CLEVELAND AND NORTHEAST OHIO’S OVERLOOKED HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERGROUND, PUNK, AND ALTERNATIVE MUSIC

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CLEVELAND AND NORTHEAST OHIO’S OVERLOOKED HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERGROUND, PUNK, AND ALTERNATIVE MUSIC

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Further elucidation of Northeast Ohio’s musical endeavors are necessary to expand upon the fact that it’s equally as vital as other metropolitan centers with fertile underground music scenes such as New York City and London from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s. Although both of those cities contained many prototypical punks and artists, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio shared rare, sheltered yet sophisticated, artistically supported and substantially influential musical underpinnings. And although there really wasn’t what one might call a “scene,” as in a substantial supportive alternative music community, there were many notable and important personalities that emerged and continue to this day to be important countercultural figures.

When speaking of the lack of proper elucidation of the Northeast Ohio scene, it is necessary to look to the fact that there are only a handful of well-written books on the Punk and counterculture movements that ever really gave Cleveland and Northeast Ohio its cultural due. Notably these books have come to light in the past 25 years or so: Please Kill Me by Legs McNeil, and From The Velvets To The Voidoids and Babylon’s Burning, both by Clinton Heylin. Only these three books and a handful of others can stand as a testament to what has been written about the early Cleveland and Northeast Ohio musical environment. Cleveland and Northeast Ohio have had written exposure in a variety of books, magazines and fanzines – homemade printed copy booklets Xeroxed in limited runs by fans; however, an investigation of the facts and people who participated in the early scene is in need of being further illuminated. Fully researching the subject,
examining many countless books, articles, websites, magazines and other ephemera, it is
apparent that Cleveland and Northeast Ohio has been neglected when academically
speaking about its historical music.
DEDICATION

This Master’s Thesis is dedicated to my parents and friend.

RIP:
Dr. Raphael Leon Poritsky (1929-2013) and Mary Constance Poritsky (1930-2011)
and Historian Robert Phillip Horstemeier (1947-2013)
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

When and where did the Punk Rock movement start? Did it begin in the Pacific Northwest circa 1960, with the Garage Punk groups The Sonics, The Wailers and The Kingsmen, or in NYC in 1964 with the avant garde groups The Velvets, Fugs and Holy Modal Rounders? At least in the United States, Underground music tended to be more about visual art, music, free expression and the desire to be different. In Britain and the UK, Punk/Underground/Alternative music was much more about class system fragmentation, where sociopolitical issues and societal differentiation occurred. The Rock and Roll “Golden Age,” circa 1954 to 1959, was a U.S. phenomenon; the U.K. did not have prototypical Rockers from which to build a foundation. Lonnie Donegan was an exception as the father of British Skiffle music, a British musical genre similar to Rockabilly. Tommy Steele, Billy Fury, Cliff Richard, The Shadows, and Johnny Kidd and The Pirates were examples of English proto-typical Rock musicians after the start of Rock and Roll in the USA.

Many African-American artists such as Little Richard, Fats Domino, Bo Diddley, and Chuck Berry, as well as white American rockers like Gene Vincent and Bill Haley, found a home in England and Europe many years after their career peaks in the United States, post 1950’s. However, England had its own proto-Punks, such as The Who, The
Deviants, The Crazy World of Arthur Brown and Screaming Lord Sutch later pub rockers such as Graham Parker, Dr. Feelgood, Kilborn, and the Highroads. Yet the UK must look to a visit by the US group the Ramones on July 4, 1976 at the Roundhouse in London as the show that triggered the U.K. Punk music scene. The Sex Pistols, the Damned and the nascent Clash had either already formed or were starting to gain popularity in that early London scene. The seeds of the UK Punk scene were initiated namely by Sex Pistols manager, clothier and provocateur, Malcolm McLaren, who took a great deal of inspiration from New York City Punk provocateurs, the New York Dolls, whom he briefly managed for a time.

The goal of this study is solely to create an historical record of the unique, important, vital, sophisticated and often-underappreciated music, culture and art scene of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio during the mid to late 20th century. Though there have been a number of books, magazine articles, movies and popular cultural writing about Northeast Ohio, there needs to be further discovery of this area’s unheralded underground musical and artistic influences. It is necessary to recognize the importance of a number of these artistic, visionary individuals to further show their influence over subsequent decades for, up to now, there has been scant illumination of these people.

Rock and Roll

WHK Radio Disc Jockey Alan Freed, along with Leo Mintz, owner of the music store Record Rendezvous, had coined or, more accurately, borrowed and popularized the name “Rock ‘n Roll,” which was essentially a 1920’s jazz term or euphemism for sex.
Record Rendezvous, or “The Vouz” as it later became nicknamed, was the starting point for the Rock and Roll Movement and where the term was most likely coined. Many future Cleveland proto-punks had their first music business jobs there in the 1970s and early 1980s. Cleveland and Northeast Ohio’s Rock and Roll scene from this era is well documented. One of the more important reasons that Cleveland got the Rock ‘n Roll Hall of Fame and Museum was the fact that Alan Freed had staged the first Rock ‘n Roll concert in history with the Moon Dog Coronation Ball at the Cleveland Arena on March 21, 1952. This concert ended in a riot due to the fact that the Cleveland Arena was oversold by 7,500 tickets, forever giving Rock and Roll a teenage-delinquent reputation.

Additionally, Elvis performed his first shows above the Mason Dixon line in Brooklyn, Ohio, a Cleveland suburb, thus furthering its reputation as a rocking, progressive city. Cleveland also featured many fine venues that hosted folk groups from the late 1950s. Motown and Rhythm and Blues artists showcased at Leo’s Casino, and many contemporary jazz groups performed at the Smiling Dog Saloon on the near West side.

By mid-century, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio was a growing, culturally blue-collar location. Cleveland and its northern suburbs became an enormous community of immigrants. At one point, Cleveland had the second largest population of Hungarians this side of Budapest. Northeast Ohio featured something else as well – something not necessarily afforded to other industrialized cities. Throughout the 1950s, Northeast Ohio was at the leading focus point of art, music and culture. Centered along the Great Lakes, its geographic location provided a substantial, radio-supported music market between
New York, Chicago and points in between. Cleveland also featured one of the oldest and most historic theater districts other than Broadway.

By the early 1960s, Cleveland was the seventh largest city in North America. The blue-collar area that supported the industrialized cities of the Northeast (including Chicago, Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and points in between) served as a performance destination for many artists who were working in the Beat, Folk, and the beginnings of the social protest and later counter-culture scenes. Although Cleveland and Northeast Ohio were considered “blue-collar,” there was tremendous support for the arts, music, theater and the general sophistication not necessarily ascribed to the industrialized north.
CHAPTER II
BEGININGS

Music, Art, Cultural Heritage and Social Upheaval

A good portion of the Cleveland and Northeast Ohio countercultural movement has a fair amount of documented publicity. During the better part of the early 1960s, there was a huge increase in both the numbers of people and in the social concerns of the public at large. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Vietnam War, and the many social-political riots in northern industrial cities, like Detroit and Cleveland, created a turbulent political atmosphere that was running concurrently with an ever-changing public at large.

Where the late 1950s were almost peaceful, even given the circumstances of the Cold War, the burgeoning counterculture along with the social upheaval was beginning to be seen in cities, college campuses and households by mid-decade of the 1960s. Soon the drug culture, women’s liberation, the folk music movement, free expressionism and experimental music would be filling the nascent FM, and even AM radio stations, and the cross-cultural influence of television.

The roots of Punk rock stretch back to 1960: the Garage Rock era, so named for the custom of forming and playing in residential garages. In the Pacific Northwest, there were such bands as The Sonics, whose keyboard-driven, saxophone squalling, voice-
shredding music was primal, tribal and atavistic in nature. Other bands from that location included The Wailers and The Kingsmen, whose lewd version and subsequent recording of Richard Berry’s song *Louie Louie* would eventually be investigated by the FCC: it was deemed pornographic in nature because no one could understand the singer’s interpretation of the lyrical content.

Though the term “Rock and Roll” was popularized in the 1950s, Jazz men and Beatniks accepted and assimilated it into their language. Soon the jazz musician euphemisms that evolved from the 1950’s expressions like “hipster” or “cool cat” were replaced with the name “hippie.” By the mid-60s, everything was “hippie,” or to quote Ed Sanders, “We went from being called ‘you damned, dirty Beatniks’ to ‘Hey, you damned, dirty Hippies.’”

By mid-decade, the beginnings of other prototypical Punk rock groups were also forming in the Midwest starting in New York City with the likes of the dark, classically trained and artistically diverse Velvet Underground, former beatniks-turned-hippie poets The Fugs, and the folk-laden, bluegrass-loving Holy Modal Rounders. College towns like Ann Arbor hailed the original simplicity of the Stooges and the sociopolitical and guitar power-chord propelled affectation of The MC5. And Detroit, with art rock and proto-Glitter rock tendencies of the Alice Cooper Band, would also contribute to this musical genre, a trend that eventually became known as proto-Punk.

