



Andy Shernoff by Carla Rhodes

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## THE DICTATORS BACK TOGETHER! ANDY SHERNOFF TELLS ALL

DAVID LAING · MARCH 4, 2021

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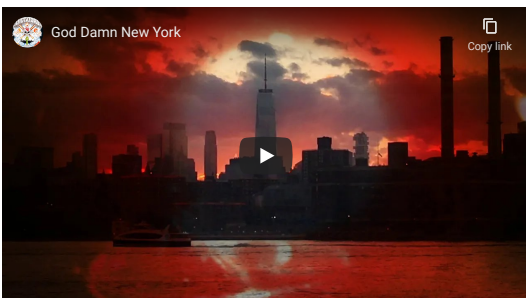
With their irreverent mix of 'teengenerate' sarcasm, three-chord garage rock, surf music and party-hearty stage antics, The Dictators presaged New York City's punk attitude. An eternal favorite of PKM, the band, with a break here and there, 'coulda been a contenduh.' Alas, in 2021, they are stepping back into the ring! Three of the four original members—Andy Shernoff, Ross "The Boss" Friedman and Scott Kempner—have been joined by former Blue Oyster Cult drummer Albert Bouchard to release new music and eventually tour. PKM's David Laing caught up with Andy Shernoff for a long and wonderful conversation about all things Dictators.

For all the death, disease and duplicitous dunces it brought us, 2020 wasn't without its highlights. Amongst good things in rock 'n' roll was the announcement – a very low-key but extremely exciting announcement – made by Dictators main man Andy Shernoff. Andy, it seemed, had taken the advice of a song he wrote and recorded solo some years back, "Let's Get the Band Back Together". That is, the Dictators had reconvened and were making new music! Not a phony version of the Dictators, but the real thing. The original three guys, Andy Shernoff, Scott Kempner and Ross 'The Boss' Friedman, who formed the band and who were at the heart of all its line-ups, were BACK!

No, Handsome Dick Manitoba wasn't invited to the party, but then, he kinda blew it with the phony version anyway, and he wasn't even their original singer; Andy was. And don't worry about the drummer; neither of the two guys on their original three albums – Stu Boy King and Richie Teeter – are with us anymore, and neither were there in the beginning anyway. Andy, Scott and Ross were *THE THREE*, and they are *THE THREE* again, with the exciting addition of old pal Albert Bouchard from the Blue Oyster Cult on drums.

The first fresh produce from the new Dictators appeared last month. "God Damn New York" is a thumping tune. Dense, melodic, souped-up hard rock, it follows on from where *Bloodbrothers* and "16 Forever" left off 40+ years ago and where the great *D.F.F.D.* picked up 20 years back. It's everything that you could expect from a Dictators tune, and Andy's voice is familiar enough – he sung on a bunch of the original recordings anyway – that there is no doubting who it is. A second new single is due April 12 and scheduled to be premiered on Little Steven's Underground Garage radio show.

### God Damn New York (2021) – The Dictators



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### DEAR NOBODY

Co-edited by Gillian McCain and Legs McNeil, the authors of *Please Kill Me*, this book is an incredible and moving read.

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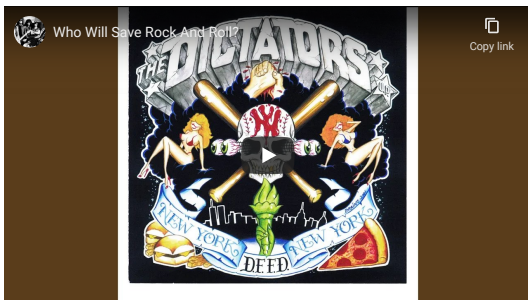
One of many influential New York groups featured in Legs & Gillian's *Please Kill Me* book, the Dictators have long warranted a detailed feature on this hallowed site, so as soon as I saw the announcement last year, I reached out to Andy. I wanted to get the lowdown on the new stuff, ask him questions that I didn't think had been asked, and put a few of my own thoughts about the group to him for a response. I wanted to dig fairly deep into the Dictators' original time around the block. What you'll read below is the result of our communications. Enjoy.

**PKM:** Thanks for your time Andy. Congratulations on "God Damn New York". First question – have you (personally, and as a band) found it difficult at anyway when making new music – either this time out, or when you made *D.F.F.D.* 20-odd years ago – to made it in a way that is consistent with the original band? It doesn't sound like you have – I think *D.F.F.D.* is up there with the original 3 albums – but I ask because there are many examples of bands getting back together after decades and making records that are very different to the earlier ones. Writing styles have changed, playing styles have changed, new influences have been incorporated. Maybe sparks have gone out. And does Ross have to "un-Manowar" himself when you regroup?

**Andy Shernoff:** I think Ross had to "un-Dictator" himself when he played with Manowar. I appreciate your ranking of *D.F.F.D.* with the original three albums. Everybody knows that the records bands make when they reform suck big time.

*D.F.F.D.* came 23 years after *Bloodbrothers*, and I'm proud of the fact that the record not only doesn't suck but it contains one of our most popular numbers, "Who Will Save Rock and Roll". The recording of the new album has been really smooth and drama free. I'm enjoying the process. The band members have decades of experience making records so there's a lot to draw from. We know the elements of a good Dictators song, so we don't waste time going down rabbit holes and it's keeping everybody busy during the pandemic. We are now 20 years from *D.F.F.D.*, so we're pretty inspired and revved up. The reaction to the first single has been amazing!

#### Who Will Save Rock And Roll?



**PKM:** So this is a real, ongoing thing? We should be excited?

**Andy Shernoff:** You should be very excited...It's a real Dictators reformation and I think the old fans will be very happy. The music encompasses everything great about the band. The difference is instead of the sarcastic, wise guy teenagers who recorded *The Dictators Go Girl Crazy* you will get, to quote a line from one of my new songs, "senior citizens who don't give a damn". We're a bunch of guys who like to make music. We're not trying to change the world and we're not looking for a hit. The point is to have fun and make the best music we can because every day you make music is a good day. The biggest change is the addition of Albert Bouchard. He's a great utility player with many skills besides drumming. He's a singer, writer, arranger and he makes a great contribution on the production end.



Dictators first photo session by Roni Hoffman

I don't live in New York City so there's a lot of sending files back and forth. We

#### VIDEO OF THE WEEK



#### ALENE LEE: THE HEART OF A SUBTERRANEAN



Jack Kerouac based his muse/lover "Mardou Fox" in *The Subterraneans* on Alene Lee, a mixed race (Black/Cherokee) bohemian writer and intellectual who was a part of the NYC Beat circle of Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Lucien Carr. Despite her intimate connection to these writers, the real Alene Lee is nowhere to be found in most accounts and biographies —partly due to her own reticence to speak. Erika Blair did some digging and presents a more rounded portrait of this fascinating woman. [Read more!](#)

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did get together once to record four tracks in a real studio and we're slowly working on completing them. What would take ten minutes if everybody was in a recording studio together takes days of file trading. Not the most efficient way to record music but we're in the middle of a pandemic. It's hard to make long-term plans in uncertain times but the first song "God Damn New York" was released on January 15 and we'll release another song in March and continue releasing music digitally at that same pace. It'll be a steady stream of tracks. I'm not sure about vinyl or a CD, but when touring starts up, we'll probably compile what we have onto a physical format...I think people are optimistic if they expect full-fledged touring to start in 2021. I try to be realistic and I'm looking at 2022.

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Now every place looks identical with the same chain stores and tacky architecture, but LA in the early '70s was all sunshine and optimism while New York was dystopia and danger. The classic Beach Boys vs Velvet Underground comparison is apt.

