mink DeVille, Tuff Darts and Planets. All but the first three turned him down. Undeterred, Peter showcased lesser-known names that played the club. Bob Gruen supplied the cover shot, a local typesetter did the layout in return for clearing his Max's bar tab and the records were pressed in New Jersey. Albums were sold by mail order or at Max's.

The original album kicked off with Wayne's newly minted anthem. Wayne and the Back Street Boys also supplied two hard-nosed rockers, 'Cream in My Jeans' and 'Flip Your Wig'. Wayne's trilogy was joined by Cherry Vanilla's rocking out 'Shake Your Ashes', Harry Toledo's Roxy-recalling 'Knots' (that Peter had heard over the PA at CBs), two spirited power-pop romps from the Fast, local rocker John Collins and Suicide's 'Rocket USA'. This last track marked the first time the world heard Vega and Rev; so strange against the other fairly traditional tracks it ignited the duo's cult. Suicide had only asked for 50 dollars to fix their tape recorder so they could record at their Greene Street basement studio. The album also included 'Final Solution', the first single by Pere Ubu, who had played the Easter Festival. "That was when I decided I wanted them on the album," Peter recalls. "I loved that single and asked if I could put it on there. I think that introduced them to England after John Peel played it."



The compilation was retitled 'New York New Wave' and released in the UK by CBS in 1978, then again in 1981 on the Max's Kansas City label as 'Max's Kansas City Presents New Wave Hits For The 80s'. Now minus Vanilla and Toledo (but plus Phil Rambow), half of side two substituted the original 'Rocket USA' with the stunning ten-minute version captured by Peter at Max's in 1976, "on a tape recorder which was later stolen when I left it running in the audience. Thankfully the reel with Suicide on it survived." The track now stands as a priceless earliest document of Suicide live at that formative time, breaking glass and all.

The new reissue further expands and consolidates Crowley's original vision and time with Max's, starting with the original album then adding Suicide's 1976 demo of 'Ghost Rider', an alternative version of the New York Dolls' 'Bad Girl', 'Pink Stilettos' by the Stilettos (written by Elda about life with her boyfriend Sylvain Sylvain and featuring Debbie Harry and Chris Stein), plus local bands that deserved a break, including the Knots, the Brats, the Offs, John Collins' Terrorists and the magnificent Senders. There's also Jimi LaLumia declaring 'Death To Disco' with his Psychotic Frogs. Disc two presents a welter of extras, including studio tracks produced by Crowley when he returned from Wayne's European sojourn of 1977-78, including the fearsome Von Lmo, Mink de Ville co-founder Fast Floyd and his Famous Firebirds, the Cellmates, Science, BMT's, Joy Ryder, Ruby and the Rednecks and a later version of Wayne's 'Max's Kansas City'. Some tracks date from Max's short-lived 1996 return.

Of particular interest are the 'Live Documents', including untouchable chanteuse Nico performing 'Saeta' in Europe in 1983, Iggy roaring 'Rock Action' in 1977, Johnny Thunders and Wayne Kramer playing Nancy Sinatra's 'These Boots Are Made For Walking' in 1979, 'MIA' featuring the Heartbreakers with a 'Live At Max's' out-take and Sid Vicious crooning Jerry Nolan's 'Take A Chance With Me' at his doom-surrounded September 1978 Max's show with a band including Nolan, Mick Jones, Arthur Kane and Steve Dior. This set will be followed by another 25 tracks on a Record Store Day double album.

I'll leave the last word to Jimi La Lumia, now Wayne's manager who, along with Crowley, supplies liner notes for the new set. "By 1981, various problems brought Max's to an end, but its 16-year run set the stage for all that followed. Many feel that if Max's hadn't come into being when it did, many of the trends, bands and attitudes that we now share, may have never come to pass." **VLR**

'Max's Kansas City - 1976 And Beyond' is out in April on Jungle Records



Gina Harlow and the Cutthroats