The race riots of the 1960s created great consternation and enormous social upheaval in the inner-city suburbs of Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and other industrialized northern cities. This caused a great “white flight” of young upwardly mobile families to move from the inner cities to the outlying suburbs leaving large portions of barren,
dilapidated neighborhoods and the beginnings of urban decay that would last for more than a generation.\textsuperscript{8} A giant hole was created, essentially turning parts of the inner city into virtual ghost towns. Adding to this misery was the movement of the industrialized substructure of the city, namely the production of steel moving primarily from the towns of Buffalo, Detroit, Pittsburg and Cleveland, the so called “rust belt,” to the Asian subcontinent. The North Coast was in decline.

Turbulence at the Close of a Decade

As the decade wore on, there were many signs that the turbulent years were coming to a close. “The damn dirty hippie” had moved from the east and west coasts and into the Midwest. Middle America now had its “longhairs,” a name given to those in the post-Beatles era, who wore their hair long, just past their ears.\textsuperscript{9}

During the 1960s, Cleveland and all of Northeast Ohio was a unique music community. There were a number of original musical groups that performed regularly at high schools and teenage clubs that existed for the sole purpose of entertaining under-aged youth. One of these groups was the Mods, who later became the Choir and after that, the Raspberries. The Mods were much more influenced by the early Who, The Kinks, and others of the British Invasion, and less by bands like the Velvets. The Mods wrote songs that were very short, sharp, three-minute pieces that utilized the songwriting techniques of the early British post-Beatles bands. There were others, too, such as local legends The Outsiders featuring singer Sonny Geraci. And the Rhythm and Blues rock of Bocky and the Visions performed teen dance nights at local high schools and other venues around town.\textsuperscript{10} There were also a number of pre-Punk proto-psychedelic bands, such as Purple Image, who came from the ghettos of East 105\textsuperscript{th} Street and Superior
Avenues on Cleveland’s east side, contemporaries of George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic from Plainfield N.J and later Detroit. Purple Image’s name was derived from a type of LSD or Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, a powerful psychedelic drug. Blending the music of early Rhythm and Blues, the funk of Cincinnati’s James Brown, and the hard melodic sound of Sly and the Family Stone gave Purple Image a unique and very experimental sound.¹¹

There were many symptoms that caused the death of the 1960’s culture. The “Camelot” years of the JFK administration seemed almost utopian in nature compared to the years following his assassination.¹² The country experienced much turbulence with the escalation of the Vietnam War, the social upheaval caused by the fight for racial equality, and the struggle for the newly emerging socioeconomic strata. The cultural decline of the decade began on August 9th and 10th, 1969 with the Tate-La Bianca murders in Los Angeles, which forced many to believe that the growing counterculture was becoming untenable. Barely a week later came the decade-defining Woodstock Music and Arts Festival, which was seen by many as a positive experience.¹³ To the contrary, on December 6th another cultural tragedy occurred when Meredith Hunter, a young black spectator at the Altamont Speedway Free Music Festival in California, was beaten to death by The Rolling Stones’ poorly chosen hired security guards, the Hell’s Angels, causing many musicians and promoters to reconsider how to organize and perform social functions. Just a few months later came the dissolution of the Beatles in April of 1970. Soon thereafter were the protests and shootings at Kent State University that resulted in the deaths of four students on May 4, 1970, after President Nixon invaded Cambodia. The 1960s were over.
The deaths of the four students on the Kent State campus had an enormous and
profound effect on everyone. Three undergraduate students who happened to be in
attendance that day were Chrissie Hynde, later of The Pretenders, and Mark
Mothersbaugh and Jerry Casale, later of the band Devo. The Kent State shootings
provided a deeply sociopolitical impact on the artistic careers of the aforementioned
individuals.

In the early 1970s, Kent had a particularly substantial music community
supporting a number of innovative musical acts and bands. On any given weekend night,
one could walk down Water Street and witness a pre-fame James Gang, featuring future
Eagles member Joe Walsh. Glass Harp and the young Raspberries were there, too. There
were other important players who would soon be joining the workforce as performers.
Robert Kidney of the Numbers Band (15-60-75), a young Michael Purkhiser of The
Action, as well as a student named Chris Butler whose band, The Waitresses, were going
to one day soon write hits of their own.

Nearby in the city of Akron, garages began to rumble with the grinding,
“motorik” drumming of the industrial North. Aside from the band Devo, the first
sounds began to emanate from bands such as the Bizzaros, Tin Huey, and Teacher’s Pet.
Many members of these seminal bands had walked the halls of Firestone and Cuyahoga
Falls High Schools adding their names to the list of do-it-yourself artists and musicians.
A new musical revolution was underway; of course, no one knew what to call it yet.

“Glitter Rock,” primarily a British music genre, began to permeate the US
televisions and radios with the visually, effeminately dressed male leads wearing shiny,
flowery clothing, high-heeled platform boots, and playing loud power-chord guitar rock.
As early as 1971, Glitter Rock was at its apex in the United Kingdom with such groups as The Sweet, T-Rex, Gary Glitter and Slade. The initial waves of new musical origins in Northeast Ohio emerged. The non-commercial, experimental music void that existed in Northeast Ohio at the time began to be filled by musical visionaries who carried out their form of musical malfeasance in dank, dirty basements, garages, and practice spaces leased from willing, sympathetic landlords.

The Origins of Punk

The main argument supporting further elucidation of Northeast Ohio’s musical climate throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s is that it was equally as vital as other metropolitan centers with fertile underground music activity such as New York City and London. Although both of those cities had many prototypical punks and artists in residence, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio shared rare, sheltered yet sophisticated, artistically supported and influential musical underpinnings. And although there really wasn’t a substantially supported underground music community, or “scene,” there were many notable and important personalities that emerged and continued to be important countercultural figures.

When speaking of the lack of a substantial Northeast Ohio underground music community, it is necessary to look to the fact that only a handful of well-written books on the Punk and counterculture movements that gave Cleveland and Northeast Ohio recognition. Notably these books were written in the past 25 years. Please Kill Me by Legs McNeil, and From The Velvets To The Voidoids and Babylon’s Burning, both by Clinton Heylin. These three books and a handful of others stand as a testament to what was written about the early Cleveland and Northeast Ohio musical environment.
Cleveland and Northeast Ohio received minor exposure in a variety of books, magazines and fanzines, homemade printed copy booklets Xeroxed in small series by fans. However, a full investigation is needed. Fully researching the subject, examining many countless books, articles, websites, magazines and other ephemera, it becomes readily apparent that this geographical vicinity was neglected when discussing its historical contributions. Along with New York and London, Northeast Ohio was, in fact, one of the first locations where the Punk rock phenomenon was created.

The Forbearers of Punk

The term “punk” was an old prison term for a male “mark” or prostitute and was first used in lyrical song form as early as 1967 by Frank Zappa while describing the hippie community. It was used in print by Ed Sanders of the Fugs as early as 1970 when describing his solo album *Sander’s Truckstop*. Writer and archivist Lenny Kaye, later of the Patti Smith group, used it to describe early forms of 1960’s garage bands as “Punk” on his 1972 compilation album *Nuggets.*

Punk Rock grew out of the Garage Rock/proto-Punk/post-Beatles 1960s landscape of the 1970s in New York, London, Cleveland, Northeast Ohio and other locales worldwide. A restless expansion of the classic songwriting techniques employed by bands like The Sonics, The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, The Who and many others, the genre itself soon became a catch phrase name for almost all music that was not mainstream.

Punk music employed short, fast, loud, often amateurish and technically simplistic song structures for both playing and performing. Vocally, any and all styles, mannerisms and expressions were accepted, from the spoken word to baritone singing or
soprano shouts, cheering and sing-a-longs, or drunken bellowing to whispers. The songs were usually sociopolitical featuring anthemic lyrical content. They often spoke of alienation and the sameness or wonderment about the human condition. Musical training often didn’t matter; anyone who wanted to try was encouraged. Punk was based on attitude rather than what others thought about a person’s abilities. It was a chance for even the most unskilled performers to express themselves in musical terms. Most bands of the era featured two electric guitars, bass and drums with occasional keyboard or other instruments, such as trumpets, saxophones, trombones or flutes, used for artistic purposes. Later there were as many experimental groups with as many differing instrumental combinations as there were musical subgenres that emerged as the years progressed.

What punks wore often caused them to be deemed as outcasts and they were often treated as social pariah. Many punks were anti-social in nature and chose to buy vintage clothing at such places at Goodwill, the Salvation Army and church sales, as the clothes that earlier generations shed were now deemed “hip” or “cool” compared to what prep school students were wearing at the time.

The nightclub scene of the early 1970s in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio was comprised of many small, family-owned bars along with a smaller number of downscale nightclubs where local musicians could play original music. Most of the original music and the musicians who created it were relegated to small coffee houses and a handful of bars. In Northeast Ohio there were a number of local bands that competed for opening show spots for the larger national groups that were working professionally and touring the country at the time. But the majority of original underground music acts worked hard
for the venues that were available. Musicians were forced to find their own places to perform. However, this allowed the musicians to work on their craft and hone their skills. If one happened to be in a “cover band,” a band that played material written by other groups and songwriters, one could get work, pay rent, and actually make a living. Prospects were much better for securing employment as a cover band because original music did not usually draw as large of an audience. Unknown original music versus cover material was often a lost cause; cover material was a known quantity that guaranteed a larger audience draw.

