

Mike Dirnt, Tré Cool, and Billie Joe Armstrong, (from top).

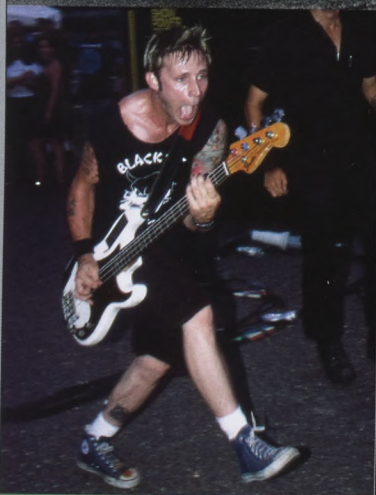


Green Day

BY DAVID FRICKE

This Northern California trio proved that punk rock wasn't dead.

ON SEPTEMBER 9, 1994, GREEN DAY TOOK THE STAGE for a free outdoor concert at the Hatch Shell in Boston. The art deco amphitheater and spacious lawn typically hosted more genteel entertainment; the house band was the Boston Pops Orchestra. But the punk-rock trio – singer-guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong, bassist Mike Dirnt, and drummer Tré Cool – came out to a roiling sea of adolescent expectation later estimated by police at sixty-five thousand people. ❧ That mass of flannel and baggy shorts turned into a whirlpool of slam-dancing as soon as Green Day pulled the pin on “Welcome to Paradise,” the sardonic opening grenade on their major-label debut, *Dookie*. Over the next five songs – mostly *Dookie* delirium, a machine-gun spray of terse, punchy riffs and rebel-yell choruses – ecstatic moshers surged forward, overwhelming a chain-link fence and a thin line of security guards. At one point, Armstrong joined the tribal stomp, leaping down into the crowd. Green Day never finished their sixth tune, “F.O.D.” (“Fuck Off and Die”); police shut down the show. “It was headline news,” Armstrong told me years later, recalling his amazement as he watched TV coverage of the melee from his hotel room. “They were saying the band’s name, what the songs were about: ‘These kids are from the wrong side of the tracks.’” ❧ A few months earlier, Green Day had been no one’s idea of prime-time trouble, much less Rock and Roll Hall of Fame material. Armstrong, Dirnt, and Cool were barely out of their teens, Northern California misfits just emerging from half a decade in the shadows, grime, and fiercely indie purity of Berkeley, California’s hardcore underground. Green Day’s early EPs and first two albums, *39/Smooth* (made with an earlier drummer, John Kiffmeyer, in 1990) and *Kerplunk!* (1992), were raw blitzkriegs issued by a tiny



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Tré Cool, Billie Joe Armstrong, and Mike Dirnt (from left) of Green Day in New Orleans, 1994; Armstrong crowdsurfing with the band performing as Foxboro Hot Tubs, 2010; Tré Cool, 1994; in the studio, 2010; Dirnt off the leash, 2000.



local imprint, Lookout!, and made for less than \$2,000 – combined.

Green Day's ascension to a major label – Reprise/Warner Bros. – came with blowback. They were immediately banned from the 924 Gilman Street Project, a Berkeley punk co-op and club where the band members had grown up in the mosh pit and Green Day made their bones as a live act. In 2014, Armstrong also confessed he'd had a severe case of nerves the day the album came out on February 1, 1994. Green Day headlined a gig that night at a San Francisco club with still-hot eighties punks the Dead Milkmen. "I remember thinking, 'I don't want to play after these guys – they have good songs,'" Armstrong cracked.

In fact, on *Dookie*, Green Day – and especially Armstrong, their main songwriter – detonated a more enduring dynamite. The broken hearts and desperate mending in "She" and "When I Come Around"; the buzz-saw fury of "Longview" and "Basket Case"; the fighting joy that propelled "Having a Blast": This was tight, classic-pop confrontation at high, euphoric velocity. It was also truth. "Whatever was on my mind," Armstrong claimed, "I wrote about it: 'This person fucked me over. I'm having panic attacks. I haven't gotten laid in I don't know how long.'" Named after a tour-van joke for bathroom trouble, *Dookie* was a record of emotionally explicit, kamikaze urgency – "a journal," Armstrong insisted, about "what it's like to live as a street kid."

