

Band of the Week: The Gun Club

Resident sound-nerd [Tom Killingbeck](#) thumbs through reams of musty vinyl so you don't have to. Here are his weekly recommendations...

Monday 13 June 2011

#31: The Gun Club



Who: Jeffrey Lee Pierce, Kid Congo Powers, Patricia Morrison, Terry Graham.

When: 1970s-1990s.

Where: USA.

Why: The 80s was primetime for punk rock – in England it was being morphed into all sorts of multifarious forms by [art students](#) and [crusty squatters](#) alike, while America was ablaze with the fiery sounds of hardcore. But even so, [The Gun Club](#) sounded completely different to their peers, despite sharing the same outlaw spirit. Jeffrey Lee Pierce was a flamboyant and notorious personality on the Hollywood scene, a peroxide blonde wildman who channelled the swampy blues passion of the Deltas while at the same time chairing the LA [Blondie](#) fan club. He found a kindred spirit in Brian Trisner, A.K.A. Kid Congo Powers, President of the [Ramones](#) fan club and editor of a [Screamers](#) fanzine. They played with rockabillies The Cyclones and later as The Creeping Ritual. Under the moniker The Gun Club, the striking pair soon became renowned across the city with their ragged blues-punk hymns.

Kid Congo left before the release of their Ruby Records debut *Fire Of Love*, the band now bolstered with members of [The Bags](#). It was a scorching first record that has come to inform each generation of blues rockers since; [Jack White](#), for example, thinks it should be taught in school. While I'm not sure I agree that such primal ditties as 'She's Like Heroin To Me' and the eternal classic '[Sex Beat](#)' should be unleashed upon young children, they're definitely essential sacraments of punk blues. The guitars were reeling

electric approximations of cowboy slides, which provided a perfect Spaghetti Western canvas for Pierce's evocative lyrics, combining [Nick Cave-style](#) religious blues lore with voodoo mysticism and comic book fantasy. The songs sound like howls from the wilderness, utterly convincing lost blues standards on methamphetamines. Produced by Tito Larriva of [The Plugz](#) and Chris D of [The Flesh Eaters](#), it's a trailblazing document of the early 80s Hollywood punk scene as well as a precursor to alt country and any amped up bluesy garage that surfaced in the years after it.

The record's success would allow Pierce to collaborate with his idols [Chris Stein](#) and [Debbie Harry](#) on the follow-up, *Miami*, he on production, she on backing vocals. Relocating to New York for this opportunity, they managed to keep the rattlesnake vibes of their debut despite the band becoming fractured and bitter. That venom is spat into the tracks, [Rolling Stones country devilry](#) mixing with heated sexual fervour and ritualistic otherworldliness. It would be downhill from here. *Las Vegas Story* was a decent effort, with Pierce reunited with Congo Powers, and led to a support slot with [Siouxsie & The Banshees](#) across Europe. It would stretch them to breaking point and they split soon afterwards. They managed a successful [reunion album](#), produced by Robin Guthrie of the [Cocteau Twins](#) (see next week for more on them), but the spirit was overall rather dampened. Pierce would play with Nick Cave's Bad Seeds in the 90s and form an interest in rap music before dying of a stroke after years of substance abuse in 1996. Several years later, the garage rock revival bands would take his good work to a far wider audience than he ever had.

Influences: Howlin Wolf, Robert Johnson, Blondie, The Cramps, Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Influenced: The White Stripes, Pixies, R.E.M., The Jim Jones Revue, No Age.

Sample Lyric: 'Yes you do look cool and by the floodlights so blue / You make my tropical apartment bed your sacrificial pool'.

Which Record: Fire of Love (Ruby Records, 1981)



2 comments

Jeri Sparks

18 Mar '12 at 5:11 am

Please do not misinform your students that "The 80s was primetime for punk rock". The primetime for punk was the back half of the 1970s, and the first couple of years the 1980's, like 1980-1982. People who came to the game in the 1980's were not punks, they were wannabees.

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Joni Flames

28 Sep '13 at 8:54 pm

I believe Captain Sensible had said it best, something to the lines of "when people started calling themselves "punk" was when it ended"

The Ramones never got together to form a "punk" band, they just wanted to play what rock n roll was originally about, before the '70s started ruining it all.

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