In addition, the local press and regionally printed commercial magazines did little to promote the original music community at large. For the most part, original music fans read Rolling Stone, Creem, Crawdaddy and a handful of other notable magazines such as Who Put The Bomp, Rock Scene and later, Trouser Press. In Northeast Ohio there were regional magazines such as Cleveland After Dark, The Burning River Oracle, Great Swamp Erie da da Boom and Scene, later was Exit, Next and Zeppelin, but other than an occasional paragraph in the form of a biography, none of these magazines made the emerging underground or the local music scene a priority when it came to exposing this media to the public.

As for radio, FM expanded its range in the early years of the 1970s as AM radio waned due to its “Top 40” format. FM represented a shift to the expansive LP (long player) album format. No longer were DJs restricted to playing a three-minute pop song when they were able to play an entire side of the latest Progressive rock LP. This resulted in little or no exposure being given to local Rock and Roll groups who were trying to
become successful, get their songs radio airplay, and receive publicity that only radio provided.

Cleveland had three proto-Punk bands in the early 1970s: the electric eels, Mirrors, and Rocket from the Tombs. A more disparate collection of eccentric, unique and anti-social groups was unlikely nor were three more disparate musical entities. The three gentlemen of the electric eels, whose use of lower case for their name was inspired by poet e e cummings, used everything from sheet metal to lawnmowers for percussive purposes. They developed the term “art terrorism,” which was their interpretation of breaking the “fourth wall” of performance, a theatrical concept pertaining to the imaginary “wall” between the performer and the audience versus the three physical walls of the performance space. When a performer speaks to or acknowledges the audience, he “breaks the fourth wall.” The eel’s required audience involvement often bordered on physical abuse. Their atonal sound of guitar, keyboard and clarinet successfully cleared the nightclubs of patrons who didn’t see their art as functional. Shocking audiences was a goal but resulted, at such places as the Viking Saloon, in only four or five lifetime performances, depending on who was asked.\textsuperscript{18,19} They dissolved the group after relocating to Columbus, Ohio, deeming living in Cleveland unsafe due to threats of violence against them from various community members.

The Mirrors and their leader, Jamie Klimek, shared an affinity for the more lyrical melancholy songwriting styles of Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground. Their two-guitar, bass and drums arrangement often played colorful, original material featuring multi-layered, dual-guitar interplay with a counterpoint of moody Velvet’s songs. The
Mirrors broke up in mid-1975 when Jamie Klimek joined latent Mirrors keyboardist Paul Marotta in his newly formed group The Styrenes.

Rocket from the Tombs, on the other hand, tended to exhibit more of a hard-edged, guitar-driven sound with louder and more experimental influences from progressive British rockers like Hawkwind, or the similarly catchy wit and song writing skills of New York City contemporaries and Punk rock originators The New York Dolls. Rocket from the Tombs were an extremely diverse group of people who came from many different societal, familial and ethno-musicological backgrounds. Their influential approach was progressive music in all forms. They were very future-oriented.

These groups all had important proto-Punk, Punk, Beat, hippie, psychedelic, experimental, and hard-rock influences such as Blue Cheer, Love, the Alice Cooper Band, and even the Rockabilly music of the late 1950s rocker Eddie Cochran. But significantly none of these groups were accepted in the local music communities from which they came. In fact, they were despised by the more commercial or popular music-loving community and never praised during their lifetimes. That is why it can be said there was not a scene but a small, communal collection of forward thinking musicians, artists and poets who envisioned a future of their own.

There was no alternative for all of the early underground bands in Northeast Ohio but to find places to perform. The electric eels turned to the Viking Saloon at Cleveland State University. Devo turned to JB’s on Water Street, The Crypt in Kent, or the Rathskellar at the Kent State Student Union. The Mirrors also played at the Viking Saloon as well as high school auditoriums and a handful of other venues that featured original music.
All three Cleveland bands - the Mirrors, Rocket from the Tombs, and the electric eels - performed one show together at the Viking Saloon on December 22, 1974, known as Special Extermination Night, the only time all three bands shared a stage. Not long after, the three bands dispersed and wererediscovered later by musicologists. Peter Laughner of Rocket from the Tombs was a close friend with members of the New York City band Television. He secured two, live, back-to-back shows for Rocket from the Tombs, performing before Television at the Piccadilly Penthouse on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland. These shows on July 24th and 25th, 1975 are two of the most important performances in the annals of Cleveland rock history. Soon afterwards, Rocket from the Tombs disbanded. The band split into two different factions - Peter Laughner and David Thomas went in one direction with their band Pere Ubu, while Eugene “Cheetah Chrome” O’Connor and drummer Johnny “Blitz” Madansky joined Girard, Ohio’s Steve “Stiv” Bator to form Frankenstein. Shortly thereafter the men of Frankenstein renamed themselves the Dead Boys.

The First Wave of Punk

By the mid-1970s, Cleveland was competing with New York and London as potent starting point of original underground music, albeit a small one - namely the first movement of Punk. By 1975, original bands around the city of Cleveland and in Northeast Ohio started releasing their own records. The electric eels recorded their unique single, *Cyclotron b/w Agitated*, officially released in 1978 on Rough Trade Records in the U.K. Akron’s Nick Nicolas, founder of Clone Records, used his label as a vehicle for his band, The Bizzaros, along with Tin Huey and The Waitresses’ 45-RPM
singles, gaining exposure internationally and garnering the attention of professional record labels.

Devo, an original, primitive, pioneering, synthesizer-using, electronic music-loving group of five Akron natives with an expansive musical worldview later became influential in the “New Wave” and Punk music community, recorded and released its own music on its label imprint, Booji Boy Records. Devo was also one of the first bands to sign a professional record contract, with Stiff Records, a small, independent label in London where they released several singles and 7” inch extended play records or “EPs.”

In Cleveland, Pere Ubu formed their own label, Hearthan Record label, and released 45-RPM singles by Pere Ubu, Mirrors, and the Numbers Band (15-60-75). There was also a group of Clevelanders known as the Polystyrene Jazz Band, led by the talented multi-instrumentalist Paul Marotta, who performed with both the eels and the Mirrors. On their own Mustard Record label, they released the influential single, Drano In Your Veins. Given the time frame, this was an exceptionally sophisticated release in the Punk catalog, employing guitar effects-pedals for sound manipulation, choral vocal effects, and very effective minimalist eight-track studio self-production. At this period in history, these techniques were new and innovative among non-professional musicians.

At the same time there was an enormous exodus of Northeast Ohioans moving from the “Buckeye” state to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, as there were more opportunities available to play original music. The Waitresses, Jim Jarmusch, Robert Quine, Tim Wright, future Bush Tetras members Cynthia Sley and Laura Kennedy, and many other musicians made multiple trips to New York City, ultimately settling there. The Dead Boys did not relocate, but instead made regular trips to New York City.
Media Dissemination

In the mid-70s there were only three channels of black and white television and a handful of popular AM-FM radio stations. Around 1975-1977, many Ohioans’ first exposure to Punk and original underground music came from college radio stations and trips to record shops and area nightclubs. The awareness of this music came from looking through the racks upon racks of vinyl LPs in the retail music stores that existed throughout the decade.

There were a number of important smaller independent record stores that played large roles in introducing the new sounds from across the ocean, the East Coast, as well as from Northeast Ohio garages. Bob Pfeiffer of the band The Human Switchboard, along with his other band members, Myrna Macarian and Ron Metz, established a small record store in Kent, Ohio in 1976 off of Water Street known as the Kent Record Exchange.23 Here a record buyer might look through the racks of independently released records, freshly imported Punk and New Wave records from England, and the latest releases from rock bands who were not mainstream.

Also, the Kent Community Store was an important part of the musical community. There a person might find records from all genres of the musical spectrum – from copies of *East-West* by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band to the first Ramones album. No record cost over five dollars, even those that were brand new and still sealed. However, with a walk over to the import bin and a few more dollars, a record buyer could find a copy of Ultravox’s *Ha Ha Ha* and other obscure releases that appeared week after week.
In 1977, along Cedar Road in the Fairmount Cedar section of Cleveland Heights, stood a very important independent record store that helped facilitate the exposure of the Punk music genre. Owner Johnny Dromette was an intelligent man. He spent the 1950s and 1960s monitoring the growing counterculture movement. Dromette was an adept businessman who followed the initial first waves of the US, UK and the world Punk scenes even before there was acknowledgment of the genre. The Drome record store, as it became known, was a neighborhood gathering spot for local punks and the record buying public to discover the latest sounds coming from around the globe.

Dromette became instrumental in discovering new and local talent and even started a small independent record label, Drome Records, which furthered the growth of the local original music community. One of his more important musical recruits was a group of tough, teenaged street kids named The Pagans. The lead singer of the band was a smart young man with an enquiring mind by the name of Michael Hudson, and soon The Pagans were renown in the small Punk music community.

Along with the local college radio stations, “fanzines” and magazines, these record stores offered the public a popular musical education. This was how and where information was disseminated in the mid-1970s.

Garage Bands

After the Beatles’ appearance on the Ed Sullivan show, millions of teenagers practiced Rock ‘n Roll in their parents’ garages. By the mid to late 1970s, the same activity also took place in living rooms and basements across the country. The hippie that
had come of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s was replaced by the bored teenagers of the next generation. By the late 1970s there were many new groups emerging from musical cities such as London, New York, Boston, Washington DC, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, LA, and of course, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. The revival of the “garage band” was starting.