By the time Green Day got to the Hatch Shell, *Dookie* was embraced by a new generation of teenage exiles, on its way to selling more than ten million copies in the U.S. alone. Fast and loud, fun but frank, the album finished the job the Ramones had started with their epochal self-titled 1976 debut, then handed over to Black Flag, Minor Threat, Bad Brains, Hüsker Dü, the Replacements, and, up in Seattle, Nirvana and Pearl Jam. Punk was officially in the mainstream, an American popular music. Warner Bros. chairman Rob Cavallo, the former A&R "scrub" (his term) who signed Green Day and has coproduced most of their albums since *Dookie*, remembered something Johnny Ramone once told him: "He said, 'You know, we never sold that much. But thank God for you guys.'"

Green Day did it the old-fashioned way: with a hit record and a riot. They weren't done, either. The band fired off three more platinum-plus albums – *Insomniac* (1995), *Nimrod* (1997), and *Warning* (2000) – while pressing against punk's own fuzz-and-rage conventions. A quietly formidable ballad, "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)," written by Armstrong back in 1990 and briefly considered for *Dookie*, was finally cut for *Nimrod*. Cradled in strings, it was a pop-crossover smash. "We were taking our cues from our favorite bands of the sixties, like the Who and the Kinks," Dirnt contended. "Figure out your next move. Keep the songs as alive and growing as possible."

In 2004, that drive produced Green Day's second landmark album, the politically charged opera and worldwide Number One hit, *American Idiot*. Nearly as long as two Ramones albums and anchored by a pair of multi-part suites, *American Idiot* combined Green Day's advanced studies of rock's great Big Works – the Who's *Quadrophenia*, the Clash's *London Calling*, and Bruce Springsteen's early-seventies tenement-stairs dramas – with Armstrong's lyric fury at America's fearful right-wing turn after 9/11, under George W. Bush. (That ambition was taken a giant step further when a theatrical adaptation of the album opened on Broadway in April 2010, with Armstrong doing three stints in the cast as St. Jimmy during the yearlong run.)

"It's important to us that we're still looked at as a punk band," Cool insisted to me in 2009, the year

of Green Day's next opera, the three-movement, eighteen-song apocalypse, *21st Century Breakdown*. "It was our religion, our higher education." But, Armstrong countered at the time, "for me, it's the whole aesthetic – harmonies, dynamics, swagger, fluidity. You take all of those ingredients and establish them to your own life."

Still, the guitarist admitted, "We're all born with the same demons. I'll see a kid at a show wearing a Green Day shirt and think, 'I wonder what's wrong with him. What's he going through?' There is always that part of you, on the subterranean side of society. You don't fit. You see things, and they make you angry. I like painting an ugly picture," Armstrong declared. "I get something uplifting out of it." He grinned as he said that. "It's just my DNA."

And it got his band into the Rock and Roll of Fame.

THIS IS MIKE DIRNT'S REGULAR ANSWER for people who ask his advice about starting a band: "Play with your friends." That's what he did. Dirnt and Armstrong formed their first group, Sweet Children, while they were still in high school and already "inseparable," as Armstrong put it.

Born on February 17th, 1972, in Rodeo, California, Armstrong was the youngest of six children in a struggling working-class family. His mother, Ollie, was a waitress; his father, Andy, was a part-time jazz musician and truck driver who died of cancer when Billie was 10. The boy, who got his first guitar the

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



KERPLUNK!
Lookout! 1992



DOOKIE
Reprise 1994



INSOMNIAC
Reprise 1995



AMERICAN IDIOT
Reprise 2004



**21ST CENTURY
BREAKDOWN**
Reprise 2009



¡UNO!, ¡DOS!, ¡TRÉ!
Reprise 2012



next year, would eventually turn his grief into one of Green Day's biggest songs, "Wake Me Up When September Ends," on *American Idiot*.

