

Music DVD Review: Lene Lovich *Live From New York At Studio 54*

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When punk rock came around in the mid to late '70s it was a shot in the arm for a means of expression that had become moribund due to complacency and commercial considerations. With corporations in control, the bottom line became more important than anything else, and the music reflected the conservative attitude that this engendered.

Punk brought with it the ethos that anybody could make a record and produce it without the need for a record label's involvement. Records and tapes were sold at concerts and through word-of-mouth publicity, groups developed followings. Some of the bigger labels began to take chances on the new acts; EMI signed the Sex Pistols, with disastrous results. The punk attitude and corporate music were not the best of matches, as their motivations for producing music didn't necessarily mesh.

However, punk's biggest effect was on the role of women in rock and roll. Up to that point, with a few exceptions, women had been restricted to playing either secondary roles to men in bands as back up singers and eye candy, or strumming a guitar and singing folk music. With punk coinciding with the burgeoning women's rights movement of the '70s the timing was right for women to be able to redefine their place in rock music. They no longer felt compelled to make themselves the objects of men's fantasies by dressing in skimpy clothing or singing pretty passive songs that weren't in anyway threatening to male egos. Cindy Lauper, Patti Smith, Chrissie Hyde, Siouxsie of Siouxsie and the Banshees, Nina Hagan, and even Madonna all redefined what a woman could do on stage and what was expected from her.



One of the first of these groundbreakers was also one of the most exciting and innovative performers to grace stages around Europe and later North America since the heyday of pre-World War II German cabaret. Pop music still hasn't recovered from the surprise of [Lene Lovich](#) bursting on to the music scene with her first single "Lucky Number" in the late

1970's. Her vocals were like nothing anybody had ever heard before, and she dressed like... like... well let's just say with an originality that's difficult to define.

Opportunities to see Lene perform are few and far between, and up until now there have been no taped performances available for sale. Thankfully that's all changed as [MVD Visual](#) has just released a DVD of a concert she gave in 1981. *Live From New York At Studio 54* was one of the first live concerts at the former notorious disco in New York, and I can't think of any performer who is still alive that more appropriate than Lene Lovich for kicking off that series.

For those of you like me who had only ever heard her perform until now, you'll be amazed at what a difference it makes when you see her as well as listen to her. Songs you thought you might have had some sort of grasp on take on more depth of meaning as she acts them out. She does more than just sing the songs, she enlivens them with full-scale performances a la musical theatre or opera, but with a damn site more theatricality than either of those mediums is usually capable of producing.

But unlike some of her contemporaries whose work verged towards performance art, Lene was most definitely a musical performer. She invests far too much energy into the musical side of her presentation to be considered anything else. While some might be diverted by her costume and her mannerisms on stage, her voice is what separates her from being just another punk performer.

The songs on *Live From New York At Studio 54* are some of those that she was most known for at the time. "New Toy," "Angels," "Home," and of course "Lucky Number" are all included on the disc, plus seven more songs. On each song she shows off the vocal pyrotechnics that made her famous. You've all seen the commercials that claim a certain automobile can accelerate from 0 – 60 miles per hour in a matter of less than five seconds or something similar right?

Well, Lene's voice can go from alto to E above high C in the blink of an eye or less. The awesome thing is that not once does she sound like she is straining or forcing her voice to perform these amazing hiccoughs in sound. There is something mesmerizing in watching her sing at those moments. She offers no clue physically that she is about to let her voice ascend the heavens, when all of a sudden she's opened her mouth the notes come pilling out.

The major theatrical element beyond her costume and makeup — her adornment on stage is more radical than her street wear — is her body language during the performance of each



song. Whoever filmed this performance did a great job of capturing her on stage activity; from extreme close ups of her face to wide-angle shots of the stage in order to provide a glimpse of her manic energy at work.

During the song "Angels" she takes a shot at the than just burgeoning New Wave movement's obsession with "Guardian Angels." Her take on angels watching over her, is that they are spying on us and she wishes they would just leave her alone. During the final deranged minutes of the song, she points out into the audience warning her listeners of the angels among them.

It's a brilliant piece of satire, and the theatrical elements of the song are indicative of her performance style. Lene has no hesitation about putting everything into her performance, as you can tell by watching any of the cuts on this DVD. Her willingness to let go of all inhibitions when she gets on stage — in marked contrast to so many performers, male and female — had always been discernable listening to her music. But seeing her perform songs that I thought I had known made it clear that audio recordings only give you the smallest indication of just how incredible a performer she truly is.

For this performance, Thomas Dolby joins her band as an additional keyboard player and augments the sound with washes of synthesizer that assist in developing the theatricality of the show. The rest of her band, while somewhat more restrained than Lene, still put their all into each song. They are incredibly tight, and as we find out from the one special feature film, take their rehearsal time very seriously. It's the attention to detail in practice that allows them to play with the abandon that we witness during the course of *Live From New York At Studio 54*.

The sound has been re mastered to 5.1-surround sound (ironically, I don't think it's Dolby sound) and considering it was filmed live in 1981 both the sound and the picture quality is wonderful. The filmmakers have even done some playing around with effects and apply some distortion to the images during each song, but always with enough restraint that it doesn't become a distraction.

If you've heard Lene Lovich in the past but have never seen her perform, then this disc will be a real treat. If you've never heard of her, let alone seen her perform, this will be an eye-opener of the first degree. *Live From New York At Studio 54* is an all around wonderful DVD of great music and astounding entertainment. You will not be disappointed.