Summary

In the United States, the 1950s was consumed with the Cold War and Ultra Conservatism, burgeoning post-war youth culture and the birth of Rock and Roll. The 1960s was concerned with social injustice, the fight for equality and peace, and the expansion of the mind and body. In the 1970s, teenagers from all over the United States were becoming increasingly disinterested in Soft Rock, acoustically based singer-songwriter music format dominating the AM radio stations. Radio formatting that influenced the early 1970s with AM artists The Carpenters, BJ Thomas, and bands like Bread, progressed into a more experimental radio format with FM that allowed DJs to expand playlists and introduce new unknown bands. Transitioning from three-minute pop songs to much longer compositions, playing sides of an entire album, or featuring 20-minute guitar solos, often the music became over-wrought by musicians incorporating styles that seemed improbable and unacceptable to popular tastes such as assimilating classical music, or nursery rhymes as lyrical content.

Features of Psychedelic music with its drug induced, sound-effect laden, distorted guitar and changing time signatures morphed into louder, hard rock. Glitter Rock with its primal drumming, shouted choruses and simplistic qualities in lyrical form became AOR: album-oriented rock, an industry description of radio formatting at the time.
Experimental progressive music became increasingly convoluted by its own attempts at serious classical musical activities. Hard Rock bands like Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Roxy Music, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and Yes, were competing for radio airplay with groups like Boston, Kansas, and Foreigner. The youth of the 1970s had very few options musically other than their own imaginations in mid-America. In a quest for discovery, many young people looked in their own backyards to find like-minded individuals to help them start a new musical revolution to help them begin again.
CHAPTER III
BACK STORY

It is important to acknowledge that all of Northeast Ohio, including Cleveland, Akron and Kent, had a large quantity of musical and artistic talents concentrated in the area. There were many talented actors, writers, musicians, dancers and performers from all walks of life. A number of important but lesser-known people from different disciplines who went on to influence subsequent generations are explored in this chapter.

Other better known, Northeast Ohio natives representing the era include musicians Screaming Jay Hawkins, The O’Jays, Eddie Levert, Henry Mancini, and Bobby Womack; thespians Dorothy Dandridge, Bob Hope, Paul Newman, Tim Conway, Martin Mull, Terri Garr, Carole Kane, Debra Winger and Drew Carey; poet Langston Hughes; comic book artists Harvey Pekar, Superman creators Joe Shuster and Jerry Seigel, and author Harlan Ellison.

Poet Hart Crane and Michael Hudson

Throughout the 1920s, Cleveland poet Hart Crane wrote a number of important literary works that became very influential. Crane, considered a difficult poet due to his abstract, dense, verbose and often-complex poetry, was the son of Lifesavers Candy magnate Clarence Crane. Between stints in New York, Paris, Mexico and Cleveland, Hart Crane worked at his father’s candy company and as an occasional reporter at the Plain2
Dealer. During these trips to the East Coast and back to Cleveland, Crane created a number of vital poetic and lyrical works that went on to influence T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore and e e cummings. After getting a number of his poems successfully published, Crane relocated to Brooklyn Heights, NY, where his life depended on the charity of others, an occasional job, and the kindness of friends who supported his work. It was during this time that he published one of his more important works, *The Bridge*, about the Brooklyn Bridge.

Crane, like many artists of his generation, was a troubled man. Crain suffered from depression and great anxiety due to his homosexuality. A number of his works were written about love interests and the multifaceted complexities of interpersonal relationships. Towards the end of his life in 1932, Crane had a heterosexual affair with a colleague’s wife after she divorced her husband. Experiencing much depression, alienation, and confusion over his continued homosexuality, Crane despaired. On the return trip home to New York from Mexico on the steamship *Orizaba*, Crane was badly beaten after propositioning a male crewmember. Crane subsequently took his own life by jumping into the Gulf of Mexico. There is a tombstone next to his father’s in Garrettsville, Ohio that reads, “Hart Crane- American Poet- Lost At Sea.”

During his stay in Cleveland, Crane lived in a house just off of East 115th Street in University Circle. One of his working projects was a short-lived local journal he published called *The Pagan*, which was essentially an outreach of his poetry and other literary works. By the late 1970s, Crane was almost a forgotten figure among the literary community of the day. But, following his death, there were a number of nascent Cleveland punk rockers living in Crain’s dilapidated house on East 115th Street. One of
these punk rockers was not only being influenced by Crane’s legendary works but was also learning how to make poetry out of Punk Rock: a teenaged Michael Hudson. Hudson was an aspiring writer, punk rock singer, and he was familiar with Crane’s works. He chose to name his band, The Pagans, after Crane’s journal.

Radio Madman - Pete “Mad Daddy” Myers

On June 26, 1959, Pete “Mad Daddy” Myers, Cleveland radio Disc Jockey, television personality and entertainer, said “good-bye” from his last DJ Show at WHK. As this chapter of Myer’s professional life concluded, he was not aware that he had inspired an entirely new generation of musicians, artists and contemporary thinkers. Previous DJ Alan Freed introduced the Rock and Roll phenomena just a few years before, leaving for a better opportunity only one year after Myers replaced him as Rock DJ in Cleveland. Myers succeeded in opening the minds of the youth of Northeast Ohio to a much more extreme, expansive musical universe.

Parents in the 1950s were worried about their children listening to “race” music records, later called “Rhythm and Blues” or “R&B,” that had been recorded by black or African—American artists. Many parents born before World War II saw Rock and Roll as merely a fad that would eventually go away. In 1959, Mad Daddy, who became a cultural icon during his short-lived radio show in Cleveland, was an advocate for the youth of the day. He attempted to demonstrate to parents that that they were incorrect about Rock and Roll being deemed as degenerate music.

Meyers was one of the first northern, white, fast-talking DJs in North America. No one was even competitively close to Myers at the time in regards to absurd behavior. Mad Daddy was not someone of whom parents approved. Young people during the era
listened to Mad Daddy on a small AM radio tucked under their pillow at night so their parents could not hear the din of Myer’s radio show sound effects such as a bubbling cauldron, dubbed-in screams, yells, and other inappropriate noises. Parents disapproved of the sexually suggestive records and absurd speaking tone of this unique DJ. Myer’s mix of sound effects, insane rhyming, rhythmic banter (pre-dating the Hip Hop era and Rap by 20 years), and use of copious amounts of echo and reverb, set him apart from his many staid contemporaries. For the youth of the generation, he was an icon representing the rebellious side of Rock and Roll.

A great deal of Myer’s repertoire was purloined from novelty hits of the 1950’s Rhythm and Blues records from biracial groups such as the Cleftones, street corner “doo-wop” and the writing of Doc Pomus, Lieber and Stoller, and the teenaged Phil Spector. Myers became problematic for the administrators at WHK. During his tenure there, he upset many and caused great consternation amongst the community. On one of his particularly memorable shows, he locked himself into the radio booth for 24 hours and continued to play the same song over and over again. Myers dismissal from WHK came after he uttered a rather profane version of a Mother Goose poem. Little did he know at the time, but he would have a profound effect on the youth and rebellious spirits that were within his listening range, an effect that continues to the present.

As “Mad Daddy” left for New York City and the radio station WINS in the middle of 1959, he did not know that the giddy, slaphappy, madman persona that garnered him a huge following in Northeast Ohio had lower prospects in New York. Northeast Ohioans embraced his style; New York City was a much tougher music
market, more difficult for him to impress. Reaching creative exhaustion and feeling that his job prospects were very limited, Myers took his own life in 1964.27

The Ghoul of Cool - Ghoulardi

“Mad Daddy” inspired another creative-type and freethinker, Ernie “Ghoulardi” Anderson. Ernie Anderson was an unusually unconventional fellow DJ at WHK and also a good friend of “Mad Daddy” Myers. Bored and able to see a future as a horror movie show host, a position Myers had temporarily held for a brief period of time, Anderson decided it was time to take his hip Beatnik rapid speech and turn it into a character that inevitably influenced a generation of Northeast Ohioans.28

In 1963, Anderson introduced N.E. Ohioans to a countercultural figure whose intent was making mischief and mayhem. Anderson adapted his 1950s “cool lingo” to the young listeners throughout the region, although he was a number of years older than the average teenage radio listener. “Mad Daddy” opened the door for Ghoulardi to enter, utilizing his creativity and executing his ideas into the musical and visual display that became WJW TV’s “Friday Night Shock Theater.” “Stay Sick,” “Turn Blue,” and “Purple Knif,” were three of his slogans that resonated with pre-and proto-punks who one day applied their own perverted logic into the world of art and music.