Armstrong was also 10 when he met Dirnt in a school cafeteria. The bond was instant, cemented by their passions for heavy rock and, later, Berkeley-scene heroes like the ska-punk band Operation Ivy. Dirnt — a nickname that stuck, based on the way he first played bass — was born Michael Ryan Pritchard in Berkeley on May 4th, 1972, and raised by adoptive

parents who split when he was 7. After Armstrong dropped out of high school so he and Dirnt could focus on Sweet Children, the two moved into an Oakland squat immortalized in "Welcome to Paradise," first recorded for *Kerplunk!*, then a hit on *Dookie*. Armstrong and Dirnt changed their band's name as well — to Green Day, after another mutual fondness, smoking weed.

Tré Cool was born Frank Edwin Wright III on December 9th, 1972, in Willits, California, and grew up in the hippie wilds of Mendocino. But his closest neighbor was a punk, Lawrence Livermore. Cool was 12 when he joined Livermore's band the Lookouts; he played on that group's two albums, released by Livermore's Lookout! label, and at the Gilman Street Project, where Armstrong and Dirnt knew a good thing — a punk-rock drummer with the atomic flair of Keith Moon — when they saw it. Cool joined Green Day in 1990 and brought his dad along. A helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War, Cool's father owned a trucking business. He renovated an old bookmobile for his son's new band, then drove it across the country on Green Day's next three tours.

"There was a lot of nihilism going around," Armstrong said of the Berkeley underground in the eighties and early nineties. "Dropout kids, people that felt like outcasts — they were coming into the scene." Armstrong wrote most of *Dookie* from that experience, while sharing a house with Cool and other hardcore gypsies. "It was a lot of beer and smoking



FROM LEFT
Green Day and fans, 2010; live in London, 2010.

dope,” Armstrong noted. Green Day rehearsed there too, with a dedication and cohesion that also distinguished their friendship.

“They were their own little gang – they would finish each other’s sentences,” recalled producer Butch Vig, who worked on *21st Century Breakdown* but first met Green Day in the nineties when they appeared on festival bills with Vig’s group Garbage. He noticed “how good they were, especially when they did that Green Day thing – that uptempo super-locked-in rhythm. They almost turn into a machine.”

That force and unity came in handy when *Dookie* turned Green Day into overnight stars. “When you break it big in the world, compared to the world you were in before,” Armstrong explained in 2014, “there is this language – people don’t understand you anymore. You lose a lot of friends.” He turned that shock into the immediate, lyric counterattack of *Insomniac*. In “Minority,” a Celtic-punk anthem on *Warning*, Armstrong delivered a “pledge of allegiance to the underworld . . . One light, one mind, flashing in the dark.” Even amid the topical fray of *American Idiot*, Armstrong wrote with absolute “seriousness,” Dirnt says, “on a personal-politics level.”

In September 2012, Armstrong hit his own brick wall, suffering a public meltdown onstage in Las Vegas and entering rehab for alcoholism and an addiction to prescription medication. The timing was unfortunate but pointed – on the eve of 37 new songs issued across three LPs, *iUno!*, *iDos!*, and *iTré!*, on which Armstrong re-examined his life in the margins and on a tightrope. “*iUno!* is definitely the sense of ‘Be

young, be free,” he explained after emerging from rehab, clean and energized, in early 2013. “The second album is the mid-life crisis: ‘I want to live my life dangerously, because I haven’t lived dangerously enough.’ And the third album is the reflection on reality. I’ve lived that arc,” Armstrong said, “since I was 17.”

