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SEX PISTOLS AT THE BLACK SWAN, SHEFFIELD

4th July 1976

Exclusive *God Save The Sex Pistols* Interview February 2011

Pistols fanatic Mick Anyon interviews television engineer Lindsay Smith, a young punk of 25 years old at the time, regarding his memory of one Sunday evening in the summer of '76.

Although the venue is closed at present, The Boardwalk, Sheffield, has played host to many a name including the likes of Genesis, AC/DC, The Sweet, and in more recent years Ryan Adams and David Gray. I for one saw The Pretenders there in 1999 for a BBC Radio 2 special. Back in 1976 the pub/rock venue was known as the Black Swan (aka The Mucky Duck) and on the 4th July that year it hosted a couple of bands who north of Watford were relatively unknown to the masses, although one of them was beginning to have an impact.



Above: Lindsay Smith (left) and Mick Anyon

Mick: Do you recall what you were doing that day and what possessed you to see this band?

Lindsay: It was just a normal Sunday and I had seen the advert in The Star (local press) that said that the band was appearing at the Black Swan and I decided to check them out. They hadn't toured and it was nice to see they were up this way. Normally bands like that would be booked by enthusiasts.

What kind of reception did they receive that evening?

A pretty muted reception 'cos there were very few people there. I would've said there were maybe forty people there and that includes the bands entourage, ya' know, people that came with the band.

I'd read that there were some Teds there.

I can't recall that there were some Teds. There were mainly just music fans, people that I'd seen around town. There were a few people that'd obviously come up with the band, ya' know 'cos we could hear a few London accents around. This guy who was stood next to me admired my t-shirt 'cos I'd got an Iggy and the Stooges t-shirt. That was Glen Matlock because I asked him who the band was that was playing as I walked in and that was The Clash. That's a bit murky because I hadn't heard of The Clash at the time but heard about them later. Apparently the Pistols brought them with them so inadvertently I saw The Clash's first gig but I'd gone to see the Pistols. I'm not sure whether the first single was out at that point. I wasn't familiar with all the music but I knew what they sounded like. The album wasn't out but they played quite a few tunes that later were on the album. They were everything I thought they would be.

What was the dress code of people in the audience?

There were no punks at the time. By that time I'd had my hair cut. A little bit short and chopped up hair. People had jeans and what have you... there were still a few long hairs around. They'd just gone to see what all the fuss was about.

Curious?

Yeah. It wasn't a very ambient place, the Black Swan. Plastic chairs, carpet, a bit like a room where you'd have a wedding reception. But, you know, the band still played great. Johnny Rotten was in fine voice, berating the audience to get a bit louder.

Can I take you back a bit. Where about were you living at the time?

I would still be living at home in Eckington (near Sheffield). I used to see as much live music as I could.

Was it just you and your girlfriend went down that evening?

Well, I'd got a girlfriend at the time so I could hardly go down on my own as we went out on a Sunday. So I said we'll go and see a band tonight so we went down, and after we came back to Mosborough (Sheffield village), back to The Vine which was my local at the time. I got a bit of a hard time from my mates 'cos they'd heard that I'd gone to see the Sex Pistols. As a matter of fact I recall saying to them you probably wouldn't have liked them but this time next year everybody will be talking about them. I could just tell they were gonna be the next big thing. I've had that feeling several times but I wasn't surprised that they achieved chart success.

Can you remember what songs they played that evening?

No Fun and I think they played Pretty Vacant. Pretty sure they played Anarchy In The UK. You've got to remember that the songs that were on the album I wasn't familiar with. It was a typical punk gig. I think at gigs later than that, they were more raucous and it drew a lot more attention. I'm an electric guitarist and I like Steve Jones' style of playing.

Were there any mistakes made that evening?

I remember them stopping halfway through and Johnny Rotten having a rant about Patti Smith, I don't know why. Yeah, there were no great dramas. It went off without a hitch. It ended not too soon after ten o'clock. They must've only been on stage less than an hour. Quite an unusual gig because it was just a small back room, but I saw one or two bands there.

Did the band mix with the audience before or after the gig?

There were a couple of them stood around. I did recognise Glen Matlock as I said he'd commented on my t-shirt. John Lydon wasn't out there and I didn't see Steve Jones. They had a few people come up them but I didn't recognise anybody 'cos I wasn't familiar with the punk scene.

Was there any particular moment that stood out that evening?

No, I just thought it was great. As I say, they played a few songs that I recognised later on. I would say that really listening to the album later, I think they played most of the songs that were on it.

What was the sound quality like?

Great sound quality, because it's a small room, carpets. They played well and they looked good. Pretty much a breath of fresh air really.

Can you remember what they wore?

