

one of the few original UK Punk bands who continues to tour and record nearly 40 years after their formation. Led by original members **Ian KNOX Cornochan** (vocals/guitar/songwriting) and **John EDDIE Edwards** (drums), The Vibrators have gone through numerous line-up changes throughout the years, but have remained determined, focused and eager to share new music with their fans. From their early days signed to Epic/CBS and the hits “Baby, Baby”, “Automatic Lover”, and “Judy Says (Knock You In The Head)” to their 2013 album *On The Guest List*, The Vibrators are unafraid to embrace their past as they continue to creatively move forward.

While Eddie tirelessly tours with The Vibrators, Knox recently retired from the road but has still been active with songwriting and providing creative energy and support. With the band on the road constantly through 2013, their legacy is being celebrated with *Greatest Punk Hits*, a collection that contains recent studio versions of many of their finest tracks. It allowed Knox and the boys to approach the songs with a seasoned yet refreshing attitude, keeping the arrangements pretty darn close to the originals without sounding like their trying to duplicate themselves.

Stephen SPAZ Schnee caught up with Knox, who kindly shared his thoughts on Punk and The Vibrators long and influential career...



SPAZ: There’s a new collection on the market, *Greatest Punk Hits*, which features the band revisiting some of their finest songs. How are you feeling about this release as well as the band’s most recent studio album *On The Guest List*?

KNOX: It’s always great to have more music coming out. It makes you feel that what you are doing, and what you did, is still relevant today and hopefully people will like it. The Vibrators have been continually making new studio albums, we’ve made something like seventeen. This keeps the band active, as opposed to a touring museum piece, whereby the band becoming its own tribute band. So it’s great to have both a new studio album (*On The Guest List* on Cleopatra Records), and a greatest hits album (*Greatest Punk Hits* on O-Rama). The *Greatest Punk Hits* album has different versions of the original tracks and should be very interesting for a lot of people.

SPAZ: While your songs have always been perfectly suited for the Punk movement, they really seem to be rooted in classic Rock ‘n’ Roll tradition. What types of bands were you playing in before Punk came along?

KNOX: I was in bands at school in the early ‘60s which primarily only played covers, then at art school I was in several kinds of R&B bands, then a Psychedelic band called **The Dream Machine**. Years later when I began writing songs I was very influenced by the **Velvet Underground**, plus I suppose all the cover songs I’d been doing. So the later bands I was in

started doing my songs. **Despair** was doing basically only my songs, whereas a later band **Lipstick** did a mixture of my songs and covers. They were both three-piece bands, and I liked Metal guitar solos and **Jimi Hendrix** so that got incorporated into the music as well. Also it's fair to say a lot of it was technologically driven, you know things like fuzzboxes, phasing pedals, wah-wah pedals, that sort of thing. I don't think I'd be doing music if people hadn't discovered electricity and invented the electric guitar and amplification!

SPAZ: I've always wondered: where did the name Knox come from?

KNOX: It's a shortened version of my surname Carnochan. I was at an all boys' school and everyone called each other by their surnames, I don't know if this still happens. Anyway my surname was too difficult, it got shortened to Carnocks and then just to Knox.

SPAZ: When did you first become aware of the initial Punk movement in the UK?

KNOX: I think it was **Pat Collier**, our bass player and also a songwriter in The Vibrators, who noticed it. It was sort of 'over there' as it were and suddenly, as we were playing fast aggressive songs, we were included in it. Subsequently we had a small part of helping shape Punk because we were in at the beginning.

SPAZ: Do you feel that the movement's hype became more important than the music?

KNOX: Possibly. It was a gift for the press: the look, the aggressive music, trouble at gigs, the political thing, so of course the press had a field day dressing it up and exaggerated it to sell papers, plus half-orchestrating things. If you stick a camera on someone something will happen. I don't think the bands minded - after all it was great publicity. Nowadays it's a kind of trade-off. People like using the term and the clothes and the attitude, but hopefully some of it rebounds back to shine a light on the music. Also I think it's both funny and also a shame that sometimes people wearing a Punk T-shirt with a band name on it probably know nothing about the band or the music. Plus what it was like in 1976-7.

SPAZ: During the early days of Punk, were you friends or competitors with a lot of your contemporaries like The Clash, The Jam, **999**, The Stranglers, et al?

KNOX: I think it must have been a mixture. You wanted the attention but then again initially it was a small movement and felt very much like an 'us against the world' kind of thing. So for that reason you were very friendly towards the other bands.

SPAZ: What do you remember about those first few years of the Punk movement?

KNOX: I suppose it was the fact that when I grew up I might have dreamt of being in a slightly famous band, and then somehow I was. When I was at the grammar school it was never even a remote career option, being in a band was something that only seemed to happen to chosen people and was going on somewhere else. I know that's all changed now. Everyone today knows people in bands. When we started The Vibrators we were just a very small band, lugging our gear around to pubs to play, often to people who probably weren't terribly interested. Then a year or so later we had roadies, trucks, and were on the TV, it was astonishing. We were often the first Punk band in some towns and there'd be people there who'd read about Punk and violence and you'd get your fair share of stuff thrown at you and spat on. Sometimes it was funny and sometimes quite frightening, but you wanted to play so you carried on, and in the end, we won the day.



