

Ron Watts Interview

Nov 2006

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Friday 17th November 2006, 30 years since Punk detonated, and I had the pleasure of sharing a few drinks with Ron Watts in my home. Ron promoted many of the early bands, and organised the now legendary Punk Festival at the 100 Club on the 20th and 21st September, 1976. Ron's just published a great book which documents those heady and (for those lucky enough to have been there) exciting times. I switched on the tape recorder, put some wine on the table and off we went, talking about our mutually favourite subject. Music! I hope people will find this interview as interesting as I did, he's a top bloke with some great memories.

Rob Maddison, Tamworth, 19th November 2006.

100 Watts, a life in Music. Written by Ron Watts and forward by Glen Matlock. ISBN 0-9543884-4-5. Available from Heroes Publishing, the Internet (it's on Amazon) or even a bookshop!



RM) Ron, firstly, why did you write the book?

Ron) I was approached by the publishers, who said "would you be interested in writing your life story". I thought about it, for about two days, and then thought yeah. Yes, I'd do that, you know what I mean.

RM) How on earth did you remember everything?

Ron) Most of it was in the house, still. I just had to find all the old diaries and booking sheets and things, and it jogged my memory, you know.

RM) You kept all that stuff, then Ron?

Ron) Well, yes, I suppose you would, really, wouldn't you. To be honest, I sold some stuff off at auction, about 10 years ago, when I was skint. One thing was the Sex Pistols contract from the Punk Festival, which was handwritten by Malcolm McClaren.

RM) Who bought it?

Ron) I think it was the Hard Rock Café in Central London, to put up on the wall.

RM) When's your next promotion Ron?

Ron) Well, I haven't been promoting for a while, but it's in my blood, and people are expressing an interest in me doing something. I've got 2 venues lined up for the new year, look here for news, come February. We've venues in Oxford Street and High Wycombe, but can't say too much at this point!! These gigs are to be known as Ron's part 1 and 2...

RM) Who are you promoting?

Ron) What I did in 1977.

RM) What, new "Punk" bands, such as The View etc?

Ron) No. Same bands I did in '77. Same bands in the same place. Some of them are reforming, I've been on the bone mate!!

RM) Who are you still in touch with from those days, Ron?

Ron) Virtually everybody. People from the Sex Pistols, met some of the Clash quite recently, Damned I'm still in touch with, no end of people.

RM) Glen Matlock wrote the forward to the book and is obviously a decent bloke.

Ron) Glen is a nice bloke, and definitely part of the Pistols, but is his own man.

RM) Did you ban Punk?

Ron) No. Punk was banned around me, and while it was banned at one venue, I still considered doing it at another, the Nags Head in High Wycombe. At the first opportunity for it to go back into the 100 Club it went back in. It's a false supposition to suggest I banned it. It was banned because the police and

Oxford Street traders association objected to Punks standing in queues outside their shops waiting to get into the club. At this time Oxford Street was the premier shopping street in Europe. I'd be getting complaints, so would go out into the street and try and get people to move out of shop doorways etc, but as soon as I went back in the club they'd be back in there. And of course there'd been some real bad violence. When a girl loses her eye that's a pretty serious thing. You have to remember that I didn't own the club, I just promoted there. Simple as.

RM) Did Sid Vicious throw the glass that injured the girl's eye?

Ron) Well, I presume so, the barman saw him do it. He didn't know Sid from Adam, but he pointed him (Sid) out and told me it was him that threw it. I don't think Sid meant to hurt anybody, except the Damned! If it had caught Captain Sensible on the head he'd have liked that! Funnily enough I was down at the 100 Club a couple of weeks ago, and Michelle Brigandage, who took some of the photos in the book, was telling me that she was actually sat with the girl who lost her eye. Apparently she was an art student from South London, never wanted any publicity and was broken hearted, as anyone would be who lost an eye, especially at that age. She was only 19 at the time. Michelle was sat with her when it happened, she was her mate, and it's the first time I've had a real chat about it. She said herself that though she accepts that it was Sid who threw the glass, he hadn't intended to do that. But at the same time, he had thrown the glass with malice, and might've done even worse damage to someone else, you never know. So in one sense, he's exonerated to a degree, and in another sense he's still a malicious Pratt.