Tonight, in Cleveland, Green Day – now in their 40s – roar into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with eyes

forward and their original ideals intact. “We started out with something so simple, but it still turned into madness,” Armstrong told me during the sessions for *!Uno!*, *!Dos!*, and *!Tré!*. He was talking about those records. It also sounded like a good description of his band – and how those kids who tore up the grass and the TV news that night in Boston got to this induction ceremony. “I don’t know any other way to do it,” Armstrong added. “That’s Green Day.”

Dookie turned Green Day into overnight stars.

Glam Bam Thank You Ma'am

BY ROBERT BURKE WARREN

In the early 1970s, T. Rex and David Bowie inspired U.K. rock & rollers to embrace androgyny and glitter, with inductees Lou Reed and Joan Jett among those heeding the call in the States.

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ROM ITS INCEPTION IN THE FIFTIES, rock & roll embraced elements of glam: Elvis sported eyeliner, Little Richard loved his pancake makeup, and Jerry Lee Lewis' girlish hair drove audiences wild. But "glam rock," with its wholehearted embrace of theatrical cosmetics, outlandish costumes, glitter smudges, towering heels on men, and blatant, cross-dressing androgyny, did not fully flower until the early seventies. Earthy hippie fashion was out, and Western pop culture was embracing science fiction, post-modern decadence, and, in the face of the first televised war, escapism. Originally U.K.-based, glam radiated to the U.S., influencing a variety of rockers both musically and visually. In its heyday, radios and hi-fi stereos from London to L.A. pumped out dozens of catchy, bubble-gummy melodies with chanting choruses, chunky power chords,

David Bowie, 1974





and primitive rhythms. As bands graduated to theaters and arenas – or dreamed of doing so – musicians upped the ante on their looks, so even the folks in the nosebleed seats could see them.