(Photo credit: Fishbones)

SPAZ: The Vibrators didn't adhere to any Punk formula when it came to their records. Whose brilliant idea was it to feature a sax solo on "Judy Says"?

KNOX: That would have been **Don Snow's** idea. He was in that particular line-up of the band and played keyboards and sax. He was a very talented musician and added a lot of bits, for instance the ending of that song, that very obvious up and down bit, etc., and the extra bits on the end of one line in the chorus, I think they were all his ideas. Also I think people now think of Punk music as this... what I call 'identikit' Punk - you know the one look and the one sound. When Punk started, it was really varied - although maybe it was also partly New Wave as well.

SPAZ: The band has been releasing music on a semi-regular basis for over 30 years. Are you frustrated by the band's 'cult' or 'underground' status over the years? Or is this where you prefer to be, success wise?

KNOX: I'd have liked the band to have been more successful, but I think it's entirely our fault we weren't. The name kept us off the radio and TV, enough to make a difference and we never got a manager after the first few years and I think without that you will have trouble getting noticed, you know, getting on the right tours, the radio, interviews, etc. Without it you're condemned to being a cult band. It has its advantages, I mean I don't have to fight my way through a load of photographers to go down to the shops. And I don't have to talk to accountants and gardeners. But sometimes I wish I had a bit more money, but that's life.

SPAZ: My favorite period of the Vibrators' recording career was actually the '80s and '90s because it seemed the band concentrated more on songcraft than being a Punk band. What do you remember about this time during the band's career? Great albums like *Fifth Amendment*, *Buzzin'*, *Hunting For You*, *Guilty* and so many others...

KNOX: Yes, one time when we were on Revolver Records the guy there Paul Birch suggested we record more rock kind of material, Punk was not a big deal at the time. But although we made some great records I felt we were in danger of going down a hole between rock and Punk rock. Neither-one-or-the-other so the fans would be disappointed and confused. I think it freed up the choice of material we recorded so we did some good stuff, but I don't think it was properly reflected in our record sales.

SPAZ: Punk's resurgence in the '90s has actually lasted a good 20 years longer than the original movement's lifespan. Do you listen to many of the new bands these days? Do you try to stay on top of current music, no matter the genre?

KNOX: I try and listen to lots of music, though unfortunately I don't seem to manage it most of the time. Recently I have been listening to Dubstep as someone at my publishing company suggested trying to do a Dubstep version of "Baby Baby". (I've probably lost all my fans now!) I can't get away from my own style but I did a Country album a couple of years ago (**KNOX and the Trailer Trash Orchestra**) which I really enjoyed. You only get one life and I like messing about with other genres. I write quite a wide spectrum of songs so it's

generally OK with me. I surprised myself with *On The Guest List* as I was still able to write the same sorts of aggressive songs I was doing when I was considerably younger, though of course many of the songs were written a while before.

SPAZ: Just like the old days, it seemed that the style and hype of Punk became more important than the music again. Did you see it as history repeating itself?

KNOX: I never worry about it. It's something going on out there in the world over which I have no control. It's just the way things go. I think Punk was such a strong style that it's influence could go on for a very long time.

SPAZ: In 1977, a lot of the press picked up on the violent overtones of the music and missed the point of the movement entirely. Do you think that this may have killed the scene before it had a chance to grow up?

KNOX: Maybe. It's difficult to say. My friend has a theory that the press used Punk to kill off Prog Rock, which might have some truth in it. So the press would have exaggerated Punk's violent side which quite possibly alienated a lot of people who might otherwise have got involved and listened to it. After all there are masses of what I call 'identikit' bands and songs in Punk, but there are also a lot of clever song writers who wouldn't initially have been recognized because the press liked to use this one-dimensional picture of a band and the music, you know Mohicans, leather jackets, Doc Martens, etc., so a lot of these people probably initially got glossed over. Also I sometimes think that Punk might have killed off some quite talented Prog Rock bands or other types of Pub Rock which might have actually been very good which was a shame. But I suppose that's progress.



SPAZ: What did Punk mean to Knox?

KNOX: It basically gave me the most exciting years of my life and I'm very grateful for accidentally being lucky enough to have been in it when it happened. Also I think you can use its philosophy in everyday life, you can recognize that things don't have to be perfect to be OK.

SPAZ: In the end, The Vibrators are just a great Rock 'n' Roll band. How do you want the band to be remembered?

KNOX: Well, as a good band doing good songs in an unpretentious manner. I quite often think we should have been more famous but who in a band doesn't think that!

SPAZ: Eddie has been the longest serving member of the band... from the very beginning even when you took a little time off in the late '70s/early '80s. Does it sometimes amaze you how long you've worked together?

KNOX: I suppose we're just very stubborn and carried on. Eddie's really good at the day-to-day running of the band and I just write the songs. I always thought we should have a manager but I suppose it's that Punk DIY ethos not to have one, so after the first one we never had another.

