

# A career of 'Pure Mania'

The Vibrators remain one of the few '77 punk acts still carrying on

By Martin Popoff

It's no surprise that nearly every punk rocker from the original class of '77 finds himself long retired, slumped over his punk rocking chair, reminiscing about being spit on in appreciation of his crude craft. Still, The Damned, The Buzzcocks and The Stranglers carry on, as do one of the misfit acts of the era, The Vibrators.

Indeed, the current Vibrators lineup is considerably legit, the band being a three-piece featuring original guitarist/vocalist/leader Knox, original drummer Eddie, and latter-era bassist Pete, as of recent, brandishing *Punk: The Early Years*, a novel cover versions CD, one that finds the band churning its workmanlike way through 20 punk classics, not to mention, Motorhead's "Vibrator!"

"The whole idea came from Brian Perera at Cleopatra Records," explains Knox. "Previously we had done quite a few covers for him, for a Metallica tribute album [and] an AC/DC one. He gave us a list of all the songs that he would like, and we looked at it and pretty well agreed with him; he knows our band well. We changed a couple of songs, and off we went. We recorded at our old bass player Pat Collier's studio, and we had Wayne Kramer sing the Dead Boys song, 'Sonic Reducer,' and he also played guitar as well. And we had Leonard Graves Phillips from The Dickies singing 'Vibrator.' He did a very good job as well, so we were very pleased to have both people on there."

It's all part of a career pattern that has seen the band amass a bewildering collection of albums over the years, many of them low-key compilations, live stuff, rarities, but lots of bona fide studio albums, as well. In essence, in that respect, the Vibrators have become a sister band to the U.K. Subs. Still, The Vibrators are best known for their *Pure Mania* debut in 1977, and *V2* from the following year, both on Epic, with only the debut seeing U.S. issue.

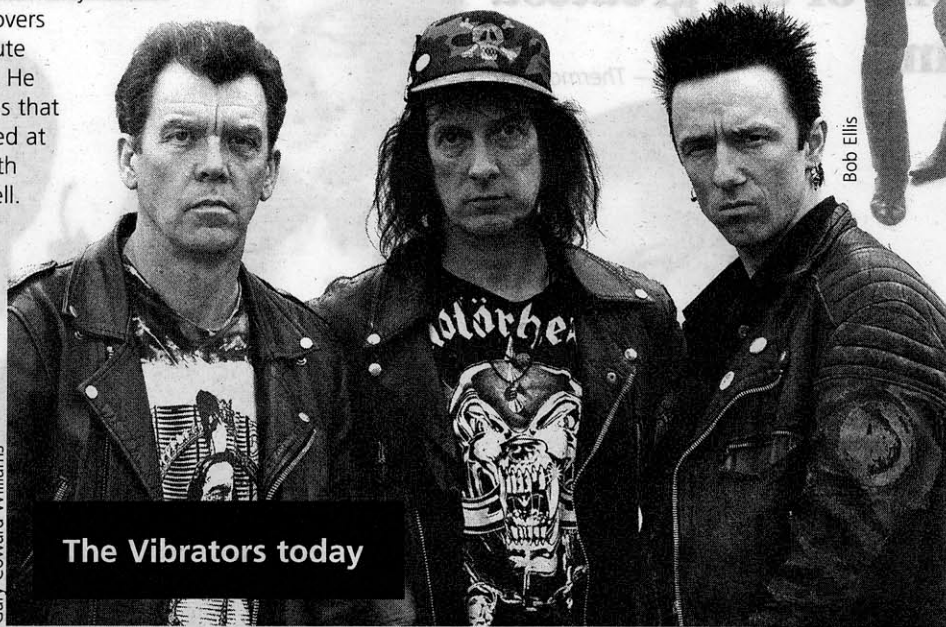
Still, the band was seen by some as somewhat inauthentic, maybe a bit old to be doing the pogo. The Stranglers got the same stick, and let's not forget, Joe Strummer was a pub rocker and Andy Summers, a hippie.

"Yeah, they said different things about different bands," acknowledges Knox, who said he was about 30 at the time. "But we were generally quite well-liked. I was playing in bands before and had quite a few songs that we would use later in The Vibrators. I had 'Whips and Furs,' which was called 'Dance to the Music.' I was doing that in bands up to three, four years before The Vibrators. We had a three-piece band called Lipstick, and about

'74, '75, we played with the 101ers, with Joe Strummer. His band got the better gig, because he was there about 10 minutes before us. So they got the best slot, Thursday, and we got relegated to playing on the Monday, playing every week. But basically, there wasn't any punk rock — we just were playing faster and faster, changed the name to The Vibrators, and then all of a sudden, it's punk rock and off you go (laughs).

"So yeah, we were a bit older, you see, and we could play," continues Knox.

"And in fact, when we played at the 100 Club Punk Festival (Sept. 20 and 21, 1976),



The Vibrators today



The Vibrators, circa 1977

anymore, because we're punk rock.' But in a way, it's punk rock to do them!"

In those early days, the band was playing most of the seminal *Pure Mania* album (Knox says much of the polished, Vic Maile-produced second album was cooked up in the studio) but also still dovetailed with covers.

"Well, we were doing Iggy Pop stuff, '1969' and 'No Fun,' also 'Saw Her Standing There,' Beatles, which was OK, because we were playing it really fast," says Knox. "And there was one song we started using, 'Interstellar Overdrive,' from the Pink Floyd, just a bit of it, and we would go into a very fast version of 'Day Tripper,' which we got from Hendrix

rather than the Beatles."

Along with fans spitting on the bands ("If you tried to do anything, usually it made it worse. And, of course, people in the bands would get seriously annoyed"), the pence pieces and the beer cans, Knox says the strangest thing ever thrown at the guys during a show was a cow's lung, adding that "... the spitting thing lasted a year or two probably. It was still around a bit in the early '80s, but then it sort of died out. Very, very occasionally, even today, somebody would spit, but it's extremely rare."

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the main thing that I always thought put punk on the map, we were asked to back Chris Spedding, because he was put on the bill without his knowledge. The promoter said, could we be Chris Spedding's backing band? Because I suppose out of all the bands, we had the repertoire; we knew those common sort of songs. And when he showed up to play, he showed us a few songs, but we had to just sort of do some pub rock songs. We were kind of OK guys so we just said OK (laughs). But thinking about it now, we should've said, 'Oh, we don't do that

Knox says it's time for another Vibrators studio album. He's got most of the songs written, and amusingly, at 62 years old (as of Sept. '07) with a bunch of touring always on the dance card, he's still got the stamina to make it happen.

"We might start doing it sort of summer, fall. We're quite busy, and Eddie is struggling with his divorce and whatnot. But I think a new album is in order, because we haven't done one proper in about five years. It's sort of on the radar — it's time." ●