

# LONDON SCENE: A Travelers' Guide

by Dave Ward

There was a time when, even in London, new wave was restricted to the one or two venues where the owners believed that washing spit off the walls and floor and sweeping up blood-smeared safety pins was no big deal. Then others began to realize that what they were dealing with was no here today, gone tomorrow fashion fad but a new and genuine youth culture movement. Most London-based punks date the arrival of the music as the summer of '76 Punk Festival at the 100 Club, Oxford Street, where an audience of a hundred or so had their brains pinned to the wall by the likes of the Sex Pistols and the Clash.

Since then it's continued to grow, to such proportions that on any night of the week your average voyeurs can take their pick from anything up to thirty different venues varying in size from the local pub to Victorian barns like the Music Machine. It's so widespread now that it's impossible to keep track; but for the sake of those likely to visit London, here are a few of the juicy ones:

## 100 CLUB: 100 Oxford Street (Oxford Circus or Tottenham Court Road Underground Stations)

The owners of the 100 Club are well used to providing a stage for minority interests; they've been doing it for years with blues, jazz and reggae. They opened their doors to new wave when even the supposedly hip promoters were starting in shock. These days it's open six nights a week (closed Mondays) and offers a selection of new wave, reggae, jazz, rock and even folk. The place itself is a large cellar with two bars and empathetic staff. Being in the vanguard of new wave has now begun to pay off inasmuch as the originators of the movement show their appreciation by still playing there when they could be selling out larger venues. As with many places, they often have a mixed bill of new wave and reggae and thus get a mixed audience. Things usually begin about 8:30 and end about midnight, admission is about \$2-3 and the capacity is about 500.

## THE ROXY: Covent Garden (Covent Garden Underground Station)

If there are ultimate hardcore punk/new wave venues, this is undoubtedly one of them. Set in the middle of central London's most desolate area, it has a busy overpriced restaurant and a bar with good but expensive beers. The Roxy has a reputation for booking the more outrageous bands, e.g. Wayne County, and also for giving a chance to bands just starting out albeit without paying them. As a consequence, the quality of the acts is always variable but rarely boring. The place itself is always fac-

ing financial problems and seems to be continually changing management. It's one of those small, sweaty, dark places and on a good night it's the best in town. The cover varies from free to \$5. Opens about 8:00 and closes 1-2:00 am. Favorite hang out of the new wave poseurs.

## THE MARQUEE: Wardour Street (Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Circus Underground Stations)

The Marquee is one of Britain's oldest rock venues and has been used by bands for live albums since way back in the early 60s. They serve rock music seven nights a week and provide one of the major stages for up and coming bands. It's a fairly small place with a capacity of 300-400 and its popularity often makes it necessary to have two shows a night (7:30 and 9:30) but if you want to be sure of getting in, arrive early. The atmosphere is pungent and the bar is ludicrously overpriced but does good business thanks to a little help from the appalling ventilation system. Standing room only. Entrance is usually \$2-3 for which you'll see two bands; a support act that could be anything and either someone new and hot or a well known name band. Audiences are usually fairly riotous and the experience of being one of the pogoing, spitting compressed mass is something to savor. Wear waterproof make-up. Within 100 yards of the 100 Club.

## THE NASHVILLE: Cromwell Road (West Kensington Underground)

As pubs go, it's one of the larger ones. As its name suggests, it started life as one of London's premiere country showcases; even has an old Chet Atkins guitar on the wall. Then it lost its financial viability, closed down and opened as a rock pub. The popularity of the place is based on the regularity with which it provides the best in pub entertainment and, in more recent times, it has become one of the after-the-gig jamming places for whomever is in town. Serves Fullers beers. Unlike most venues, it has a few tables but if you want one, arrive about 6:00, have a pint or two in the regular bar and start the line yourself about 7:00. Opens about 8:00 and costs \$1-5. Favorite gig of the Dave Edmunds/Nick Lowe set.