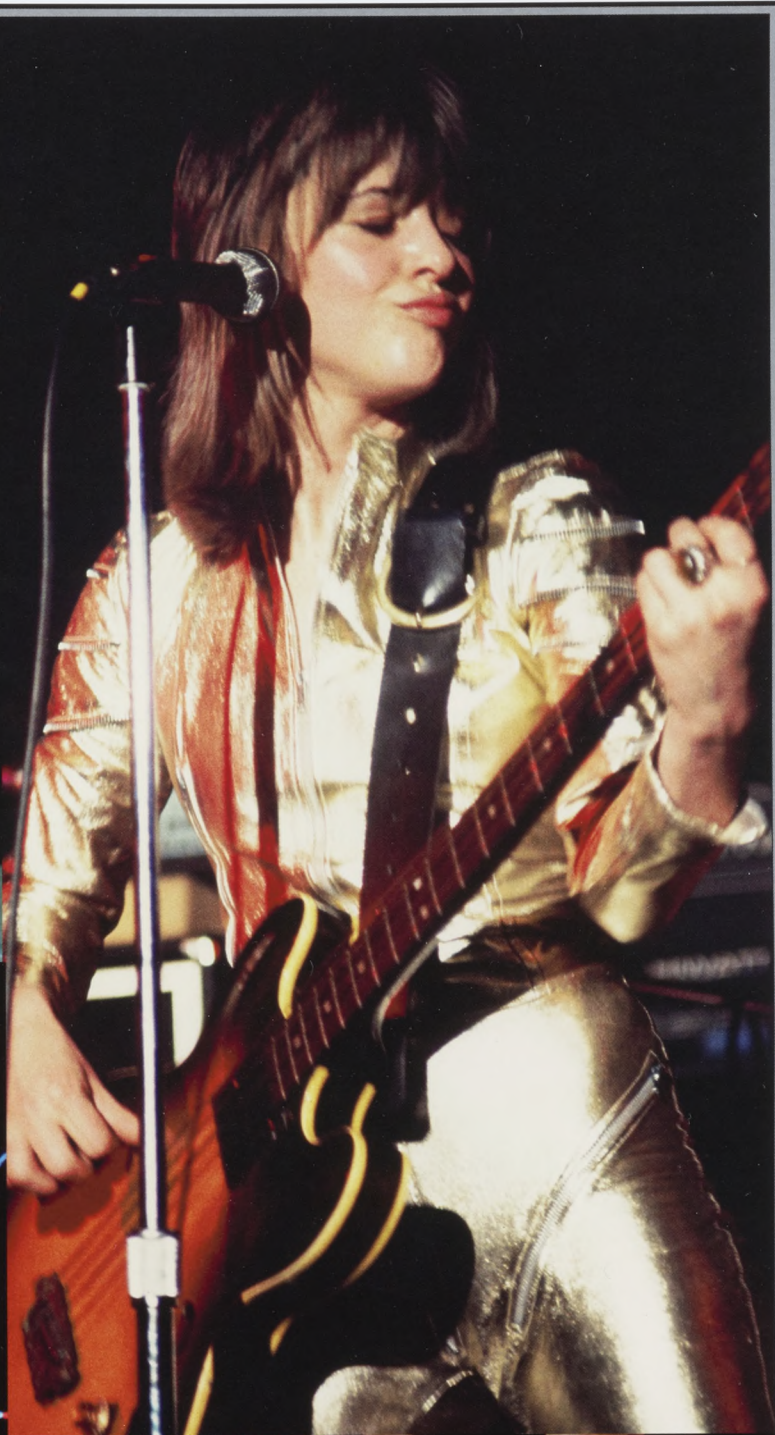
Glam had been swishing toward the spotlight for a few years. Mick Jagger had appeared in a dress onstage in Hyde Park, London, in 1969, and David Bowie wore a fetching gown on the cover of his 1970 LP, *The Man Who Sold the World*. But the official beginning of glam-as-we-know-it was T. Rex's career-defining 1971 performance of Number One hit "Get It On (Bang a Gong)" on *Top of the Pops*. In the dressing room prior to the show, guitarist and leader Marc Bolan enhanced his shiny outfit by applying glitter to his cheekbones. He hit the stage shimmering with a fey glow while simultaneously channeling the alpha-male sex strut of Chuck Berry. This set off a trend among U.K. bands, who not only wore glitter – thus glam's interchangeable moniker *glitter rock* – they started proclaiming they were "glam," appearing in ever-higher-stacked heels, feather boas, furs, silks, and other traditionally female accoutrements, while still singing about all things hetero. The juxtaposition made for the most brazenly sexual rock to date. Prime glam movers like Slade, Mott the Hoople, Bowie, the Sweet, and America's own Jobriath left dressing rooms smelling like Aqua Net, their makeup cases, mascara, fake eyelashes, eyeliners, and lipsticks scattered among the drug paraphernalia and liquor.

Bassist-vocalist and American expat Suzi Quatro, under the watchful eye of her producer Mickie Most, went in the opposite direction of her male peers, downplaying traditionally feminine looks by zipping herself into a tight leather jumpsuit. Yet

Quatro, ironically, was the first to bring real female energy to glam's center stage, performing the hell out of tunes like "Can the Can" and "48 Crash," songs hewing to the big-chorus/big-beat template of the time. On the other side of the world, in California, young Joan Marie Larkin, a.k.a. Joan Jett, a frequent underage partyer at L.A.'s premier glam club, Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco, was paying close attention to those Quatro singles. As a teen, she would form all-girl proto-punk glam-rock band the Runaways, brazenly borrowing Quatro's style, favoring tight jumpsuits and a shag 'do, while the Runaways' lead singer, Cherie Currie, aped her glitter idol, David Bowie.

IN 1972, DAVID BOWIE'S *THE RISE AND FALL OF Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* became glam's beachhead. The cover featured a tinted photo of Bowie as Ziggy, clad in a snug green jumpsuit, sporting bright blond hair and big space-alien boots. When he and the Spiders From Mars took the show on the road, he switched to a crimson mullet, heavily lined eyes and kabuki-inspired costumes, offset by lead guitarist Mick Ronson's blond shag, tight, glittery suits, and platforms.

