

Anarchy on the River Tay – How a cancelled Sex Pistols gig in Dundee changed music history forever

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By Graeme Strachan March 3 2018, 8:20am f t in ✉



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It is perhaps the most famous Dundee gig that never was – a cancellation that was to change the face of music history in the UK.

In the week tickets went on sale for [John Lydon's return to Dundee with Public Image Ltd](#), memories have been stirred of the Caird Hall cancellation that will forever take its place in music folklore.



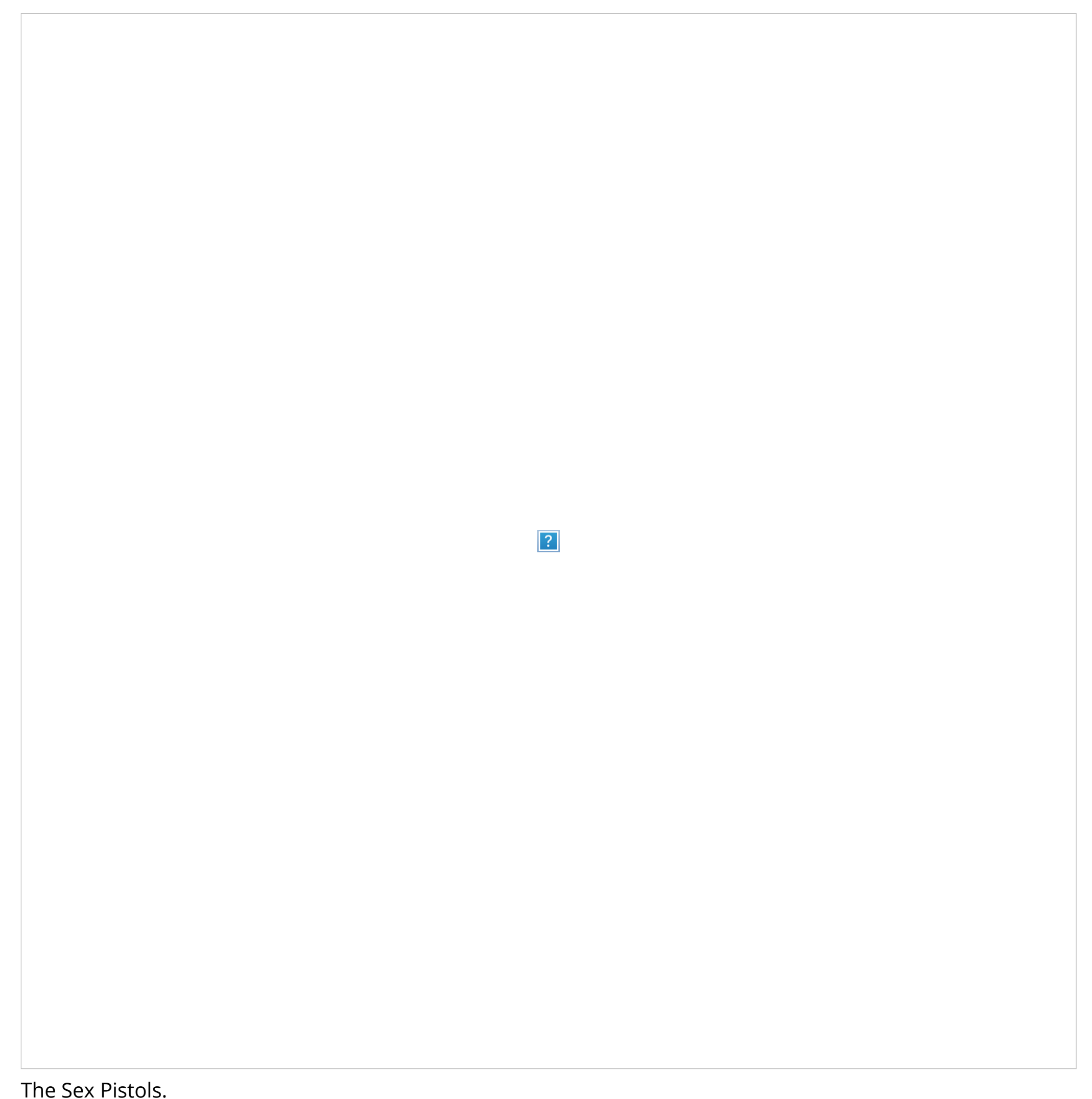
Lydon's Sex Pistols played Dundee's bowling alley in October 1976 as a young punk band intent on shaking up the establishment just days after signing with EMI Records.