**PKM:** Notably, Manitoba is not part of this. Obviously, there was a falling out. Can you elaborate on that? I know Ross continued with Manitoba after you'd called time on the band – assume things are okay with Ross?

**Andy Shernoff:** I wouldn't enter into this situation unless there was a healthy, creative atmosphere. Richard's involvement would have made that impossible. I value my sanity. I'll leave things at that.

**PKM:** Speaking of Ross, I know he's fairly far to the right politically. How does that sit with you and Scott?

**Andy Shernoff:** I question how deep Ross's political convictions are. I've known the guy 50 years and he's never expressed a political opinion to me before. I think he enjoys pushing people's buttons. I had a talk with him when we were getting started and we both agreed that The Dictators are about having a good time. Being abrasive and alienating people with politics would not be conducive to the musical environment we want to create. As far as I know, he has kept to that agreement.

**PKM:** Sticking with politics for a bit – the Dictators were never known for their political correctness. ... As someone who has been a fan of the band for 40-odd years, and who also is supportive of the intentions of political correctness, I've never had an issue with your lyrics. I've always seen that they were just reflecting a certain character – the 'teengenerate' – who was white, teenage and irresponsible. A couple of lines from the '70s that could perhaps be seen now as insensitive sit next to lines about doing homework in bars, eating vomit off the floor, and not wanting to grow up. The song "Two Tub Man" declares "Lou Reed is a creep", yet at the same time you were covering the Velvets' "What Goes On". So it would seem to me that your lyrics were a celebration of uncouthness and a rejection of responsibility and need to be framed in that context. How do you feel about all that?

#### Two Tub Man - The Dictators



**Andy Shernoff:** First off, I don't believe in political correctness or cancel culture. I think just about everything is open to be made fun of or mocked, and nobody should be punished today for saying something stupid 20 years ago. I know in the '70s I was insensitive by today's standards but being foolish and impulsive is a teenage rite of passage. Freedom of speech gives me the freedom to offend. I really think people are too sensitive these days, I see a lotta crybabies all over the political and social spectrum. I make no apologies, my motives remain pure; sarcasm and humor.

On the first album I created a teenage character that was the most antisocial, offensive guy possible. All writers exaggerate and I find humor in weird places. That's where the "I think Lou Reed is a creep" line comes from. I mean, who is cooler than Lou Reed? ...Nobody! It's so obviously obnoxious, so purposely

stupid! ... Yet it's probably my most quoted lyric. Go figure.

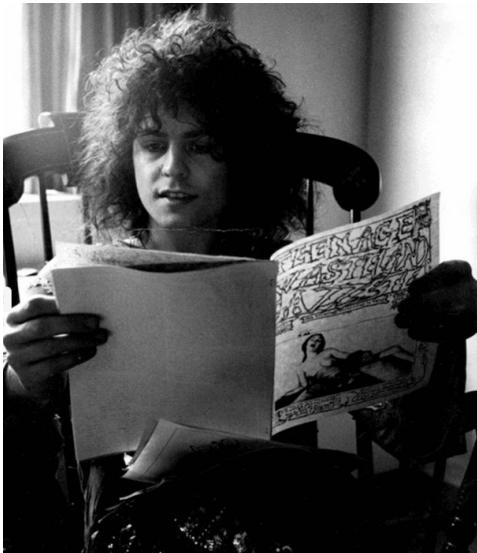
**PKM:** Going back a bit, before the band you published a fanzine called *Teenage Wasteland Gazette*. Most Dictators fans who know that have never seen an issue of it. Including me. But I am fascinated by early fanzines, so I have questions about it, and your entrance into active rock fandom... So what inspired you to start the zine, and what other zines influenced you? How do you actually get into 'fandom'? Lenny Kaye and Greg Shaw came via sci-fi. Did that ever appeal you? Was it basically *Creem*? What about *Crawdaddy* in the 60s? *Rolling Stone*, *Circus*, *Fusion*?

**Andy Shernoff:** I was a voracious reader of rock magazines including *Creem*, *Fusion*, *Rolling Stone*, *Crawdaddy* and the British weeklies. I devoured that stuff and saved every issue I bought though I recently sold my collection because they were just sitting in storage. I haven't looked at them in decades. Anyway, I had just started college and I had absolutely no interest in any of my classes. Publishing a fanzine just seemed like a good use of my creative energy and it gave me direction when I needed it. At the time, I thought becoming a rock writer was a possible career choice and a fanzine seemed a good way to get started.

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I understand there was sci-fi connection but I've never seen a sci fi fanzine in my life. I couldn't even name one. My main inspiration was [Richard Meltzer](#), he opened the door for me; rock and roll as a lifestyle incorporating sports, drinking, food, sex, all delivered with tongue firmly planted in cheek with a healthy dose of sarcasm. To be honest, another powerful motivation was to get on record company mailing lists and receive free records to feed my record addiction; mission accomplished on that. Soon I was getting dozens of records sent to me every week just because I had a stupid fanzine. That would never happen today.



Marc Bolan reading *Teenage Wasteland Gazette*

Outside of Greg Shaw's *Who Put The Bomp* and Alan Betrock's *Jamz*, I don't think I had seen many other fanzines. When I eventually did, they were all trying to be *Rolling Stone Jr.* with articles about bands and record reviews. *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* wasn't like that at all. Basically, it was rock and roll-based fiction and sarcasm. I mocked bands and celebrated teen culture. I was trying to make my friends laugh. There were no record reviews or articles about obscure English bands. I did fake reviews, articles about my friends, getting drunk, sports, silly stuff. It was more like the anti-*Rolling Stone*.

There's still some interest in it for some reason, I've had offers to do a compilation of *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* but I always turn them down. It was a lot of fun being an obnoxious teenager, but the idea of reliving it makes me uncomfortable.

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**PKM:** How did you come across Meltzer and Nick Tosches, and how did your sensibility align with them?

**Andy Shernoff:** Future Dictator Scott Kempner had met [Richard] Meltzer at a Stooges show and knew his address. I mailed him the second issue of *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* and he not only approved but he passed it on to Nick Tosches and Lester Bangs and suddenly I was in the club. They were sort of my big brothers. They encouraged me and introduced me to so many people. I wrote a few things for *Creem* and when Nick became an editor for *Oui* magazine, he got me real work interviewing Alice Cooper, Marc Bolan and Muddy Waters. Pretty thrilling stuff for a kid.

**PKM:** Were there differences between the East and West Coast schools of fandom and rock criticism at the time? The West Coast guys – Shaw, Scullati, etc – were very pro-pop and very pro-surf. *Go Girl Crazy* suggests you were into surf music... so were you a closet West Coast guy?

**Andy Shernoff:** I was a huge Beach Boys and LA Dodger fan as a kid, I thought the West Coast was the promised land. I dreamed of living in Los Angeles though I'm glad I didn't. I think my experiences growing up in New York were superior to anything I could've had in LA.

Greg Shaw was very supportive when I started my fanzine and I met Scullati a few times when I was on the West Coast. There were tons of pop guys in New York but they leaned more to British pop like the *Trouser Press* gang. I don't think there were East and West Coast schools of rock criticism. New York writers might have been more cynical but that was representative of how Los Angeles and NYC were two different worlds at the time. Now every place looks identical with the same chain stores and tacky architecture, but LA in the early '70s was all sunshine and optimism while New York was dystopia and danger. The classic Beach Boys vs Velvet Underground comparison is apt. Crime was rampant in NYC and huge swaths of the city were rubble-filled vacant lots and empty buildings. Recently, I was telling a friend from France how exciting New York City was in the '70s, and he was dumbfounded that anybody would have fond memories of crime, drugs and open prostitution. I was taken aback, I was thinking, 'hey Pierre, I'm proud I survived that morass, maybe it was hard to find a good baguette but we made great music ... and the rents were dirt cheap!'