The Spiders From Mars, however, like many rockers, were leery of glam, at least at the start. As David Bowie told *Rolling Stone*: "What was quite hard was dragging the rest of the band into wanting to [dress glam]. That was the major problem. It was like: 'Jesus, you lot – let's not be [just] another rock band, for chrissakes.' But they caught on to it as soon as they found that they could pull more girls." With help from his now fully on-board band, Bowie

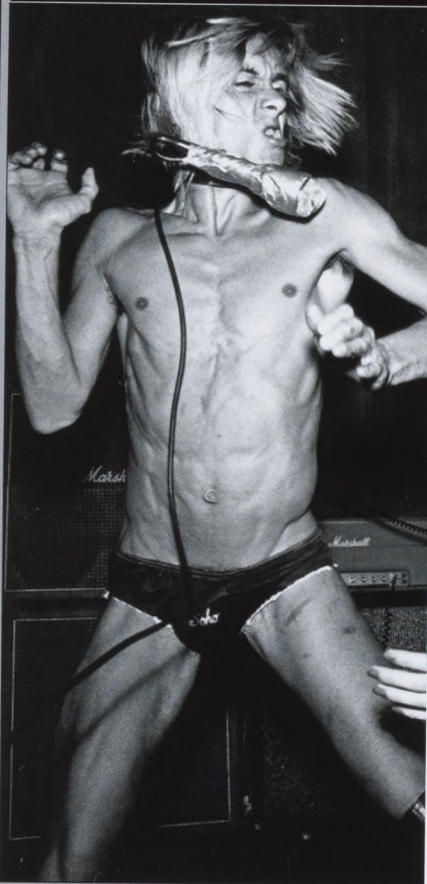


**CLOCKWISE
FROM FAR LEFT**
T. Rex maestro
Marc Bolan;
British rockers
the Sweet;
Jobriath, the
no-hit wonder,
in his signature
bodysuit;
America's first
glam sweetheart
Suzi Quatro;
top-charting
band Slade; and
2015 inductee
Joan Jett, with
Cherie Currie, at
the height of the
Runaways.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Lou Reed, 1973; ground zero for the glam explosion in the U.S.: Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco on Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1974; New York Dolls, 1973; and Iggy Pop, 1973.



would at last achieve superstar status.

As the Ziggy persona spun further outward, Bowie and Ronson brought glam stardust to their friend and long-standing influence, Lou Reed, whose "I'm Waiting for the Man" they'd covered on the *Ziggy* tour. Reed had recently departed his seminal band, the Velvet Underground, and owed his record company a second solo album. Bowie and Ronson flew Reed to London's Trident Studios and coproduced *Transformer*, now known as Reed's "glam" album, and his commercial high water mark.

Bowie and Ronson encouraged Reed to write about his pansexual days in Warhol's factory, and the duo provided very Ziggy-esque rock (much of it played by Ronson) as accompaniment. Reed grabbed the glam torch and ran with it, even writing a song entitled "Make Up," which goes into deep detail about cosmetics and dresses, then proclaims, "We're coming out of our closets!"

The trio branched out on *Transformer*'s centerpiece, "Walk on the Wild Side." Bowie and Ronson deviated from glam trappings and swathed Lou's literate, sung-spoken, Warhol Factory-inspired lyrics in laid-back, jazzy atmospherics like stand-up bass, brushed drums, and R&B backup singers. Despite bald references to oral sex, drag queens, drugs, and prostitution, "Walk on the Wild Side" became perhaps the unluckiest hit single ever.

For the *Transformer* LP cover and subsequent live performances, Reed fashioned his own nocturnal New York version of glam: black fingernails, leather with bondage overtones, and thick eyeliner. Despite eminent rock scribe of the day Nick Tosches deriding the album's "homo stuff," *Transformer* made Reed an international star.