“Ghoulardi” was ahead of his time in terms of technical achievements. Aside from being one of the first horror movie hosts, he was also one of the first to add his speaking voice over the televised movie image in what is called “voiceovers,” or to dub in wild music, or to cast himself into the actual, televised movie roles. Ghoulardi only lasted for a few short years. He soon moved to Los Angeles where he enjoyed a long, fruitful career as one of the greatest voiceover talents of the 20th Century. Throughout
Anderson’s career, his gorilla-suited assistant, Ron Sweed, was gathering ideas for a show of his own. Subsequently, Ron Sweed became “the Ghoul,” and furthered the role of “Ghoulardi” with Anderson’s consent. The underground influence of both original horror movie hosts persisted well into the future.29

Do-It-Yourself Poet Pays - d a levy

At the dawn of the 1960s, there was a movement of writers, poets and contemporary thinkers that were gathering in the coffee shops and restaurants of the University Circle area of Cleveland where Case Western Reserve University, The Cleveland Museums of History and Art, and Severance Hall are located. A number of these patrons went on to become major figures in the countercultural movement in the latter part of the decade, some playing a role in the Punk-rock phenomena a decade or more later. One of the most important people to emerge from this movement was the poet d a levy, whose lower case spelling was inspired by 1950’s poet e e cummings. In 1963, levy’s brother gave him his first mimeograph machine from which he began producing magazines, books, artworks and poetry pamphlets in his own little workshop in his living room.

d a levy was a sweet, intelligent, considerate and extremely creative individual. He was brilliant, driven and extremely prolific. At 17 he decided he’d kill himself, but he stopped this course of action when he discovered the writings and poetry of William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac and Charles Olson. At this point he decided to become one of the most well-read, intelligent and intellectually diverse poets of the 20th century. levy started producing books and soliciting poems from other poets around the country, corresponding with many literary figures in New York City and San Francisco, and with
poets as diverse as Charles Olson, Ed Sanders and Alan Ginsburg. Almost everyone he contacted sent him poems to publish. These poems, along with his personal works, eventually led to hundreds of self-published books and other media. The “Mimeograph Revolution,” a vital predecessor to the Do-It-Yourself movement.30

levy is one of the most important literary figures to emerge from the 20th century. His use and adaptation of “concrete poetry,” a visual or pictorial arrangement of the words, became an important genre in the literary movement.31

After befriending fellow poet Ed Sanders of the Fugs and expressing his interest in writing, levy began publishing a newsletter in Cleveland called The Marrahwannah Quarterly about the positive uses of marijuana. Soon after, at a local coffee shop called The Gate under the Trinity Cathedral on Euclid Avenue, a few levy-penned poems were read by teenagers that contained offending profanity that the local authorities deemed obscene. Having thus brought himself to the attention of law enforcement, levy, along with James Lowell, owner of Asphodel Bookstore where levy’s books et al were sold, were arrested on dubious charges of “dissemination of obscene literature.”32

levy came from very middle-class roots with no financial support outside of selling his poetry. His legal cases cost much more than he was able to afford. Legal bills mounted, years passed, and levy’s anxiety grew. Many supporters and admirers attempted to help him. The Fugs, Allen Ginsberg and others organized a benefit concert at Case Western Reserve University, raising roughly $20,000 for levy and Lowell’s legal defenses. But in the fall of 1968, after much turmoil and tumult in his life, levy started mailing away his poetry books and other works to various people around the city. He sank into a deep depression. Perhaps “there was something in the water of the city” that
levy had dearly loved. Feeling his whole world was collapsing around him, levy loaded “his childhood squirrel rifle and shot himself in his third eye.”

levy became an immortal symbol for many poetry and literary supporters before the age of 30. Although the authorities reviled him, he became a martyr for the counterculture in the form of a cultural icon. He was ruined by the four letter words in his poetry, like Lenny Bruce before him, and by the heavy-handed tactics of overzealous local authorities who persecuted the sensitive poet.

La Cave and The Velvet Underground

In 1964, a crucial link to the poetry, arts and music movement opened up just off East 105th Street and Euclid Avenue at the edge of University Circle. This club, known as La Cave, was a small but significant key in the development of the growing underground music scene of the 1960s in N. E. Ohio. Although just a coffee shop, this established eatery became the new “hip” gathering place for hippies, former beats, rock and rollers, and teenagers looking for newer, up and coming musical performers. Typically La Cave featured many important folk and countercultural musicians such as Judy Collins, Love, the Fugs, and the often-controversial alternative band, the Velvet Underground. The Velvet Underground playing in Cleveland was a catalyst for the N. E Ohio punk rock musical movement that developed in the early 1970s.

The Velvet Underground is often seen as the beginning of the Punk movement. Their pre-punk aesthetics was black, including black sunglasses, black clothes, and black music - black in the sense of negative or dark lyrical content. Their nihilistic world view and post-Beatnik look was entirely new at the time. Their look, coupled with the highbrow/low brow cultural divide - the meeting of high art classicism of artists like
Andy Warhol who was their financial supporter versus the low life drug culture of the tough street-life of New York City from which they came - musically contributed to their being unique amongst their contemporaries. Their music was dense, complex, avant-garde, and industrial sounding. Guitarists Lou Reed and Sterling Morrison’s excessive electric guitar volume, along with viola and bassist John Cale’s throbbing waves of sub-bass combined with Maureen Tucker’s percussive, minimalist, tribal drumming created a unique style of sparse song arrangements contrasting the often complex lyricism on the intricacies of the human condition.

The Velvet Underground shared a special relationship with Cleveland. When they were playing in town everyone knew there was going to be a party somewhere, and most of the time it was at La Cave where their shows became legendary. The first Velvet Underground and Nico album initially sold approximately 30,000 copies. Many people who bought that album started a band, a claim often attributed to the producer Brian Eno.34

In 2011, David Thomas of the band Pere Ubu was being interviewed at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. When asked what started the alternative music scene in Cleveland, David answered, “The whole reason we have the Punk scene in Cleveland is because Jamie Klimek and a number of other people saw the Velvet Underground at La Cave in the 1960s.”35 Because of their special relationship with N.E. Ohio, the Velvets played Cleveland at least 24 times according to Larry Bruner, the booking agent/owner of La Cave.36
Jazz Mystic - Albert Ayler

In 1964, the dedicated performer and “Free Jazz” saxophonist Albert Ayler released an original, unique, and landmark album called “Spiritual Unity.” Born in 1936 in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Ayler received his first tenor saxophone lessons from his father. He attended John Adams High School and later, the Cleveland Academy of Music. In his nascent Cleveland years, his impressive skills earned him the name “Little Bird” in honor of virtuoso saxophonist Charlie “Bird” Parker. By the mid-1950s, Ayler was playing saxophone, touring, working and supporting harmonica-blues legend Little Walter and later, tenor saxophonist Stanley Turrentine in the United States. By 1962, Ayler relocated to Sweden and started performing with pianist, poet and Free Jazz pioneer Cecil Taylor’s group. Returning to the United States in 1964, he relocated to New York City, putting together a trio of musicians including himself, bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Sunny Murray. After securing a record contract with ESP Disk, the group began recording “Spiritual Unity.”

Ayler became a legend and an influential Free Jazz pioneer. His avant-garde, abstract style was at once complex and confusing to casual Jazz supporters. He explored musically where other jazz musicians did not in terms of his style, which was both original and unorthodox. Incorporating such different styles as Military Brass band, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues and Classical, his music evoked strong emotions amongst many jazz critics and admirers. Ayler’s music was even deemed “difficult” by Jazz music supporters. His abilities were disparate and hard to categorize. His untamed improvisational performances bordered on cacophonous exercises, as he pushed the boundaries of tone, song structure and harmony. In spite of divergent evaluations of his
musical abilities, contemporaries such as saxophonist Eric Dolphy called him “the best player he had even seen.”

From 1964 to 1970, Ayler continued to perform, record and tour to make money and a legacy. Recording sporadically, he later fell into a deep depression, supposedly over the health troubles of his brother, fellow Jazz musician Donald Ayler. He disappeared on November 5, 1970, and his body was later recovered from the East River in Manhattan on November 25, 1970. His death was considered a suicide. It is believed he took the ferry to the Statue of Liberty and jumped off halfway into the trip. There were rumors of murder and other nefarious scenarios; however, it is believed he killed himself although a note was never found. He is buried in his hometown of Cleveland.

Even though he is obscurely resigned to the annals of music history, his impact upon aspiring, inventive musicians was profound. His aggressive, experimental, percussive and stylistic way of playing endeared him to many post-beatnik, proto-punks and hard-core hippies. Bands like the MC5 and the Stooges, both from Ann Arbor, claimed Ayler as an iconoclast. Fellow teenage punk rockers in Cleveland such as John Morton, later of the electric eels, was attracted to the more colorful and eclectic sounds emanating from the work of Ayler.