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**PKM:** The West Coast guys – Shaw in particular – were advocates of what later became known as power pop. I think Shaw early on called it 'pop revival'. (And Metal Mike Saunders used the term 'light-weight rock', which was meant to be a compliment!) The Who were at the center of all that theorizing – and there's that famous earlier quote from Pete Townsend that gave the genre its name and which also involves the Beach Boys. So with your Who and Beach Boys influences, were you a power pop guy? What did you think of things like the Raspberries, Badfinger, Big Star? Blue Ash?

**Andy Shernoff:** I was definitely a power pop guy... you can add Dwight Twilley, Phil Seymour and the Rubinoos to those bands you mentioned. I love songs with jangly guitars, catchy choruses and sweet harmonies. Bands like The Raspberries, Badfinger and Big Star filled in the hole left by the Beatles. There was an LA magazine I used to write for called *Phonograph Record Magazine* that was a big supporter of that sound. They went for even more obscure artists like Michael Pagliaro, the Wackers and Crabby Appleton. I'll put my power pop credentials up against anybody.

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The first musical group I remember liking was the Four Seasons. I kinda think they were power pop minus the guitars. That Bob Crewe production really jumped out of the radio. I was too young to actually buy records then but when I was old enough, it was all about the Beach Boys, and no songs rocked harder in 1964 than "I Get Around" or "Dance, Dance, Dance"; powerful and undeniably pop. It seems odd to say this in 2021 but for a few years in the '60s the Beach Boys were the most rocking group around.

The Dictators did a few tunes like "Loyola" and "16 Forever" that I consider power pop.

"Loyola"-The Dictators:



After *Go Girl Crazy*, I wrote songs that were more pop than punk, many showed up on the *Manifest Destiny* album. In my secret life, I would probably be in an American version of the Hollies ... unfortunately, I don't have the voice.

**PKM:** Speaking of West Coast, something to me that sounds like an antecedent of the Dictators is some of Flo and Eddie's stuff. Songs like "Another Pop Star's Life", which is very Who-like, and "Cheap", as well as their covers of things like "Afterglow" and "Days". Where you aware of that stuff? And Flo & Eddie obviously ties into Zappa – was he an influence in any way?

**Andy Shernoff:** I own that Flo and Eddie record; killer version of "Afterglow" on it. You know they sang backup on a Ramones record? I thought the Turtles were great, "Eleanor" was hilarious. The *Battle of the Bands* album was high concept and I loved *Turtle Soup*, killer songs unfortunately hampered by Ray Davies' production. Great songwriters don't necessarily make great producers. That record really deserved a better sound. Both of those albums were under the radar masterpieces ... but Zappa, I never got. I appreciate his humor and irreverence, but the music was too jazzy for my taste.



Andy Shernoff 1976

**PKM:** Jumping back to the East, the Fugs would seem to have had something of an influence sensibility-wise? Did the whole Lower East Side thing impact you?

**Andy Shernoff:** I wasn't into the Fugs as a kid, the production and album graphics were a bit too crude; however, I have since learned to appreciate them via Spotify. I went to a "reunion show" they did few years ago. It was only Ed Sanders who's probably 80 years old with some backup musicians. I've learned you have to see these legends when you can; they're dropping like flies. I worshipped Don Rickles when I was a kid. I went to see him a few months before he died and I'm really happy I did. He was 90 years old and couldn't walk so he was carried out in a chair like a pharaoh. His humor didn't have the same punch, he would insult somebody then for some reason he felt the need to apologize as if anybody thought he was serious. It took away his thunder but it was just great to be in the same room as him.

**PKM:** And do/did you like Dylan? I assume you did like the Velvets... Did you ever see them? Were you a Max's guy? A Warhol guy? (Danny Fields gave you an early write up). Did you ever see Hackamore Brick, Elliott Murphy...early

Springsteen? And, big question I guess – what did you think of Patti Smith?

**Andy Shernoff:** Never got into Elliott Murphy but I'm glad you mentioned Hackamore Brick, I wore that record out. It reminded me of *Loaded*, my favorite Velvets record. Such a great vibe! At one point we unsuccessfully tried to get their drummer Robbie to join the Dictators. Scott and I were among the 10 people that saw them play at CBGB. They were impressed we knew their songs.

Dylan's a god but obviously not an influence. I wish I could be as spontaneous with lyrics as he is. I labor over mine. I identify more with Leonard Cohen who mulls over every word and syllable. I heard a story where somebody complimented Cohen on one of his songs and he replied, 'yeah that one took me a year'. I haven't pressured myself to finish a song since. If I'm onto something I take my time and work it till it feels right.

I missed the Velvets, but I saw Lou Reed's first solo show where he was backed by a band called the Tots. Somehow I got my hands on the poster for that show, which I have framed in my studio. A few years ago, the guy who designed it saw it on my website and contacted me to buy it because he didn't own a copy, but I wasn't interested in selling; evidently, it's super rare.

I got into Springsteen on his second record. I've seen him dozens of times since; some of the most exciting shows of my life but I had to stop when he got so big he needed to play stadiums. That's an experience I don't care to partake in. I wouldn't see a raised-from-the-dead Beatles reunion in a stadium. Just getting from your car to your seat takes an hour, leaving takes even longer. The biggest venue I'll attend is a basketball arena. Bigger than that is a waste of time, unless you like staring at a giant screen for 2 hours.

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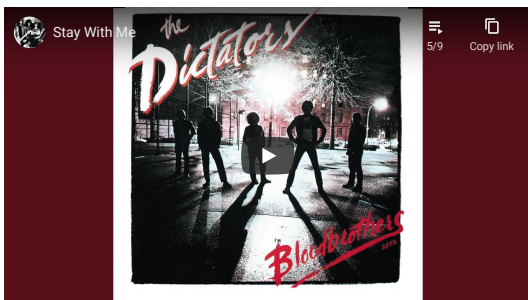
Those were heady times. We were there the week the Sex Pistols record was released, we met Lemmy and all the British punk bands. I have a picture of Sid Vicious playing my guitar on my website.

I think Bruce's album *Western Stars* is brilliant. I don't understand the poor reception it got. Lyrically and musically so spot on and refreshing. It was a creative sharp left turn which is what true artists do. Everybody wants him back with the E Street Band but great artists lead their audience. His recent single "Letter To You" is superb but because he recorded it with the E Street Band, there's less of a jolt to it, it's a little too familiar. I like it when my favorite artists shake me up. The exceptions being The Ramones or AC/DC, of course.

I've seen Patti Smith probably a dozen times, I really respect what she does, but I always found her shows to be hit or miss, though I do admire her courage. Her book *Just Kids* is another story; I could not put it down, totally compelling. It felt more like an amazing novel than a memoir. Absolutely brilliant, deserved every accolade it got.

Here's an interesting tidbit; the first time I saw Bruce and Patti perform was the same night, July 13, 1974. I was with my old producer Murray Krugman. We started with Bruce at the Bottom Line when he had David Sancious on piano and Ernie "Boom Boom" Carter on drums. Then we went uptown to Max's Kansas City to see Patti when it was just her, Lenny and Richard Sohl. Both shows were maybe 1/4 full.

#### Stay With Me – The Dictators



**PKM:** The Stooges and the MC5 were obviously a big influence. You 'saw the Stooges covered in bruises'. What were your experiences with those bands?