## THE NAGS HEAD (The Angel Islington Underground)

Set in London's less salubrious East End, the Nags Head is strictly for those hardcore head banging, spit puke and pogoing lovers. As hardcore as the Roxy but with a

more working class anti-hero clientele. It's about as dark and dangerous as you can get and is therefore much frequented by bands and voyeurs with those inclinations. Entrance is ludicrous at \$27, particularly as you're likely to see a couple of new acts. Open pub hours (6-11:00), holds about 200; so go early and look mean.

## The MUSIC MACHINE: Camden High Street (between Mornington Crescent and Camden Town Underground)

In far forgotten Victorian days, this was an old time music hall frequented by the likes of the Prince of Wales but it's doubtful whether you'll see Prince Charles doing the same thing now. It still has the original decor with gold painted cherubs and gothic nonsense, over which more recent generations have taken delight in adding some variable graffiti. You can eat, drink and play the latest electronic games. There are two large dance floors, an upstairs balcony and even old-time theatrical boxes (no extra cost). Things don't start until about 9:00. You'll get two, sometimes three bands for your money and the main act won't get onstage until about midnight which means you can catch them after seeing a pub gig somewhere else. The cover is cheap (they make their money on the bar) and it's new wave about three out of six nights. It's a well known hangout for junkies. Decaying music hall set in an area notorious for drunks and secondhand clothes stores. Capacity is 1500-2000.

## DINGWALLS: Camden Lock (Camden Town Underground)

Situated on Camden Town's new home for hip businesses, Dingwalls is one of the more expensive 'in' places which offers new wave a couple of nights a week. The advantages of the place are a good restaurant and a wide choice of booze which goes at half price before 10:00. It's a small place with some tables. The high admission charge (\$3-7) allows them to book top line acts and it stays open until about 2:00 weekends, 1:00 during the week. Opens about 8:30.

## THE ROUNDHOUSE (opposite Camden Town Underground)

The Roundhouse is funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain and has recently had its grant reduced which has meant fewer live gigs and theatrical productions. To try to compensate for this, the management has dedicated Sundays to new wave and reggae. In doing so, they have given

London its largest regular meeting place for punks *et al.* who worshipfully trek there about 2:00 in the afternoon from when, until about midnight, they can hear as many as six or seven bands, usually one of which is a big name band. There are bars, restaurants (reasonably priced) and the opportunity to do some serious posing amid the latest in punk paraphernalia. The cover is about \$5 and well worth it. The Roundhouse is also the venue for a lot of avant garde theatre and musical festivals, so it's worth picking up a program.

New wave has reached such proportions that it can sell out the larger venues and does so regularly. Thus, established major venues like the Rainbow (Archway Station) and the Hammersmith Odeon (Hammersmith Station) are now featuring new wave one or two nights a week. Both are (for Britain) larger auditoriums (capacity roughly 2,500) with large stages. Besides these, many of the London colleges, of which there are about a hundred, also promote new wave and usually cost very little. Easiest access to information on all gigs is through the weekly magazine *Time-Out* (Thursdays) which carries details of them all and is sold at all newspaper shops. It also has a comprehensive guide to the widest possible range of events and details of routes to just about all venues. Of the major rock papers, *NME (New Musical Express)* is perhaps the most new wave inclined and comes out weekly on Thursdays. The underground (subway) system is by far the most convenient way to travel in London; it's slightly expensive but quick and cleaner and less dangerous than its New York counterpart. Drawback - it closes about 1:00 am. There are some somewhere in the region of two hundred pubs featuring live music most nights and the usual time for the opening set is about 9-9:30. Pubs usually open about 6:00 and close about 11:00 and most have one band a night. For less hassle, arrive early.

For new wave lovers, there's no better place to be than London but it's also true that things are a bit different here. Gigs are usually charged with high energy and audiences tend to be a lot more vociferous and sometimes more violent. There are all kinds of political connections to both the extreme left and extreme right; many bands play benefits for one side or the other. This tends to lead to occasional violence. Sometimes it's just the raw energy. Throwing abuse, beer cans and hockers at the bands are the most common forms of *compliment* and accepted as such. It's generally true to say that new wave is a working class youth movement in Britain (as rock was in the early 60s) and is a form of violent revolt. You can expect a pretty frenetic experience. Enjoy it. □

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