Fellow Bowie friend and influence Iggy Pop, a keen student of rock & roll outrage, grabbed some glam in the early seventies, too. Although this was a musically fallow period for the Ig, photos of him from the glam days are unforgettable: hair bleached bright surfer blond, godlike physique poured into a pair of skintight silver hip-huggers, Maybelline accentuating his haunted eyes and his rapacious mouth. Thus outfitted, Iggy became a drug-addled fixture at Rodney Bingenheimer's, where, legend has it, he stared stupefied at his reflection and bedded many, many young women.

MEANWHILE, ON THE EAST COAST, THE New York Dolls' trashy hooker version of glam would prove quite influential. Despite selling few records in their 1971-77 lifespan, the campy, big-haired quintet, clad in women's underwear, thigh-high boots, and sloppily applied makeup, inspired two very influential forces: costumed rockers Kiss and London impresario Malcolm McLaren.

In the early seventies, fellow New Yorkers Kiss shared stages with the Dolls, copying their cross-dressing style, but, according to drummer Peter Criss: "We were just too husky to wear women's clothes and makeup . . . we looked more like drag queens." In one of the more genius moves in rock history, Kiss invested in professional theatrical grease-

paint, and, a la Ziggy, each became a sharply defined, comic-book-esque character, ascending to stadiums while the New York Dolls imploded in the gutter, as glam seemed to, for a few years. But glam never fully went away.


Malcolm McLaren, who began as a clothing store entrepreneur, briefly managed the Dolls before they finally broke up in 1977, and took note of the band's visual shock effect. Back in London, he applied what he'd learned to his next clients, the Sex Pistols. While not glam per se, under McLaren's tutelage the Pistols contrived a similarly theatrical and confrontational style, initially sporting loud, artfully distressed duds designed by Vivienne Westwood and sold in Westwood and McLaren's King's Road shop, SEX.


INSPIRED BY THE SENSATIONAL VISUAL ASPECTS of punk, but also in thrall to Bowie, who was at his artistic peak for the entire decade, glam reemerged in binary form in early-eighties England: the New Romantic and goth movements - again, largely U.K. phenomena. Bands like Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet, and Adam and the Ants were the former, employing lipstick, mascara, blush, and loud, wide-shouldered suits; meanwhile, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Bauhaus, the Cure, Sisters of Mercy, and their ilk

went the route of the latter, with whiteface, raccoon eyes, and vampiric attire. Though their fans would have been appalled, these goths and New Romantics could easily have swapped tips at the Boots cosmetic counter (and probably did so) all while discussing their spiritual father, Bowie. Yet, heading into the nineties, these styles would make only a few inroads into the U.S., sonically through bands like the Dandy Warhols and Brian Jonestown Massacre, and visually through the occasional thick eye makeup and frequent Day-Glo hair color of Berkeley, California punk upstarts Green Day.

The years from the mid-eighties to early nineties saw the reign of so-called hair metal - largely a U.S. West Coast thing. Bands like Mötley Crüe, Poison, and Warrant slathered themselves with makeup both tribal and glamorous, teased their hair ever higher, paraded stages in scarves, fringed crop-tops, and headbands, played ear-splitting, chart-topping rock & roll, and worried parents sick.

Nirvana, of course, brought that final glam era to a shuddering halt, but Kurt Cobain himself, once he could afford it, undertook some glam affectations, *vis a vis* a boa, eyeliner, and occasional full drag. Although he became the reluctant standard-bearer for grunge, Cobain was the most glummy of the great unwashed rock stars of the nineties, twisting gender norms in look and song with perverse glee.

Post-Internet cultural fragmentation shows us that no one genre will dominate again, and with the increasing mainstream acceptance of cross-dressing and LGBT lifestyles, glam may have, at long last, lost much of its power to shock. Depending on your perspective, this development could be either good or bad. Or, in the glam tradition, it could be both. 

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