**Andy Shernoff:** The line 'I saw the Stooges covered in bruises' was directly inspired by the 4-night stand The Stooges did at Max's Kansas City in July 1974. I went to three of the four shows and The Stooges were at the top of their game. Iggy was falling off the stage, cutting himself, coming back the next night with stitches in his chest. It was scary, thrilling and absolutely riveting. Maybe the greatest rock shows I ever saw.

The first time I saw the Stooges and MC5 was at the NY State Pavilion at the former Worlds Fair site in Queens in September 1969. The Stooges were very primitive but the MC5 tore it up. It seemed like every song was played at a ferocious tempo. I loved the energy coming off the stage and it helped to define what a rock and roll band should be in my mind. I saw them once more when I was in college and involved with the concert committee. I brought them to the State University at New Paltz to play an outdoor festival in the spring of 1972. They were in their final stage and running out of gas; Dennis Thompson and Rob Tynner quit a few months later so it wasn't as memorable as the first show I saw.

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**PKM:** And the Flamin' Groovies – Scott writes in the liner notes on Norton's collection of Dictators rarities, *Every Day Is Saturday*, about his and your mutual love of them early on, when you first met. Were those UK and French Groovies releases easy to find?

**Andy Shernoff:** Loved the Flamin Groovies, their UK releases were available but not easy to find. *Flamingo* and *Teenage Head* are close to perfect records. They have never left my turntable

**PKM:** Did you associate with people like Lenny Kaye and Alan Betrock?

**Andy Shernoff:** Absolutely, Lenny worked at Bleecker Bob's record store so I had met him there before he started playing with Patti. I was friends with Alan Betrock. He was from my old neighborhood in Queens and I really loved and respected him. He was a mover and shaker on the early NYC rock scene. He documented everything when he started *NY Rocker*, then after he sold it, he gave a lot of artists from Blondie to The Smithereens a kick start as producer. He tragically died way too young, a great loss.



Andy Shernoff by Jonathan Postel

**PKM:** Were the likes of Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Sabbath among the things any of you listened to? The Dictators early on were seen as a heavy metal band... 'Heavy Metal' had very different connotations back then, yeah?

**Andy Shernoff:** Metal in those days referred to any hard rock band. That could mean Deep Purple, Alice Cooper or the Dictators. Now metal has a different definition and so many sub genres I don't think anybody can accurately describe the differences. When you're just learning your instrument, volume, speed and distortion cover many flaws and we used all three. I didn't care what they called us. I liked hard rock, but I also liked the Bay City Rollers, garage bands and the Beach Boys. People weren't so polarized into their musical tribes in those days.

I thought I had sophisticated taste so, outside of the first Led Zeppelin record, I didn't really listen to the bands you mentioned who in my mind were too plebeian. Time has made me reconsider and I will confess that I stole the intro for the Dictators song "Science Gone Too Far" from "Highway Star" by Deep Purple.

**"Science Gone Too Far"-The Dictators, from the *Manifest Destiny* album:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq18UxEo8XY>



**PKM:** So – the birth of the Dictators. You first met Scott, yeah? And he ended up writing for *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* too? Was that when you started formulating the band?

**Andy Shernoff:** Scott was friends with my roommate at college. He used to come up to see concerts and visit. In those days Stooges fans were rare so if you met one you immediately bonded. Scott encouraged me when I started *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* but never wrote for it. At that time being in a band was the farthest thing from my mind.

**PKM:** Ross [Friedman] was in a band called Total Crudd, which is one of the great band names and not a band name that one would associate from someone who'd later be in Manowar. What were Total Crudd like?

**Andy Shernoff:** Ross is a bit of a chameleon... Total Crudd was a hippie band that mostly played cool covers and a few forgettable originals. They lived in an old mansion in Highland, N.Y., *Animal House*-style and held these crazy, over the top, drug- and alcohol-fueled parties. It wasn't a serious musical venture and Ross was the only real musician in the band.

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**PKM:** So you and Scott found Ross, and the Dictators were born. You all lived together in a house in New Jersey and had a succession of drummers. And then Sandy Pearlman got involved, and you basically had a record deal before you did a show. Can you run us through how that happened? How did Pearlman come across TWG? Your first gig was with the Stooges and BOC somewhere?

**Andy Shernoff:** Almost...Here's the story: I was going to school at the State University at New Paltz. Ross was playing with Total Crudd, who lived one town over in Highland, but he was starting to outgrow them. I had started my rock writing career, so I guess he thought I had some music biz connections. I ran into him one day and he confesses that he wants to leave Total Crudd and start a new band. I immediately said, "I'll play bass". I didn't own a bass and had never been in a band before, but it seemed like a good idea. So Ross and I joined forces and then asked Scott, who owned a guitar but had never played it outside of his bedroom. We knew he was a Stooges fan, so he was in!

We moved into an abandoned farmhouse in Kerhonkson, N.Y., where we paid \$150 a month rent. We rehearsed everyday as we ran through a slew of drummers and I started writing songs. The other guys were supportive and seemed to like what I was coming up with. Once we accumulated about 10 songs, we invited Blue Oyster Cult manager Sandy Pearlman to hear us. We knew him through Meltzer. So he drove upstate with Meltzer and Roni Hoffman, who was Meltzer's girlfriend as well as a talented photographer from that era. We played our tunes and, unbelievably, Pearlman got it right away. He said he could get us a record deal so we moved back in with our parents in NYC, with stars in our eyes.

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Sandy actually did get us a deal with Epic Records within months; that's ridiculously fast. They say you need 10,000 hours to prepare for success, I don't think we had put in 100 hours. Ross was the only skilled musician, Scott and I, we were total amateurs. Our first show and my first time ever on stage was opening for the BOC and Iggy and The Stooges in November 1973 at Prince George Community College in Maryland. Looking back, it seems like a preposterous fantasy.

**PKM:** You were playing out regularly before the record came out though, yeah? Danny Fields wrote you up before the album release saying you were picking up a following in the 'affluent suburbs of New York'. Was this the Coventry??

**Andy Shernoff:** Actually, The Dictators didn't play that much because outside of The Coventry, there weren't any venues for us to play. In those days every club wanted bands that played covers; if you played the hits on the charts, you had a choice of clubs to play. The Coventry was the rare club that booked bands that played original music. It was located in a very unhip part of Queens, a short distance from my parents' house. Joey Ramone used to get there by hitchhiking down Queens Blvd. in his glam clothing. Imagine that totally bizarre scene!

Supposedly the owners were connected to the mob in some way.

I'm not sure where Danny got the idea our fans were from the 'affluent suburbs of New York', our only fans were our friends from The Bronx or Queens, which were working class boroughs of New York. It was probably hype given to him by Sandy or Murray.

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**PKM:** Glam days – The Dolls, I assume, were big for you?

**Andy Shernoff:** The Dolls were the kings of the New York rock scene. Tons of charisma, rousing shows, they really caught the spirit of rock and roll in their performances and gave a kick in the ass to every New York kid who had dreams of being in a band. The audience was full of hot girls, dressed to kill and future rock star boys. Yet, the music business looked down on them because they didn't do 20-minute drum solos, but I thought they were really solid musicians. They really jelled once Jerry Nolan joined, he had a such swinging groove. They proudly created a uniquely New York sound and were influential for all the early CBGB bands. There really was a magic about them.

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Rock and roll is three chords and a backbeat. If you ain't got the backbeat, whatcha got?

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The glam scene was based in the Mercer Arts Center, which had rooms for all kind of performances, theatrical and musical. The building that housed it literally collapsed as depicted in the HBO series *Vinyl*. The glam scene then moved over the bridge to The Coventry in Queens, but by then it was already starting to wane.