Devo

In 1978, an almost flippant remark by a member of a young band called Devo started in motion a series of events that had a lasting effect on the music world. On one of their first trips to Europe, an English journalist asked a member of the group, “What is Akron like?” The band member replied, “It’s a lot like Liverpool.” This quotation was published in a weekly music magazine in England, and it brought attention to the North
Coast of Ohio. That Akron was “the new Liverpool,” like the home of the Beatles, suggested an abundance of new talent. Soon agents arrived in Akron, Kent and Cleveland searching for the latest New Wave and Punk sounds, hoping to make a profit. This permitted a few lucky groups to benefit from the success of bands such as Devo, Rachel Sweet, Tin Huey, The Rubber City Rebels, and later, The Waitresses. But others were not considered viable products when the record company personnel felt they had exhausted the nascent scene. Bands such as Hammer Damage, Unit 5, Trudee and the Trendsetters, The Action, The F-Models, and The Red Rocket Gang were omitted from the label rosters. Eventually, there was The Akron Compilation LP that came out on Stiff Records that featured a good, basic overview of the Akron music community at large including the Rubber City Rebels, Waitresses, Tin Huey and others, although by this time, New Wave and Punk were already established.39, 40

The Akron band, Devo, was original. There has been no one like them before or since. They were also inventive, creating a dystopian alternative worldview in which people of the Midwest had become sad, lazy and complacent, like “couch potatoes” or “spuds” as they described them. They were one of the first bands to ever make and incorporate music videos into their live performances using the early media technology to create disturbing and morbidly fascinating home-movies portraying a fictional future filled with visions of a post-apocalyptic nuclear dreamscape that were years ahead of their time. The band changed the course of music history by using early primitive synthesizers and writing avant garde, darkly portrayed, futuristic personal manifestoes about negative aspects of human nature. Devo was a band that made people think. Many people hated them and not just for the lack of understanding of their intent. The band’s
whole aesthetic was based on the philosophy that the world was devolving or reversing evolution’s course. Though their abstract view of society as a whole was viewed by many as a joke, Devo was serious when it came to turning popular music into art. They started performing at Kent State University shortly after the shootings in May of 1970, and went on to influence just about every New Wave and Punk band that came after them. Before their band name became a catchphrase, they were already making and creating both a musical template and a stylistic path for artistic visionaries to follow. It was actually David Bowie and his producer at the time, Brian Eno, who helped create Devo’s major record label career and who saw them as they were: a unique and colorful group creating new music of many disparate styles.

The Cramps

The Cramps were formed in Stow, Ohio in 1976. Lux Interior, the group’s singer, was from Stow, Ohio, and Ivy Rorschach, their guitarist, was from Lakewood, Ohio, a Cleveland suburb. The pair had initially met in California in the early 1970s when both were attending art school. After becoming romantically involved and realizing they had many shared artistic interests in common, they returned home to Northeast Ohio and formed The Cramps. In late 1976 they moved to the Lower East Side of New York City and, later, in the early 1980’s to Los Angeles. Because of these relocations, there was confusion during their careers whether The Cramps were an East or West Coast band.

The Cramps were not technically a Punk band because the group’s artistic vision was closer to the early 1950’s teenage Rock and Roll way of life: rebellious, anti-establishment, street tough kids riding motorcycles in black leather jackets with greasy, slicked back hair like Marlon Brando in the movie “The Wild One.” The band’s musical
vision was much the same, similar to the styles of early Rockabilly performers like Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran and, of course, Elvis Presley. They represented the powerful, primal, and simplistic nature of early Rock and Roll. Thus, the band was embraced by punk rockers, new wavers, and people from all aspects of the alternative musical family. The Cramps were slightly older than most of the younger punks that were coming into the music scene by this point. Being teenagers in the 1960s gave them a greater musical historical perspective to share, as well as knowledge and an appreciation that was not afforded to many of their younger musical and artistic peers.

Their commitment to the music and art they embraced was real. Here was a man who, even into his late 50s and early 60s, displayed complete abandonment to his music and art. Lux was a pencil thin man. But when he performed, he typically guzzled an entire bottle of red wine with a microphone stuffed in his mouth while wearing nothing but gold Lame’ underwear and six-inch spike heels. He was known to then climb a 15 foot stack public address or sound system, jump to mid stage, land on concrete, a P.A. Monitor or “Foldback” speaker cabinet wedge, and break a microphone stand in half. This kind of public behavior displayed the fact that as a Rock and Roll performer, Lux’s devotion to his art often bordered on self-destruction. No performer has even come close to this level of sacrifice of personal well-being in the name of art.

The Cramps influenced all subsequent generations of bands that appeared after them. They replicated Lux’s pompadour haircut, dark sunglasses, tattoos, cars, and girls and flames stenciled on their upright bass. The Cramps look evolved, but they brought to the forefront of popular culture the use of the musical vehicle of Rockabilly, which they later turned into Psychobilly, a term they coined. Rock and Roll and Hillbilly Music
equals Rockabilly - a simple, 1950’s original Rock and Roll subgenre, a stripped down combination of sped up country music with twangy, hollow-body guitars, heavily reverbed or slapped back echo, “hiccupped” vocals styling and simple percussive beats. It was initially an early form of Rock and Roll whose purveyors included Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Charlie Feathers, and other hillbilly pioneers. But it was The Cramps in the early 1970s who reinvented this primitive musical form and turned it into a cultural phenomenon and a musical legacy. Using the energy of Punk, the simplicity of the Rockabilly music canon, the black clothes that symbolize rebellion and the urgency of desperate, musical abandon, The Cramps essentially invented a musical mixture whose influence still resonates.

The Cramps’ influences were familial, environmental and situational: namely the golden age of Rock and Roll followed by the British invasion, the explosion of the counterculture and the inevitability of the art/music/original/Punk/Underground music scenes.

Lux and Ivy were musical soul mates and became the King and Queen of the Punk/Underground culture they personified, combining many disparate styles to make their band unique and original. They were genuine, and even though their songs were often tongue-in-cheek or humorous in nature, they expressed the fact that making music was serious. They shared the belief that their art was real, not artificial or fake, confidently believing in themselves and the importance of their music. Keeping this type of music alive was an art form and a way of life as opposed to just mere performance. While Rockabilly was a dated genre of generations past, The Cramps utilized it for
timeless party music, with origins from Lou Reed, the outlaw black leather-clad rockers from the past and The Velvet Underground.41

Chrissie Hynde

One of the most important figures to emerge out of Northeast Ohio in the last 40 years was Chrissie Hynde of the English band, The Pretenders. Hynde was born and raised in Akron, but she moved to London in the early 1970s just as the Punk and New Wave scenes were starting to form post-Glitter Rock, circa 1972. Chrissie was beautiful, headstrong, smart and exceptionally talented. She was also at the right places at the right times. Beginning with her first jobs in England writing for music weeklies, she came into contact with important figures such as Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood, The Sex Pistols, Clash, and members of The Damned. She was literally right in the center of activity as well as a scene participant. Soon after the initial beginning of the United Kingdom’s Punk movement in London, roughly 1974 to 1978, Hynde spent the next few years experimenting with various London musicians. She decided to form her own group, The Pretenders, after a demonstration tape she recorded found its way to an interested record company.

The Pretenders exemplified the new order of the New Wave/Punk canon that began in England in the late 1970s. Their sound was simple yet refined. Using cleverly unadorned song structures showcasing minimal, pretty guitar parts and a strong foundational pounding rhythm section, Hynde released dynamic vocal performances on the unsuspecting public. The band’s configuration was two guitars, bass and drums. Hynde employed local musicians whose biographies were not known beyond their native rural cities. Hynde’s voice was the centerpiece of much of the Pretender’s power. Her
husky contralto delivered sexually charged lyrics with fire and passion, while her beauty was always hidden behind long bangs of raven hair. The Pretender’s songs were often hard rock in nature with catchy elements of pop and light chorus-laden guitar lines weaving throughout the body of each song. Songs like “Brass in Pocket” featured chiming bell-like guitars. Sometimes the songs were in major and minor keys; sometimes they were not defined to give them an open-air sense of musical grounding. This allowed for Hynde’s emotional vocal delivery to fill in the spaces that were left open in the music. Utilizing the musical techniques she learned by studying such classic English songwriters as Ray Davies of the Kinks, she was able to harness the powerful vibrato in her voice for a dramatic and emotional impact.

The original Pretenders only existed for two full LP’s and one Extended Play record. Guitarist James Honeyman Scott died shortly after recording the second full LP from a heart failure attributed to cocaine, and bassist Pete Fardon died 10 months later from a drug overdose. Though this original group was short-lived, their impact was important. They demonstrated to many musicians, record companies and fans worldwide that Chrissie Hynde and her band were no mere one hit wonders. Hynde went on to reform newer versions of the Pretenders and continue to write even more hit records.

Sharp-dressed, strong-willed, politically active and an avid vegetarian, Hynde became one of the most artistically influential women in the music industry. As of this writing she lives in England, has a home in her native Akron, and continues to perform. She both praised and damned Northeast Ohio in her song “My City Was Gone,” but she has always maintained that Akron is her home that she still holds dear to her heart.42
Although Hynde is one of the city’s most famous ex-patriots, she maintains an enigmatic air about her, as scant information and few interviews perpetuate her mysterious qualities.
For over three generations, Northeast Ohio was home to young talent that was destined to emerge as legends in music, poetry and theatre. Although it is described as “The Mistake on the Lake,” Cleveland and its regional culture have always been part of a large, sophisticated musical and artistic community.

There is much written about Northeast Ohio over the years explaining its countercultural history, and a small amount of magazines and historical documents give limited credit to its influences. As time passes, details of this history may be forgotten or overlooked. At the same time, many still continue to pursue music and art here, not in the spirit of economic gain but simply for the sake of their art.

Since 1993, books have been published by Clevelanders who participated in the countercultural scene of the late 1960s and 1970s. National tours by these authors and international tours by Cleveland rock bands such as a Rocket from the Tombs and scene stalwarts Pere Ubu brought a higher profile to the music community from which they came.

