



Live At The Masque: Nightmare In Punk Alley
 Brendan Mullen with Roger Gastman

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The Masque was LA's premier first-generation punk club. But it was unlike similar venues in the US, because it did not occupy a public space that was transformed into a punk hangout (like CBGBs in New York or the Mabuhay Gardens in San Francisco). Rather, it was a foul, dark hive of rooms below a pornographic cinema, originally rented by expatriate Scot Brendan Mullen as a place for punk and noise groups to rehearse. This resulted in open parties that almost immediately coalesced into an illegal club,

a nexus of operations and a full-blown scene. Between August 1977 and December 79, The Masque (at several locations) presented every important Los Angeles group of the period, and offered shows to a variety of traveling groups. This book evokes its period brilliantly. Drawn from the archives of many photographers and chroniclers, *Live At The Masque* is exceptionally successful, because it makes room for more than just the 'hip' aspects of the time it chronicles. There are plenty of pictures of The Germs, X and The Screemers, but there are also shots of Needles And Pins, Backstage Pass and even of the phoney-punk groups who existed for an instant, whose members' identities have faded into the mists. The Omfits? The Twits?

The Spastics? They're all here. Who were they? What did they sound like? Only tireless scene chronicler Al Flipside (of *Flipside* fanzine fame) knows for sure.

The essays by Kristine McKenna and Mullen are excellent, as are the fanzine review reprints and lengthy photo captions. Along with the flyers by Paul Lesperance, Tom Recchion, Chris D and Bob Biggs, you get extremely crude ones demonstrating there was a time before punk iconography became a commodified style. Some groups even have longish hair in their early pictures. No one had a clear, singular vision about what a punk looked like. A group as artistically evolved as The Screemers (whose conceptual thrust was as important as their

sound) co-existed easily with The Controllers (whose idea of 'punk' seems to have begun and ended with The Stooges). In those rooms under the Pussycat Theater, it was ultimately discovered that all you needed to be a punk was enough attitude and enough beer.

It's unclear how many people ever made their way down the Masque's steps. Probably less than 1000. But the place was a Mecca for weird locals and anyone who read *Slash* magazine, and this book captures its essence. Like Jim Jocoy's photo chronicle of punk, *We're Desperate*, this reminds me how much posing went on. And, perhaps more importantly, how good that posing felt. Can't wait to put this on my coffee table.
 BYRON COLEY

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