**PKM:** Some of the other artists on the scene – Teenage Lust, Twisted Sister, Sniper with Joey Ramone, Harlots of 42<sup>nd</sup> St, Suicide, The Dogs (from Detroit), The Planets, KISS!! Thoughts on all/any of them? Where did you guys fit in?

**Andy Shernoff:** Teenage Lust were fun, not sure why they never made a record. They had a great look and good songs. I only saw Sniper after Joey; they were forgettable. And if you can picture chubby guys dressed in glam clothing with zero charisma and bad songs you got The Harlots of 42nd St. Suicide were notorious for driving the audience out of the club; on purpose!!! I didn't get to know Alan Vega until many years later, but he was a super sweet guy with heart and vision. If there was ever a band that was truly ahead of their time, it was Suicide. Nobody in New York was using synthesizers in those days.



Dictators by Katrina Del Mar

We played with the Dogs a bunch of times and we really got along with them because like us, they were one of the few non glam rock bands. The Planets

were an early band on the scene. They were led by Binky Philips who was a local legend because after Pete Townsend smashed his SG at the performance of *Tommy* at The Metropolitan Opera House, he tossed it to Binky. The ultimate souvenir in Who fandom!

I saw Kiss at the Coventry and I thought they were great. They did a low budget version of their eventual extravaganza but the songs were catchy. Other good bands were The Fast and Milk and Cookies. Twisted Sister weren't part of that scene, they were a cover band making real money packing the bars of Long Island.

The Dictators always had a problem fitting in. We were like my record collection, a little bit of everything punk, metal, garage, surf, pop. We didn't have an identifiable sound. Plus, in the early days we were pretty obnoxious. We thought everybody would get the joke, but they didn't.

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If there was ever a band that was truly ahead of their time, it was Suicide. Nobody in New York was using synthesizers in those days.

**PKM:** Where did the BOC fit in at this time? Was Patti Smith on the scene? What about people like Helen Wheels, Ronald Binder?

**Andy Shernoff:** The BOC were not part of the NY scene. They were already professional, touring and making records. I think Albert and Allen were the only ones who actually lived in New York City. Allen Lanier was living with Patti, but he had little to no connection to the local scene. Patti was definitely on the scene, but she was known as a poet, not a rocker. Our manager Sandy Pearlman was the first person to suggest Patti start a band. They maintained a long relationship until Sandy died. She spoke and performed at his memorial in San Francisco.

Helen Wheels was Albert Bouchard's girlfriend, She was a sweetheart and much loved person on the scene. She was truly extraordinary. She wrote songs for the BOC, ran her own band and was the first female weightlifter I ever met. She was a very strong independent woman which was rare for the macho rock and roll scene. She died tragically from an infection after a routine operation. Albert and I wrote a song about her on the second Blue Coupe Record called "Supernatural Love".

**"Supernatural Love"-Blue Coupe:**



**Andy Shernoff:** Ronald Binder was a huge Blue Oyster Cult fan who latched onto the punk scene. He was *Punk Magazine's* first "Punk of the Month" and did a cameo on the first Dead Boys album. He was always a bit sickly, as he was born with a defective heart and died about 20 years ago.

**PKM:** Around this time Alan Betrock was doing his early 'zines, which eventually morphed into *New York Rocker*. And I guess *Trouser Press* started around the same time. Betrock, in particular, had a real collector's mentality. Were you ever a collector, and what was that obsession with facts and details something you saw as interesting or important?

**Andy Shernoff:** Alan's early zines, *Rock Marketplace* and *Jamz* predated almost everything. He was a pioneer and a budding entrepreneur. You could say he discovered The Smithereens, Marshall Crenshaw and Blondie as he produced their first recordings. I bought a lot of records besides the ones I got free as a rock critic but I wasn't obsessive. Alan was a serious collector and started selling those hard-to-get British records to people around the country via a mail order business for people who didn't have access to the records we had in New York.

*Trouser Press* came a little bit later. I met Ira Robbins through Scott as they went to high school together and I would see him at concerts all the time. He knew my fanzine and approached me one time and said he was considering starting a magazine. Good thing he did, I loved *Trouser Press*, it was maybe the best magazine of the era with topnotch staff who knew the music and could really write.

**PKM:** So, [the Dictators' debut album] *Go Girl Crazy*. Brilliant record but kinda amateurish sound. Even the demos sounded better! Was that deliberate? I mean Pearlman and Krugman were obviously pros.

**Andy Shernoff:** Unfortunately, not deliberate. You're right the demos were better than the album and ironically our most played song on Spotify is "Master Race Rock" from that original demo, the first music we ever put to tape. The big difference is we had a more solid drummer on the demos. The *Go Girl Crazy* drummer, Stu Boy, was difficult and a bit of a knucklehead. I think Stu Boy's rock star looks and clear drum kit swayed us, but he had a serious timing problem and for some reason was averse to keeping a solid groove. He used to talk about Buddy Rich all the time. Not really apropos for the Dictators. Basically, it all falls apart when the drummer doesn't stay in the pocket; without that foundation the other instruments have nothing to lock onto. So that was a major weakness of our first record. As an amateur, I was oblivious to the subtleties of a rhythm section and completely blind to its role in a recording. Pearlman and Krugman were visionaries but they weren't musicians so that might have played a role in their inability to diagnose and fix how Stu Boy's playing was a problem while recording the first album. Rock and roll is three chords and a backbeat. If you ain't got the backbeat, whatcha got?

**PKM:** So *GGC* comes out, critics love it, do you actually play out much?

**Andy Shernoff:** We got great reviews except for Dave Marsh in *Rolling Stone*. Unfortunately, we got dropped within weeks of the record's release, so we didn't get to play out much but there was no place for us to play anyway. The Coventry had closed, and getting on a tour was unthinkable. It was pretty demoralizing... meanwhile, unbeknownst to us, CBGB was just starting to book bands

**PKM:** Around this time, there are more fanzines starting up too. *Back Door Man* in LA, *Denim Delinquent* in Canada, *Gulcher* in Illinois, out of which a band called the Gizmos form, obviously influenced by the Dictators. Are you realizing there are people all over the place – maybe even the beginnings of a network – who still want to talk about the MC5 and the Flamin' Groovies? And Lenny Kaye's *Nuggets*. Did it feel like all that stuff was in the past? I mean you'd played with the Stooges, but "Search & Destroy" had come and gone and they were obviously done.

**Andy Shernoff:** When *Go Girl Crazy* was released, there were no local punk rock scenes, no fanzines or string of clubs to play. However, within months of its release, a network started popping up in Boston, Toronto, Cleveland, London, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Rock was ripe for an insurgency. New York City, being a media center, got a jump on things earlier than other cities, but the punk revolution was inevitable. If our record came out 9 months later, our timing would have been spot on

**PKM:** This is also around the time the CBGB scene starts. Ramones, Television, Patti... were you aware of this from the start? Was the band in some sort of hiatus as *Punk Magazine* started, the Ramones took off, and then the UK side of it kicked off? How did all that feel?

**Andy Shernoff:** When The Ramones played their first CBGB show in August 1974, the Dictators were in the studio recording *Go Girl Crazy*. I wasn't aware of CBGB until early 1975. The Ramones were living in Arturo's loft around the corner from CBGB. Television were living downtown when they convinced Hilly to let them play his bar. We were out in the boroughs, so word hadn't gotten out to us about CBGB yet

The first show I saw there was Patti Smith, instead of the voice, guitar, piano set up I saw her use at Max's Kansas City, she had a full-fledged band. She was starting to get some notoriety and was the first artist to really pack the club, which was probably 150 people in those early days.