Michael Hudson and Cheetah Chrome

Two exceptional Cleveland-centric books published recently were *Diary of a Punk* (2008) by Michael Hudson of the Pagans, and a *Dead Boy’s Tale* (2010) by
Cheetah Chrome of the Dead Boys. Both books give a detailed account of growing up in the unforgiving 1970’s Cleveland music scene and the groups that evolved from it. These are both an insider’s look at the tough and often brutal world of Punk rock as well as how history viewed it at the time. While many other books about Punk rock and its early origins exist in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, there are many details of this history that remain unexplored.

Gillian McCain and Eddie McNeil

Reviewing older books such as 1996’s *Please Kill Me* by Gillian McCain and Eddie “Legs” McNeil, much of the early Punk days in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio was omitted before the emergence of the band The Dead Boys in the late 1970s at CBGB’s, a popular Manhattan night club. While this account acknowledges that New York City was in fact the center for Punk and Alternative music starting in 1964 with the Velvet Underground, it is not until Chapter 33, late in the book, that a complete discussion of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio is presented. Instead the book details an account of The Dead Boy’s ascension into the CBGB’s scene. Unfortunately, the focus of the chapter revolves around The Dead Boys being complicit in abetting the demise of the Punk Rock-Lower East Side-CBGB’s scene by bringing violence into it, rather than the long-range influences of the group.

Clinton Heylin

Alternatively, a much more thorough overview exists in Clinton Heylin’s book, *From The Velvets To The Voidoids - A Pre-Punk History For A Post-Punk World* (1993). This is a much more detailed account of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio’s Punk and Alternative scene, as well as the lack of it. Here is stated that all of the early music
community participants interviewed by Heylin said that there really was no scene for Alternative music in the late 1960s-early 1970s in Northeast, Ohio. Conversely, as explored in chapter two, there was a core group of roughly 25 to 40 people that were involved at this time in the budding underground.

Heylin unearths a central theme: the lack of an actual supportive music community, coupled with the fact there were very few places to perform and a lack of attention from the local media, such as radio and print publications. At the time Cleveland was considered a place to leave, not a place to live. On the contrary, N.E. Ohio was a place where many forward-looking artists and performers experimented and tried new things, destined to be influential, not that they were free from reprisals. The three bands from this period - Mirrors, electric eels, and Rocket from the Tombs - all received exposure as three original, unique underground bands that were contemporaries of bands working in New York City such as the New York Dolls. Heylin’s historical account is more complete in this regard due to his more in-depth research as well as his understanding of Northeast Ohio’s cultural musical history. Heylin exposes the talent that grew out of industrial N.E. Ohio, a region with many unenviable characteristics such as the environment, the weather and bleak urban landscape. Heylin’s timeline of this history that happened throughout the world’s Underground music community is detailed, crediting many of the first-wave Punks together with their N.E. Ohio home as being ahead of their time, mentioning in particular Cleveland band Pere Ubu as well as Devo. From the Velvets to the Voidoids, well researched and thoroughly documented, represents the proto-Punk/Alternative music world up through 1992.
Heylin’s second Punk book, *Babylon’s Burning: From Punk to Grunge* (2007), is an even more thorough account of Punk Underground and its origins. *Babylon’s Burning* suggests the international world music community accepted Punk and Underground music. Heylin reaches into earlier parts of the 20th Century looking for evidence of punks, expanding the search to include Garage rock and proto-punks, also extending the history forward to explore the roots of bands that formed as late as the mid-1990s. Cleveland again receives recognition in *Babylon’s Burning* with a deep exploration of the people involved and their creative influences. In contrast to his previous book, Heylin’s timeline delves into the minutia and social-political climate in the small but vital music community of N.E. Ohio, as well as environmental factors. *Babylon’s Burning* takes a chronological view of the entire Alternative music canon spanning from 1971 to 1994.

The four books by Hudson, Chrome, McNeil and Heylin made the greatest and most significant contribution crediting Cleveland and N.E. Ohio as an influence on the Underground music community. However, these books did not cover all of the world history of Punk and Underground music in regard to Northeast Ohio’s influences and contributions as will be demonstrated.

Nicolas Rombes

In *A Cultural Dictionary of Punk* by Nicolas Rombes (2009), there are a number of citations regarding the North Coast in addition to many citations from a number of fanzines, periodicals and historical books. Again, the electric eels, Rocket from the Tombs, and Mirrors receive the most attention.

Notably included here are the writings of Cleveland Charlotte Pressler who describes Ohio as a bleak, decaying, urban wasteland and further expands upon the fact
that this was one of several extenuating circumstances that led to the disparate beginnings of such unique performance ensembles. Rombes mentions important early bands including Human Switchboard and The Dead Boys, and Cleveland punks, The Pagans. Cleveland’s music community is explored along with other fellow N.E. Ohio musical examples including The Cramps, Devo and Pere Ubu, all receiving entries and prominent notations. In addition, *A Cultural Dictionary of Punk* is a philosophical discussion of the psychological input and impetus that created the Punk rock explosion of the late 1970s. There is more of an American bias in this book than in other books, often biased to the New York City or London Underground scenes.

Jon Savage

The handful of popular culture books, magazine articles, fanzines as well as academic books that discuss N.E. Ohio’s important musical contributions is now growing. Jon Savage, who wrote *England’s Dreaming* (1992), gives some small credit to Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, acknowledging the electric eels, Rocket from the Tombs, Mirrors, Devo, and Pere Ubu. But the history displayed here is really the story of the Sex Pistols’ rise to stardom and subsequent breakup. The book also gives important credit to the UK/London Punk Underground music scenes.

In February 2014, Savage released a lengthy article in the U.K. magazine *New Musical Express* claiming that Northeast Ohio and its musical scene went unheralded and underexposed, in agreement with the thesis of this study. The article is a review of the newly released record and companion book called *Punk 45: Kill the Hippie! Kill Yourself! The American Nation Destroys Its Young*, featuring the N.E. Ohio bands the electric eels, Pere Ubu, The Pagans, and Akron’s The Bizarros.
George Gimarc and Simon Reynolds

*Punk Diary: The Ultimate Trainspotter’s Guide to Underground Rock 1970–1982*, by George Gimarc (2005), is a daily account of every show that was even remotely connected to Punk, including proto- and post-Punk listed in chronological order. Impressive in its detail, Devo receives the first mention as a N.E. Ohio band in regard to their first performance in 1974 where they were introduced, followed by Rocket from the Tombs, the electric eels and later, Pere Ubu. A gap of performances of Ohio bands for many years follows, until finally The Cramps and later, The Pagans, are mentioned. Though details about Cleveland and Northeast Ohio are incomplete, *Punk Diary* remains a valuable study and an excellent resource of encapsulated historical data.

Simon Reynolds’ *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post Punk 1978–1984* (2006), gives two excellent accounts of N.E. Ohio’s late 1970’s Punk scene and the environment from which Pere Ubu and Devo evolved. Akron, N.E. Ohio and Cleveland are given historical and contextual credit. Chapter five, “Uncontrollable Urge to Industrial Grotesquerie of Pere Ubu and Devo,” begins with Akron and gives a candid portrayal of the extenuating circumstances (i.e. industrial, environmental, historical, sociopolitical theories, ideas and ideals) that led to the formation of the band Devo. Later in the chapter, Reynolds applies the same rubric to Cleveland, Pere Ubu and locations to the north. Reynolds is a British author and does his best to compare industrialized cities such as Akron and Cleveland to similar UK cities such as Manchester and Leeds. He makes a comparison of the environmental, societal, and historical conditions that led to the formation of these groups’ circumstances that had a similar effect on the movement as a whole. In short, both the US and the UK had similar groups of disaffected youth who made music outside
of the realm of the mainstream, and there were many similar factors that went into the evolution of these groups. Overall, Pere Ubu is seen as a rather humorless but committed group of artists whose stern leader, David Thomas, is often sullen but devoted to his industrial wasteland of a city. Devo’s impression is less serious, “as having a laugh at the expense of others.” Devo was serious when it came to making art that worked in a commercial sense. Where Pere Ubu shunned the mainstream, Devo embraced it. And although it is only discussed in one chapter, this book summarizes the timeframe in an historical context from which this unique and original music was created.

Collected Essays and Ephemera

*Punk: An Aesthetic* (2012), is a fine collection of re-created Punk ephemera dating from the late 1960s to 2014. Edited by Johan Kugelberger and Jon Savage, it features essays by William Gibson, Linder Sterling, and Gee Vaucher. Hundreds of pages highlight scanned posters, fliers, handbills and fanzines that describe the Punk aesthetic while preserving their beauty. The accompanying essays explore a distinct theme of disenfranchised youth who, when left to make their own choices, wrote their own “do-it-yourself” manifestoes, and proceeded to make art to the best of their ability.

Cleveland and Northeast Ohio are represented here by an early photo, circa 1971, of Peter Laughner of the band Rocket from the Tombs. Laughner is wrapped in a black leather waistcoat jacket wearing locks and chains reminiscent of Harry Houdini, 1920’s illusionist and stunt performer. The photo itself was shocking according to conservative standards in 1971, yet ahead of its time and very representative of the style that eventually emerged as typifying Punk Rock. Jon Savage credits Cleveland and the fact
that Punk evolved and had origins there. Pictures of two original fliers, circa 1974, by John Morton of the electric eels, are also represented.

