

NOVEMBER 15, 2018 / LENE CORTINA / LEAVE A COMMENT

Punk Places #8 – Screen on the Green

The Screen on the Green is pretty much exactly as its name suggests; it's a cinema looking over a green space, located in Islington, north London. Built and opened as the Empress Picture Theatre in 1913, and despite several name changes along the way, it still operates as one of London's most popular "local" cinemas. Much has been written about its history, its striking architecture and even its current role as a plush, premium-priced, hipster-hangout, but to anyone of a certain age, its name will always be associated with the night the Sex Pistols played alongside the Clash and the Buzzcocks. For a pound.



On Sunday August 29th, the then tatty Screen on the Green hosted the first Punk all nighter. It was the long hot summer of 1976, and the Pistols were in the middle of a run of shows, which had already seen influential gigs at both Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall (July 20th 1976), and the Pier Pavilion Hastings (July 3rd 1976), where audience member Poly Styrene was celebrating her birthday, just a month before.

The Islington show was never intended to be anything other than ground-breaking, with the unusual start time of midnight, and was arranged by McLaren as a test of strength of the new movement. With fellow Londoners the Clash and Manchester's Buzzcocks on the same bill, it was the first deliberate attempt at an all Punk super bill.



Bromley's with their feet on the seats – Steve Severin, Siouxsie Sioux and Debbie Juvenile.

"I don't think anybody really knows their way with clothes at 15. We created the style by not being educated about dress" – Debbie Juvenile



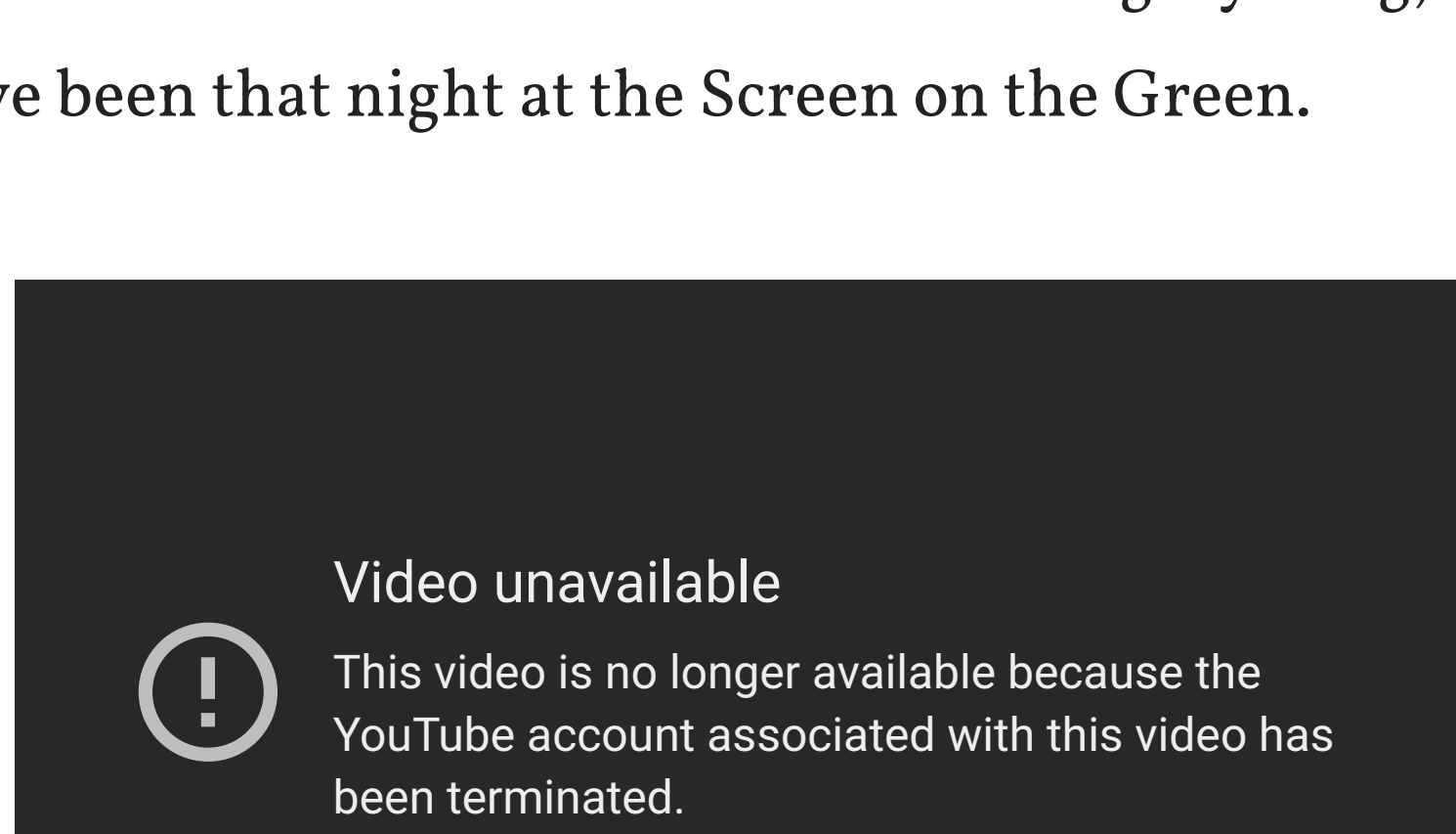
At this point the movement was still defining itself, the clothes and the "being there" were just as important as the music. In Jon Savage's essential tome "England's Dreaming" he quotes Buzzcocks manager Richard Boon as saying, **"There was a sense of people competing for copyright on presenting ideas...at the Screen on the Green the Clash went into the alleyway to get dressed so that no-one could see that they were wearing slogans and paint-spatter. There was that urge to secure their turf"**.

Without an on-site designer or a cutting edge Kings Road boutique to purloin their outfits from like the Pistols, the Clash, along with many of the movements early followers, had started to invent clothes for themselves. The race was on to make a statement, which went for the audience too, with the Bromley's in full attendance and in full regalia for the event. Maybe they didn't know how significant this all was on the night, but they must have been feeling it – this was a night of Punk legend.

NME staffer Charles Shaar Murray, who was still evidently grappling with the significance of the evening's line-up, wrote a full page about the event in the following week's NME calling the Pistols performance "taut...direct... and utterly real", and he gave as many column inches to the audience; "a chick in S&M drag with her tits out" (wonder who that could possibly be?). He then goes onto suggest the Clash are a garage band who should return to their garage, but like we said, he didn't really seem to "get" it. Legend has it that Rotten knocked a tooth out on his mike stand halfway through the set, and the ensuing pain fuelled his performance to another level.



That night at the Screen on the Green is the stuff of legends. The all star, all punk bill cemented the fact that there now was a movement, and less than a month later the Pistols, the Clash and the fledgling Banshees would do it all again at the 100 Club Punk Festival before taking it mainstream. From here on in, Punk just exploded, but one of the tipping points for the Punk movement, between what could have been a fizzler or a mighty bang, might just have been that night at the Screen on the Green.

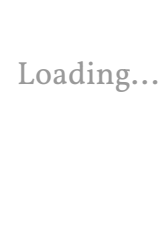


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