John, I think he'd got a netted jumper on. Paul Cook used to wear a t-shirt didn't he? Glen Matlock looked pretty much standard. He never looked much of a punk guy did he? I think Steve Jones had white jeans on and I remember admiring his guitar.

Do you still have the original ticket stub?

No I don't. It was a raffle ticket type and as I recall it was 50 pence.

Which other bands of the day did you see?

I would seek out any gigs that I could actually. I saw most of them. The Stranglers, The Saints from Australia, The Damned, Generation X with Billy Idol - they were good and just came and stood near the bar. I talked to them. Most of the punk bands that were around, I saw at some point. For a while it was good, then things started getting out of hand. Skinheads started turning up. Sham 69, I recall Nazi guys there. People started jumping on the bandwagon. Then I started going down to London and seeing postcards with massive mohicans. I thought it was then starting to get stale.

What's your favourite Sex Pistols song?

I don't think I've got a favourite Pistols song. I just like the album. It's one of those albums that you rarely get - an album that you like from start to finish. As a whole it is great and I like all the B-sides. Pretty Vacant, God Save The Queen, Bodies; basically I like them all.

Did you ever see the band again?

Because I enjoyed 'em so much when the tour proper came out (Anarchy tour) I was either gonna see them at Manchester or Derby. I think I got tickets for Derby and I think it got called off because of the Bill Grundy thing so I never got to see them again. The tour kicked off and almost straight away got cancelled.

What do you think was their biggest mistake and do you think Malcolm had anything to do with it?

I think they got tricked by the press. It tried to kick up controversy and they did at the time and everybody jumps on the bandwagon. With the Bill Grundy thing they played into the hands of the press. Nowadays you can cause controversy and get away with it. He wanted to cause controversy and that he did. Malcolm managed the New York Dolls for a while didn't he?

Prior to this gig, who else had you seen in concert?

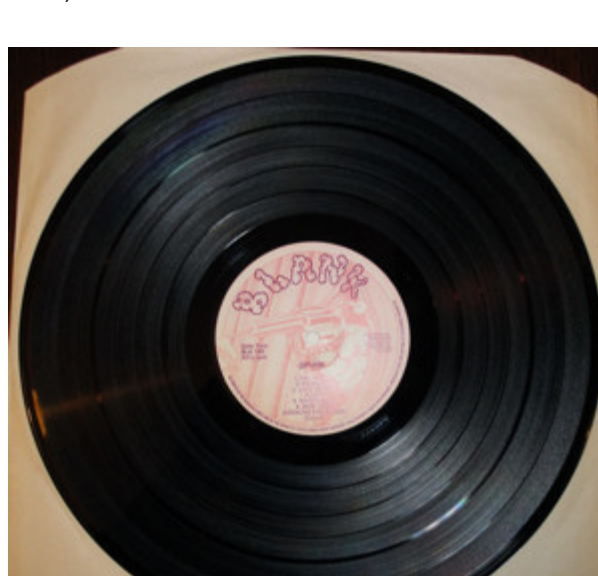
Loads of people 'cos you've got to remember this was after progressive rock. The Sex Pistols started up as a reaction against these bands. I'd seen Pink Floyd, Genesis, Deep Purple. Ramones was the first punk album I ever bought so I knew what to expect.

How do you rate the Pistols among the great British icons such as Led Zeppelin, Elton John, David Bowie and The Rolling Stones?

Well, they stand out don't they? They'll go down in history. I wouldn't compare to some of those as they're part of a different genre. If somebody says "what's punk like?" you put on Never Mind The Bollocks don't you, or The Clash?

The bootleg album Spunk came out (pardon the pun!) I think a week or so before Never Mind the Bollocks. Did you buy it?

I didn't get it until after I got Never Mind the Bollocks. I'd read about the album of demos and I went up to Record Collector, Broomhill, Sheffield (still open) and got it there. With bootlegs at the time there was a lot of controversy with them 'cos record companies were prosecuting people. All the singles I would've got from Virgin, down The Moor (Sheffield shopping precinct).



Above: Lindsay's copy of Spunk with stickered sleeve

What did you think when Glen was replaced by Sid?

To me the Pistols are always going to be Glen Matlock on bass. He (Sid) looked the part there's no two ways about it. To me the Pistols and that sound were with Glen Matlock. When they brought in Sid Vicious it was the beginning of the end for the band. It brought them to the masses, and most people nowadays if you mention the Pistols and asked them who's the first person they think about, a lot would say Sid Vicious. I'm an purist you know.

Did it mean anything to you when the band reunited in '96?

I'd read about it, I was interested but I wasn't moved to go and see them again 'cos I thought well if it's just a cash making exercise. As it turned out it got pretty good reviews so I was happy they did. They didn't get trashed. If I'd got the opportunity I might've gone and seen them if they'd toured widely. I read the review of Finsbury Park and it said they were surprisingly good.

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