One day, walking through the East Village, I saw a flyer for The Ramones at CBGB with Blondie opening. I recognized Joey who used to come see us at the Coventry and convinced Scott to go see them with me. There were maybe 15 people in the audience. Blondie went on first, but they didn't have their act together yet. The Ramones, however, kicked butt. I liked them immediately. They played about a dozen songs in 15 minutes. I was used to seeing bands that did drum solos longer than that, so they were a breath of fresh air though I never could have predicted what they eventually accomplished.

Around the same time I came across *Punk Magazine*. I realized something was starting to happen as I saw a Dictators mention in the first issue. I thought we were forgotten, so that was encouraging, somebody knew we made a record.

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**PKM:** Was your thunder being stolen, or was there vindication?

**Andy Shernoff:** I never felt our thunder was being stolen, I was glad there was finally an audience for the band. We were part of the scene, but we always felt like outsiders. Most of the other bands lived in the East Village or lower Manhattan while we were still living with our parents. We were out of the social loop.

**PKM:** And then you came back, as part of the CBGB scene, and *Punk* (the magazine) has started, basically in the Dictators' honor. How are you received?

**Andy Shernoff:** We were well received. Our first show at CBGB was packed and people knew the songs. We had never experienced a club full of people who paid to see us. Those days were magical, so much fun, nobody had a record deal. The idea that I would be here in my 60's talking about my career in music was unimaginable. CBGB gave us a home base. We would play 2 shows a night Thursday to Saturday. That's more shows in a weekend that we previously could do in months.

CBGB was a total dive bar on the Bowery under a hotel for the homeless. It was surrounded by deserted streets and if you ventured a few blocks east you put your life in danger. In the early days, no sane record company exec would dare venture down there, the isolation allowed things to build gradually.



Dictators 1975

The Jayne County thing was interesting. Like I said in *Please Kill Me*. "Good publicity is good publicity, bad publicity is good publicity, no publicity is bad publicity". It got our name out. There was a small controversy, including an article in the *Village Voice*, but it didn't really affect us, we weren't ostracized, we didn't lose any friends. We preferred playing CBGB to Max's Kansas City anyway —better stage and sound system. Everybody has made up; it's water under the bridge

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**PKM:** When you did come back – '76 I guess – you were playing keys and Mendoza on bass. There's a '76 CB's recording in circulation with a couple of unreleased originals, including "Tender Was The Night", a great song which sounds like a heavy metal version of something off the Flamin' Groovies *Shake Some Action* album.

**"Tender Was The Night"—Dictators, live at CBGB, July 26, 1976:**



It also includes Scott singing a cover of the Groovies' version of "Tallahassee Lassie". This was the beginning of the transition to *Manifest Destiny* I guess, but you hadn't gone the wide lapel look just yet.

**Andy Shernoff:** That was a strange period for the band. I had left the band as I was unhappy with the reception for the first album and I wasn't sure I wanted to continue in that direction. The failure of the first album confused me and I reacted in an immature way but when I saw there was an actual scene developing, I was convinced to rejoin the band on keyboards.

After the commercial failure of *Go Girl Crazy*, we didn't want to fail again, so we wanted to record an album that a record company could actually market. Sandy and Murray encouraged us in that direction as they were interested in getting a return on their investment. The result was *Manifest Destiny*, a misguided attempt to make a commercial pop record by a band that had absolutely no commercial potential. I call it "the wrong record at the right time". 1977 was the year the world was finally ready to accept quirky music, but we went mainstream. *Manifest Destiny* sold better but we spent a lot of money recording it. Though it got some airplay, it still wasn't a hit. We tried to be something that we weren't, a valuable lesson.

**PKM:** Was *Shake Some Action* an influence at this point? I've always thought it might've been an influence on *Manifest Destiny*. And maybe Cheap Trick? And maybe "Don't Feat The Reaper"?

**Andy Shernoff:** Of course we listened to *Shake Some Action*, probably a million times. The Flamin Groovies were up there with the Beatles and Stones for us at the time. To be honest, that whole period is a bit fuzzy and I haven't listened to *Manifest Destiny* in decades. I don't recall the inspiration for the songs outside of the fact I was trying to write something more commercial.

**PKM:** Is it around this time you do the Miss Nude America thing? And play with AC/DC?

**Andy Shernoff:** We did Miss Nude America twice, in 1976 and 1977. After the release of *Manifest Destiny*, we toured a lot. We opened for every mainstream band—Kiss, Cheap Trick, Uriah Heep, Thin Lizzy, Bob Seger, BOC—across the Midwest and headlined clubs in LA, San Francisco and the major markets. We did a few shows with AC/DC, who we got along with superbly. When we returned to NYC, AC/DC opened up for us which was their first NY show.

**PKM:** What is your overall remembrance of this time?

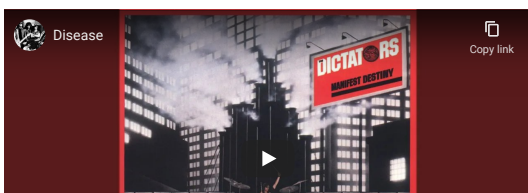
**Andy Shernoff:** I was young and inexperienced. After the failure of the first album, I had no solid vision of what the band should be. I just went along for the ride. I was traveling the world and playing in a rock band. I didn't really feel in control of my life though I was having a pretty good time. Everything changed when we went to the UK. I had been buying all the UK punk single imports and they were all great. It made me reconsider our direction and want to take control of the band again.

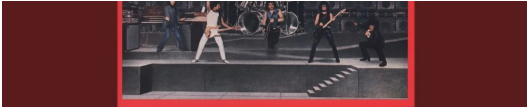
**PKM:** And how the hell did you end up on David Geffen's label?

**Andy Shernoff:** David Geffen had left music for the movie business by the time we were signed. Elektra and Asylum were one company, and when they asked us which label we wanted to be on, we said Asylum, not sure why since Elektra certainly had the more prestigious legacy. I think we just wanted to be contrary since Asylum was home to all the Laurel Canyon singer-songwriters.

**PKM:** *Manifest Destiny*: A very under-rated but confusing album. Two of your great anthems, "Young Fast & Scientific" and "Science Gone Too Far". Some fantastic pop songs – sort of like your own unique take on power pop – helped out by Ritchie Teeter's great pop voice. Plus "Diseased", which was probably more uncommercial lyrically at least than anything on the first album.

**"Disease"—The Dictators, from *Manifest Destiny*:**





And at the height of punk, you get a biker/metal dude on bass and you start wearing the kind of suit that people were wearing to discos (granted Buck Dharma was wearing something similar)...Granted the cover of "Search & Destroy" established punk cred, but what were you all thinking?

**Andy Shernoff:** As I said, the wrong record at the right time. We were shaken by the failure of *Go Girl Crazy* and overcompensated. We got some airplay and sold way more than *Go Girl Crazy*. Unfortunately, my songs really aren't mainstream. We weren't focused, our image and sound was confusing. We went off course and tried to be something we weren't, a mistake I think I haven't repeated. In retrospect, we missed the opportunity that was 1977. The world was changing and finally there was an audience willing to accept our idiosyncrasies but we didn't put them forward.

**PKM:** Next you did some shows with Kiss. Did you go down okay with their audience, which I assume was comprised of the sort of kids you were writing about on "Teengenerate" and "Master Race Rock"?

**"Teengenerate"-The Dictators ("he's no boy and yet he ain't no man"):**



**Andy Shernoff:** We did a Midwest tour with Kiss, 8 to 10 shows. There were always kids who came to see us, but the Kiss audience overall never accepted us. We were playing basketball arenas, 15,000 people, but we weren't connecting with the audience. I started to feel the band wasn't jelling. Mark is a killer bass player and helped make us sound more professional, but I didn't like writing on keyboards and felt that I was the right bass player for the band.