The band's first single Anarchy in the UK was due for release on November 26 and manager Malcolm McLaren put together a tour to promote the record which would include a second gig in Dundee on December 1.

The Caird Hall date became the gig that never was when Queen pulled out of making an appearance on Thames Today on December 1, which was the London evening TV show presented by Bill Grundy.

Their plugger suggested the Pistols as a substitute on the tea time show.

McLaren thought the publicity generated by live TV was too good to turn down and a limousine was duly sent for the band and the Caird Hall gig was hastily rescheduled for later in December.



The Sex Pistols.

The band appeared live on Grundy's show and the infamous performance made front page headlines the next day.

Note: Video contains strong swearing



Steve Jones responded to Bill Grundy's dare that he say "something outrageous" and he responded with a four-letter word and turned the air blue.



The gig that never was.

EMI withdrew the single and shortly afterwards fired the band.

The infamy that surrounded the Pistols as a result of the Today show turned the group into stars.

McLaren later said the interview was a "pivotal moment that changed everything" and "punk became the most important cultural phenomenon of the late 20th century".

Former Dundee DJ Pat Kelly said the story of punk might have been completely different had the band played their Caird Hall show as planned.

He said: "Let's be clear about the Sex Pistols – they were manipulated and put together by a very clever manager Malcolm McLaren.

"I do recall the outcry when they swore on TV and the media were on their case.

"They lost work but gained financially when EMI Records dropped them.

"However, Virgin came in and signed them and the rest was history.


"The public bought into the hype but at the end of the day so did the punks and McLaren made a fair bit of money all through a swear word.

"Dundee Corporation was frightened that the Caird Hall would not be in one piece if they allowed them to perform the rescheduled date.


"So they dutifully cancelled their booking."

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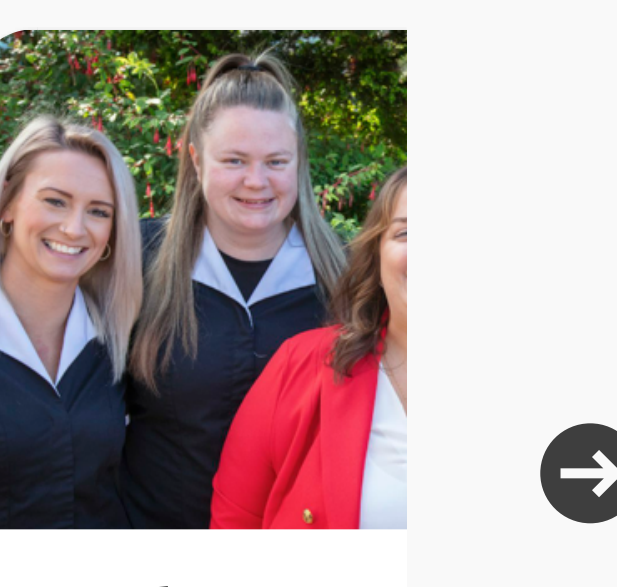
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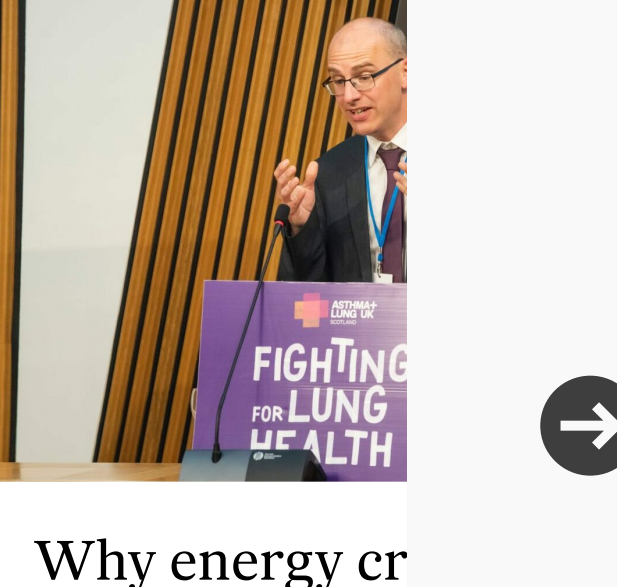
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