Reissued Sources and Magazines

A collection of the original fanzine, *Best of Punk Magazine* (2012), first published by John Holmstrom, is presented in comic book form featuring colorful and humorous accounts and interviews covering various events and bands that were performing in New York City at the time, specifically the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Eighteen issues from 1976 to 1979 made *Punk Magazine* a “Who’s Who” of all the early Punk pioneers. Cleveland and Northeast Ohio are scantily represented, but they are represented nonetheless. Articles on the Dead Boys and Devo include some visual images that lend themselves well to the comic allure of these pages. *Punk Magazine* represents the cultural phenomenon that was Punk Rock in the mid to late 1970s.

One of the better-written documents of the early Northeast Ohio music scene presents the magazine, *Ugly Things*, issue number 33 in particular. Published by Mike Stax (2013), *Ugly Things* is a well-written, historically correct music periodical that delves into garage, Punk, freak-beat, experimental and psychedelic genres of the second half of the 20th century. In issue number 33, for example, there is a rare account of the proto-Punk 1960’s band Love, along with an article featuring Cleveland’s own, the electric eels.

Julian Cope

British “rock and roller” and musicologist Julian Cope of the post-Punk, neo-psychedelic band, The Teardrop Explodes published *Copendium* in 2012. Here Cope describes N.E. Ohio’s first Punk pioneers, the electric eels, Mirrors, and Rocket. One of the first British
musicians to champion Pere Ubu and Cleveland in general, Cope holds N.E. Ohio in high
regards. *Copendium* is a review of record albums, including all of the early Cleveland
Punk bands’ albums released posthumously, and Cope goes to great lengths to accurately
explain the history. Cope cares passionately for his subject matter, even giving credit to a

Omissions

Many books, periodicals and historical documents, such as the textbook *The
History of Punk Rock* by Brendan Mazer (2006), omit any mention of Cleveland and N.E.
Ohio or any original bands that have a close connection to the area. In *The Encyclopedia
of Punk* by Brian Cogan (2010), Cleveland, together with Akron and its influential bands,
are peripherally mentioned. This historical account omits both timeline and contextual
historical documentation.

Craig O’Hare’s book, *The Philosophy of Punk* (2001), attempts to explain the
philosophies and intellectual impetus of Punk Rock, encapsulating all of the many
subgenres in the Punk canon such as homosexuality, hard-core Punk, political Punk, Oi
and/or skinhead music. This book is a collection of philosophical theories rather than a
presentation of the historical context of the Punk and Underground music movements. At
no place in this book is Cleveland or Northeast Ohio mentioned with the exception of a
picture of The Dead Boys guitarist, Cheetah Chrome.

*Punk- The Whole Story* (2008), written and published by the British music
magazine, *Mojo*, a periodical with a reputation for critical acclaim, thoughtfully written
and historically correct for 20 years. Cleveland and Northeast Ohio are mentioned but
only in the context of record reviews of Devo, The Cramps, Dead Boys and Pere Ubu.
Only London is acknowledged as being the birthplace of Punk. There is a long section pertaining to the early days of the proto-Punk scene in New York City, including the Velvet Underground, The Patti Smith Group, The New York Dolls and Television. But credit to Cleveland and its regions for beginning origins is omitted. This book postulates that the entire Punk music movement started in 1976, after the origins explored in this study.

20th Century Rock ‘N Roll–Punk by Dave Thompson (2001) is a British view of a Punk rock discography, a historically inadequate account of British Punk music due to its brevity. In Greil Marcus’ Lipstick Traces (1989), Britain and the Sex Pistol’s manager, Malcolm McLaren, are given the credit for inventing Punk rock. The Velvet Underground, Jonathan Richman, Boston and New York City, with its poets, artists and drug denizens, are explored and given appropriate attention, but, again, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio are omitted from the Punk contextualization.

American Hardcore (Second Edition) - A Tribal History by Steven Blush (2010) is also lacking in its historical context. While Blush does cover the late 1970s-early 1980s Punk subgenre, Hardcore, only a short paragraph highlighting Northeast Ohio’s early Punk beginnings, (Pere Ubu, The Pagans, Rachel Sweet and Chrissie Hynde), and Akron’s stalwart Zero Defex is listed together with The Guns and Knife Dance. There is no mention of any Cleveland or N. E. Ohio bands or their contributions to the Hardcore scene. Many of these early touring Hardcore bands often played with bands like Zero Defex, who helped provide a support system for them.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Over 60 years have passed since the “Golden Age” of Rock and Roll, circa 1954-1959, when Elvis, Chucky Berry, Little Richard and Buddy Holly’s careers peaked, and Northeast Ohio played a significant but often underappreciated role in the world music community of entertainment, arts, music, and theater.

Many sources credit New York City and the Velvet Underground as the birthplace of the Punk Rock Movement, and much evidence points to them as the pivotal group that laid the foundation for the phenomena starting with their formation in 1964. The timeline progressed historically, from 1971 to 1975, as the New York Dolls demonstrated in the United States followed by the United Kingdom. The demise of the Dolls in 1975 gave rise to the Ramones in the U.S. followed by the bands The Sex Pistols, The Damned and The Clash in the U.K.

This study created and showed a small but concentrated number of influential Cleveland and Northeast Ohio artists, musicians, performers, writers and, in general, the cast of characters that influenced the Punk Rock Movement. This study also affirmed and recognized the need for further exploration of the importance of the artistic, visionary groups and individuals that influenced subsequent decades, including DJ Pete “Mad Daddy” Myers, television personality Ernie “Ghoulardi” Anderson, poets Hart Crane and
d a levy, Jazz musician Albert Ayler, bands The Cramps and Devo, and musician Chrissie Hynde.

This study’s review of literature found a significant number of contributions from authors Gillian McCain, Eddie McNeil, Michael Hudson, Cheetah Chrome, Nicolas Rombes, Jon Savage, George Gimarc and Simon Reynolds. Clinton Heylin contributed the most comprehensive study of the Punk movement in his 1993 book *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*. The Preface of the book demonstrated that “Cleveland was the only other U.S. city to have a contemporary wave of pre-punk exponents: Mirrors, electric eels and Rocket From The Tombs…” other than New York City. The review of literature discussed collected essays, ephemera and reissued resources such as comic books, reprinted fliers, fanzines and magazines as valuable historical information sources.

While many can argue that Northeast Ohio had its fair share of proper exposure and championing of its prodigal sons and daughters who accomplished much over the years and sometimes moved on to other locales, there are many other important figures that have remained silent until now about their regional successes. Cleveland and Northeast Ohio have always had a bit of an inferiority complex, whether it comes from the 50 years of losing sports franchises, the loss of nearly half the city’s population, or its public drubbing by its international critics for its once burning river and polluted lake.

The complete story of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio has yet to be told. Further investigation into the history of the Punk and Underground music movements, such as interviews with key players, is needed. The critically unique, diverse and colorful musical world from which Punk and early Underground music developed needs to be further
explored giving appropriate attention to Northeast Ohio regarding the origins of Punk and Underground genres.
END NOTES


6 A quote from a conversation with Ed Sanders from November 30, 2012.


11 http://dangerousminds.net/comments/clevelands_black_rock_legacy_purple_image

12 The Camelot years. (2014). A reference to the legendary British King Arthur and his castle Camelot that first appeared in French romantic literature in the 12th century. JFK was a young handsome president much like the young fictitious king and his administration was deemed so as America, at the time, was almost idyllic and even perhaps rather innocent before his assassination. The Kennedy family was almost like an American version of the British Royal family http://voices.yahoo.com/why-term-camelot-was-given-john-f-kennedy-7232644.html.
Later attributed to Charles Manson’s tribal cult “The Family.”

German word for motor skills describing a 4/4 musical drum beat.


This refers to the fact that the three books cited had the most to say regarding the Punk Rock movement and its beginnings in Northeast Ohio.


New Wave was a term coined by Sire Records founder Seymore Stein in the late 1970s when the first waves of Punk were coming from England and developing in America. He rightly felt that the term “Punk Rock” would be a hard sell to American radio stations, disc jockeys and the record buying public. The term New Wave was deemed more acceptable for selling records to the general public. Bands like the Talking Heads, The Police and Elvis Costello are examples of the term first being used for promotional purposes.

From a Facebook dialog with Bob Pfeifer on November 12, 2013.


Race Music. A term originally used to describe Black or African American Music. In 1948 Jerry Wexler, a producer for Atlantic Records, came up with the
name “Rhythm and Blues” or “R+B” to make the music more sellable to the general public.


29 From a conversation with Ron Sweed, aka The Ghoul, on March 12, 2013.


33 A quote from a conversation with Ed Sanders from November 30, 2012.

34 Eno, Brian. (1980). Musician and producer Brian Eno made the claim to Musician Magazine that, as it was so important an album, “I think everyone who had bought one of those 30,000 copies must have started a band.”

35 Cleveland music seminar. (2010). At the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum featuring David Thomas, Bob Pfeifer, Cheetah Chrome and Mike Hudson.


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