**PKM:** You've said you were a fan of Kiss...

**Andy Shernoff:** I was a big fan. I saw one of their first shows at The Coventry and was impressed by the songs and goofy show. Gene was from my old neighborhood and Scott knew Ace from the Bronx. We used to run into them at concerts. There absolutely was a commonality from growing up as Jewish rock fanatics in New York City. However, they were way more ambitious than I could ever dream of being.

**PKM:** Then West Coast - how did you find the scene out there? There was still *Back Door Man* magazine, and the Hollywood Stars/Kim Fowley thing going on... the Runaways had probably come and gone. And Bomp! had it's shop and was in full swing with the Weirdos and the Zeroes and the like. Did you kinda connect with any of that?

**Andy Shernoff:** Yeah, the West Coast was exciting. Our first trip out there was in 1976, we only played Mabuhay Gardens, the original San Francisco punk club. The local scene was just starting to sprout. In 1977, we returned, playing LA, and there were more bands. *Back Door Man* was very supportive of us. I don't think The Masque, which was the epicenter of the LA scene, was open yet but there were more bands and a larger audience.

We stayed at the legendary Tropicana in West Hollywood. It was a great looking post-modern motel that used to be owned by Sandy Koufax, my favorite baseball player. Every New York band stayed there; it had a restaurant called Duke's that I loved. We were there with the Ramones and had parties around the pool every night. Tom Waits actually lived at the motel and was a constant presence hanging around the main office. He dressed like a hobo, so I thought he was a bum who stumbled in off the street. I have good memories as it was still the golden era for LA, sunshine, optimism and Hollywood dreams. I think the LA veneer is a bit tarnished these days.





Dictators promo 1975

**PKM:** Then the UK in late '77, at the tail end of the main wave of punk. Shows with the Stranglers, who didn't exactly show a similar sense of humor to you guys. I know Scott came back loving the Clash. I take it Ross wasn't impressed. Nor Mark, who was soon gone? Did you play elsewhere in Europe?

**Andy Shernoff:** At that time every UK band was bringing over an American band as openers. The Damned toured with the Dead Boys, The Clash brought over Richard Hell and we toured with the biggest band of all, The Stranglers. They were riding on a ton of top ten hits. We toured England, then did 5 nights at The Roundhouse. Outside of Hugh Cornwall, I don't remember interacting with any of them. Those were heady times. We were there the week the Sex Pistols record was released, we met Lemmy and all the British punk bands. I have a picture of Sid Vicious playing my guitar on my website. We then took the ferry to France, toured Europe on our own and came back to headline the Roundhouse with 999 opening.

The scene in the UK was truly mindblowing. You have to realize that in America the punk rock scene was a small niche. It had no influence on the culture and was generally ignored by the media. In the UK, the bands had hit records and appeared on TV shows, punk was influencing the arts, fashion and politics. It was the opposite of the States. We came back and reassessed. The world where I envisioned my brand of rock and roll ruling the culture was possible. Mark left the band for numerous reasons and went onto huge success with Twisted Sister, I went back to bass and I quickly wrote all the songs for *Bloodbrothers*. I was inspired!

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You have to realize that in America the punk rock scene was a small niche. It had no influence on the culture and was generally ignored by the media. In the UK, the bands had hit records and appeared on TV shows, punk was influencing the arts, fashion and politics.

**PKM:** Assumedly this is where Ross and Sandy met French band, Shakin' Street?

**Andy Shernoff:** Shakin Street came a little later. After the Dictators were dropped and pretty much non-functioning. Sandy wanted to produce Shakin Street so he grabbed Ross to play on the record. Then, while playing with Shakin Street opening for Black Sabbath, Ross met Joey DeMaio and left them to start Manowar.

**PKM:** Did Sandy meet the Clash, or was that later?

**Andy Shernoff:** At that point, Sandy was being pushed on The Clash by CBS hoping they would make a record more attuned to the American market than the first Clash record which was deemed too raw. Mick Jones asked me if I would recommend Sandy as producer for The Clash. I said, "yeah, go for it". He's probably never forgiven me. I think *Give Em Enough Rope* is a fantastic record, but Mick hated the experience recording with Sandy, who was notorious for spending weeks in the studio and making bands do endless takes.

**PKM:** *Bloodbrothers* was clearly punk influenced in its stripped-down attack. Faster and louder. And unbelievably thick and powerful sound. Ross and Scott combining brilliantly, you back on bass.

**Andy Shernoff:** I would say things were finally falling together musically. We all had developed skills on our instruments, I was focused as a songwriter and we had a clear vision as to how we wanted the band to sound. We fell into a two-guitar sound that was truly representative of who we were. Inspired by our time in the UK, we stripped it down and basically did a live performance in the studio. It all jelled musically and lyrically. *Bloodbrothers* was the style of record we should have made in 1977. Ah, the wisdom of 20/20 hindsight!

**PKM:** Your cover of the Flamin' Groovies' "Slow Death" is amazing. I know Roy



Loney loved it. Did you get to know him?

**Andy Shernoff:** Absolutely, I was buddies with Roy Loney. Another wonderful soul who died too young. The amazing thing about Roy was that he was still singing great when he died. Most singers lose vocal quality when they get older. Not Roy, he was singing better than ever.

**"Slow Death"-The Dictators, from the *Bloodbrothers* album:**



**PKM:** And your equal greatest pop song "Stay with Me".

**Andy Shernoff:** I liked the song but we played so sparingly through the '80s that we didn't know the popularity of "Stay With Me" with Dictators fans. It was usually in the middle of the set. We found out on our first tour of Spain in 1995 how popular it was and it has been our big rousing set closer since.

**PKM:** Was "I Stand Tall" a response to UK?

**Andy Shernoff:** "I Stand Tall" was absolutely a response to England. As much as I enjoyed our time in the UK, it was kind of backward. The venues didn't have refrigeration, so they gave us warm beer and it seemed like every hotel we stayed in was from the 19<sup>th</sup> century with shaky plumbing and no elevators. I was happy to come home after six weeks in Europe. "I Stand Tall" was my whimsical patriotic love song to America.

**PKM:** And it would seem to me that what the band became at this point is what it has chosen to stay ever since.

**Andy Shernoff:** We had finally put in our 10,000 hours. The two-guitar, riff-based attack of *Bloodbrothers* is the formula the band has followed for the past 40 years and it continues on the new recordings.

**PKM:** What were you thinking in terms of the music and your place in the scene – whether in New York or beyond – and what happened after the release?

**Andy Shernoff:** By this time, there was a string of punk clubs across the country and we hit them in the summer of 1978. Musically the band was starting to hit its stride, but we were always out of time. The first album was too early. Our third album should have been the approach for our second. We were trying but lack of sales made things difficult. Adding to the challenges, Manitoba had developed a drug habit which was starting to have an effect on the band and performances.

**PKM:** "16 Forever" – the label wanted a single quickly after the album? Unbelievable song, as great as "Stay with Me" but with a really crystalized statement- "don't try to make a grown up out of me". Was that how you really felt? You must've been devastated when it was shelved.

**"16 Forever"-The Dictators:**



**Andy Shernoff:** I don't recall the reason, but we went up to Bearsville Studios, which coincidentally is right where I live now and recorded "16 Forever" and "Too Much Fun". "16 Forever" never got a real mix, the version that is on *Every Day is Saturday* is the rough mix we left the studio with that day. Sounds pretty good though.

**PKM:** So at what point, were you dropped, and was that the end of it?

**Andy Shernoff:** It was right around that time, late 1978. We were offered a tour of Europe with AC/DC, but when we asked the record company for tour support, they decided to cut their losses and we were dropped again. Manitoba was lost in a drug haze and Ross joined Shakin Street. The band was officially over.