SPAZ: You've recently retired from touring with the band. Can you explain the reasons behind this decision? Does this make you a current Vibrator, an ex- Vibrator or a part-time Vibrator?

KNOX: I wanted to somehow do a bigger band with a manager and get a business machine behind it as I have a lot of quite good rock songs which aren't suitable for The Vibrators. I thought if I could get going and get on the radio I could maybe get into playing stadiums! (You've got to have a dream.) Unfortunately for me things took a bad turn and I got ill and that was that for the moment. I'm still dreaming though. I think I might concentrate more on songwriting for a bit as I sometimes now think I was actually a songwriter, but became a performer by default. As for The Vibrators I'll see how it goes. I like doing the songs and singing so that might very well continue for a few years, it's sort of down to them, they might want to stand on their own feet and not want me anymore. It's their call. I don't want to interfere. I suppose in that way I'm a part-time Vibrator. The band play very well without me. They got a great review when they recently played the big Punk festival here in the UK called Rebellion, so check them out when they come out there to the States.

SPAZ: What are some of the Vibrators songs you've written that you are most proud of...

KNOX: I like "Baby Baby", it feels like the sun's come out when we play it, or like a holiday. Now funnily enough if you listen to Justin Bieber doing an acoustic version of his song "As Long As You Love Me" it starts off really like "Baby Baby", and then he has this other song called "Baby" where he sings "Baby, baby, baby" so I've started wondering if say one of his parents was a big Vibrators' fan and he heard the song a lot when he was little? Or maybe his guitar player did? REM did a version of "Baby Baby" for their fan club which might come out in a box set they were talking about doing. I really like my song "My Stalker" (on the *On The Guest List* album) which has Eddie Spaghetti from the Supersuckers singing; plus "Every Day I Die A Little" (on the *Greatest Punk Hits* album). And I also like "Sleeping", and "Juice On", the electric chair song, which I thought would be a great song if they ever made *Deliverance 2*.

SPAZ: Are there any Vibrators songs that you'd like to erase from the band's catalog?

KNOX: Probably, but I think it's OK that people can see that you're just a fragile human being like everyone else and quite capable of messing up every now and again. You have to have a bit of a sense of humour about what you do. Though I have to say that as I'm not that much of a singer and don't always write OK words, so of course there are things I've done which make me cringe, but that's life...

SPAZ: When you went into the studio to re-record some of the band's older songs for *Greatest Punk Hits*, were you able to reconnect with some of the memories of recording the original versions?

KNOX: Probably, though like a lot of bands, you have these very real time constraints in the studio so you push on with recording and there's not really any time for reflection. If you stop and reflect there go the backing vocals or the tambourine. I'm always moved by

my opening guitar sound on the original recording of "Baby Baby", it's very evocative. Also the original version of any song, even if it was rubbish, is always the best version. It has this other thing added to it, the time and place it was made. The recording sort of carries that with it.

SPAZ: Is there a lot of unreleased Vibrators studio material that we'll be able to hear one day?

KNOX: There can't be much as we've probably exhausted it all. I think somewhere on a cassette I have what we called "The White Show" which we did at the Roundhouse in London one time. That was where John Ellis suddenly announced he was leaving the band. Also sometime I might put out an album of some of my Vibrators' demo's as I used to make fairly reasonable demo's with all the instruments on, almost like the finished tracks.

SPAZ: What's next for Knox?

KNOX: I'm always hoping for a break in music, and trying to make one. So far all that broke was me - but I'm sort of back starting to do stuff again. I've got lots of quite good songs demo'd up that I feel I must record soon..... plus of course I'm still doing a bit of painting. I've got 200 paintings on my site (www.knox76.com), so check them out! And I was vaguely thinking of doing a Ska album of Vibrators' songs, that sort of thing..... Plus **Charlie (Harper)** has been talking about making the next **Urban Dogs'** album, at the moment this one is planned to be noisy! Also the same company putting out Greatest Punk Hits (O-Rama) are going to be putting out my early 80's solo album **Plutonium Express**, that's great! One ambition I have is I'd love to do a version of "Baby Baby" with Slash on guitar, and have a mix done by Jason Nevins who did Run DMC's "It's Like That". I'm keeping my fingers crossed, you never know.

SPAZ: What are you currently spinning on your CD, DVD or record players?

KNOX: Like I said earlier I've been listening to some Dubstep. Also the last couple of days a little bit to **Oasis** and **Beady Eye** because **Liam Gallagher's** currently in the news. He's got a great voice, like when he sings the line "I'm a Rock 'n' Roll Star". He needs another song like that, but I don't know if he can get another song like that, or still sing like he did. I never really listened to Oasis except by accident at gigs. Also sadly I never really know what other Punk bands are doing as I'm pretty much out of the loop, and also I've no idea about the Top 10 or anything. At the moment I sort of live in my own little world where I fiddle about with my songs and do a bit of painting. Oh, and take our dog Chippy (a hilarious rescued Jack Russell) out for a walk.

Thanks to Knox
Special thanks to Bob Ardrey



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