RM) Was there any collusion to get Sid off by discrediting the barman's story?

Ron) No, but so many people went down with him, to the police station, and said he didn't do it that the CPS probably thought 250 against 1 and dropped it.

RM) Were you surprised by Sid's eventual demise?

Ron) No. You know, his mother, Ann Beverley moved up to Swadlincote, near here. She got some money from Sid's estate, and the Pistols gave her some money. She got a cheap house and a few bob in the bank, and when she'd run through that she topped herself. As for Nancy, the police weren't looking for anybody else, but we don't know, do we.

RM) Ron, how proud are you of your role in Punk, and could it have happened without the 100 Club?

Ron) Yeah, it would've happened anyway. It might have happened in a different way, but I suppose the traumatic birth it got, and the big hand it got via the Punk festival etc helped, otherwise it might have taken a bit longer.

RM) Could it have started in any other city other than London?

Ron) I think it needed London. It gave it the credibility. It might have happened somewhere else, and it might have been more interesting if it had happened, say, in Liverpool or Newcastle or somewhere, but it would have taken longer to be accepted, and London would have taken longer to accept it.

RM) I suppose the Pistols, who catalyzed the movement were a London band, and people like Paul Weller, Pete Shelley etc always say the seeing that band is what galvanised them.

Ron) Yes. They were the catalyst. We needed to have them in the Capital, playing in the middle of the Capital. It was always going to be a shortcut for them, you know. So yes, it would have still happened elsewhere, but in a different way.



RM) Whose idea was the 1976 Punk Festival at the 100 Club?

Ron) Mine. My idea, yeah. I approached McLaren, as I knew that I needed the Pistols to headline it. And the Damned, they said that they wanted to do it, and The Clash agreed immediately, then we had to cast around to find some more. The Manchester bands were got down by Malcolm (McLaren). Siouxsie approached me direct, although it wasn't much of a band. Then, the Stinky Toys were volunteered by McLaren, although I'd never heard of 'em, and hardly anyone's heard of 'em since! Never mind, they got on eventually on the second night!

RM) I read in the book that the Grande Piano on the stage got used like a climbing frame. Were you actually liable for damages if things got broken?

Ron) The piano wasn't going to get moved off the stage. It always stays there. Thing is, you've got to remember that it was a running, 7 nights a week club, for Jazz and Blues mainly, and the piano was a part of all that.

The owners of the club left me to it for my nights, very seldom that they were there, even. If the place had been wrecked, it would've been down to me, I'd have had to pay for all the damage, you know.

RM) Punk 77's owner wondered if you thought the Banshees sounded as bad as he thought they did?!

Ron) Well, in '76 they weren't really a band, you can't comment. What they were doing was performance art, just getting up onto the stage and doing something off the top of their heads. They didn't know any songs, and it sounded like it. It was weak, it was weedy. Sid just about tapped the drums. Siouxsie was doing the Lords Prayer and stuff like that. You couldn't say it was a gig, or a rehearsed act, it was just people, getting up and trying to do something. I let them do it, you know, I might have done something like that at their age. I don't think Siouxsie really lived up to her reputation, if you like. Well, not initially.

RM) I didn't like them, but the Banshees went on to become very skilled, musically.

Ron) Yes. By then she'd recruited some good blokes. She's been living in France for a long time now, I don't see her.

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Additional questions supplied, with thanks by: Paul @ www.Punk77.co.uk, Eddie Armchair @ www.tamworthbands.com Jon @ www.touchincloth.co.uk And, most importantly, a very big thanks to Ron for agreeing to be interviewed, and especially to Ann Robson, my other (and better) half, for speaking with Ron and arranging it.