**PKM:** What next? There's the one-off reunion show released in '81 as the brilliant *Fuck 'Em If They Can't Take A Joke*, you have a band called the Bel Aires, apparently recording an album with the great Lou Whitney of the Skeletons and morells. Scott also travels to Springfield to record with Lou with his next band the Del Lords.

**Andy Shernoff:** Well, there was no band, so I had to get real jobs for a few years, which wasn't much fun. The band did a few rent party reunions and I tried to get a few bands off the ground, but nothing took off. Around that time, I started producing bands and I discovered I enjoyed working in the studio a lot more than leading a band, a great revelation. It's led to some great adventures all around the world and I was able to make a living between songwriting royalties and when performing slowed down.

One of the groups I had was called The Bel Aires, which recorded with Lou Whitney in Springfield, Missouri, though The Del Lords worked with him first.

I returned to Springfield around 2011 to record my solo EPs there. I recorded music that comes from a completely different place than the Dictators that I'm really proud of and has done quite well from licensing. Springfield was like a mini-Muscle Shoals, a topnotch studio with a killer house band. It was all centered around Lou Whitney, an amazing character and a pleasure to work with. There's a movie on Amazon about Lou and the Springfield scene called *The Center of Nowhere*, I recommend it if you are interested in regional American music.

**PKM:** Something else I'd like to ask you about – *Wild Kingdom* and the fully blown late 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Dictators reformation can wait for another time – is the band's influence. Especially what happened in the late '70s and into the '80s. Obviously, the Ramones picked up "California Sun" from you, and you influenced them, and indirectly through that, a lot of bands. More directly, Radio Birdman picked up on "California Sun," too, I guess around the time the Dictators were regrouping ahead of *Manifest Destiny*. They also covered "King of the Surf" (recording it with Johnny Kannis up front in '77) and wrote their own surf-inspired material, most notably "Aloha Steve & Danno". And then there was the Birdman off-shoot the Hitmen – "I Don't Mind" is clearly in the Dictators' style. And Birdman had a huge influence on a generation of fans in Australia, and so introduced the Dictators to bands like the Eastern Dark (who performed "Minnesota Strip" live) and the Screaming Tribesmen ("Stay With Me", "Baby Let's Twist") and most of the bands on that *Do The Pop!* compilation. Then there were the Barracudas, who started doing the surf-punk thing – "Surf & Destroy" – in London in about '78. They were Birdman fans, but obviously Dictators' fans too – they got you to produce their comeback record. Then the Nomads in Sweden – they covered "16 Forever". I guess the question here is twofold – were you were aware of this stuff as it was happening – the Dictators influence – and how did it make you feel?



Andy Shernoff by Nikki Ishmael

**Andy Shernoff:** I wasn't really aware of any Dictators influence on other bands until the late '80s maybe the '90s, We just seemed like a big secret, a forgotten band. This was pre-internet so what was happening in Australia or Sweden stayed in Australia and Sweden. We would play every few years in New York, usually in decent-size rooms like the Ritz or Irving Plaza, but that was our hometown so I felt we were hometown heroes. We didn't do a national tour again until 1991. That's 13 years between tours. We were out of touch with the

audience we didn't know we had.

I feel the pendulum started to swing back in our favor after the release of the book *Please Kill Me*. That book combined with the success of bands like Green Day led people to search out their punk roots. Sort of like when I heard The Rolling Stones and then got interested in Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters. Some people discovered us and liked what they heard.

By the way, that *Do The Pop!* comp is excellent. Australia had some fantastic bands. I love the Hoodoo Gurus and I'm buddies with Deniz Tek. I usually see him when he comes to NYC. I know Johnny Kannis. I'm flattered if we had any influence on their music. We had similar influences so I certainly identify with their music. Interestingly, I have a side project called Master Plan with Keith Strengh from The Fleshtones and we recorded the Eastern Dark tune "Walking," so it goes both ways.

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**PKM:** Last questions... You've produced at least a couple of classic albums yourself over the years too, including the great Barracudas comeback record in the early '90s, and the first Waldos record *Rent Party*. It kinda surprised me that you did that one given that I never saw a real connection between you guys and the Heartbreakers. But you were obviously a fan. It must've been gratifying to get something that I think really proved how important Walter [Lure] was to the Heartbreakers.

**Andy Shernoff:** I think the *LAMF* record was one of the best rock records to ever come out of New York. I wanted to make that Waldos record a worthy successor and I think it was, every song is killer. Tony Coiro, the bass player, brought me onto that project. Tony was sort of my co-pilot, he had a lot of ideas for arrangements and he sang "Crybaby," the lead off track. He was a big tough Italian guy who didn't take shit from anyone. He told me unbelievable stories of keeping Johnny Thunders in line when he toured with Johnny.

**"Cry Baby"-The Waldos:**



Walter was a bit removed, when he wasn't recording. He sat on the studio couch and read *Barron's* magazine. I didn't really know him before but we became friends via the recording of *Rent Party*. He was pretty happy that it revived his career, and he was able to tour internationally again. It is true that Walter's importance in The Heartbreakers is often overlooked. Johnny Thunders had an overwhelming presence while Walter was shy with a slight stutter, but he was really a sharp, educated guy. I claim everybody's favorite songs on *LAMF* were written by Walter.

Walter and I played together numerous times over the years and I was happy he asked me to produce again when he got the record deal for a second Waldos record. Unfortunately, this time he didn't have enough songs for a complete album. Walter just wasn't writing anymore so we had to find material to record. I called up tape collectors I knew to find old recordings of bands Walter used to play in like The Heroes and The Blessed. We used some on the record. It's a good record but doesn't reach the heights of *Rent Party*.

“

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Thunders had an overwhelming presence while Walter was shy with a slight stutter, but he was really a sharp, educated guy. I claim everybody's favorite songs on *LAMF* were written by Walter.

I don't really have an approach to producing. I try to accent a band's strengths and make every song sound as good as possible. You always have to keep the record company and band happy so the ability to compromise is a must. I'm kinda out of the game of producing other bands, I stopped after that last Walter Lure record. Times have changed and recording an album takes up too much time for too little money. I'll still record my own projects but it's always an individual song vs. an album.

I'm following this philosophy with the new Dictators recordings. We will release individual songs until we tour at which time, we will package them to make an EP or LP... Just like the early '60s, it's a singles world again!

~  
**THE OFFICIAL HOME OF THE DICTATORS!**



*Dictators 2020 by Scott Braun*



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## DAVID LAING

A sporadic contributor to the likes of Ugly Things, Vulcher and I-94 Bar over the decades, Dave from down under has owned a couple of labels - Dog Meat and Grown Up Wrong! - and worked for record companies both large and small and now runs his own freelance publicity thing. He's put together numerous various artist compilations with long titles like Do The Pop! The Australian Underground Garage-Rock Sound 1976-'87 and numerous collections and reissues by the likes of the Flamin' Groovies, the Fleshtones, the (very early) Bee Gees, Skyhooks, the Hitmen, TMG and more.

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Rick

March 5, 2021 at 3:35 pm

Terrific piece that successfully drops all the relevant names & acknowledges the usual suspects. . For the sake of historical completeness however, mention should be made of Jon Tiven & his New Haven Rock Press. At the time a contemporary of Betrock circa Jamz, Tiven had a massive influence on Karen Rose who subsequently went on to cofound and edit Trouser Press. I'd always thought AC/DC opened in NYC supporting Judas Priest at the Academy of Music.

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Scott

March 10, 2021 at 2:25 pm

Gulcher out of Indiana not Illinois

↳ REPLY

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