

Big picture

December 21 1977, and *le tout punk rock* are out in force for the opening night of the Roxy in Covent Garden, a tiny club leased for three months by Andy Czewowski, Generation X's manager. Looking dapper at the centre of Erica Echenberg's photograph is John Lydon, already a star of the scene with the Sex Pistols; on the right is Mark P, the young editor of the punk fanzine *Sniffin' Glue*. On the left is Brian James, songwriter and guitarist of the Damned, NME journalist Nick Kent and James's then-girlfriend Julie Nylon. "Brian

dumped her that night," recalls Echenberg, "and started up with me. She stubbed a cigarette out in my face. They were lovely people, you know."

Echenberg was working as a rock photographer in London when a friend played her New Rose by the Damned over the phone in autumn 1976. She went to see them play and was involved in the nascent punk rock scene from then on. The opening night of the Roxy was its coming-out party.

"It was definitely a big event because everyone was there," she says. "Even Led Zeppelin came down. But it was a really seedy place, with filthy toilets and

rickety old stairs leading to a cement basement where the bands played."

Echenberg was documenting London's punk movement in the brief period when the bands were yet to be huge, there was no uniform style, and the fans were more photogenic than the people on stage. The Roxy, for example, had one regular called Gerry Atrix whose self-expression consisted of attacking his face with a black marker pen.

"It was a gift for a photographer because everybody wanted to have their picture taken," says Echenberg. "The beauty of it was that nobody was telling these very young people how to dress;

Snapshot Opening night at the Roxy club

By Erica Echenberg

they figured it out for themselves. And all of a sudden girls were OK, whereas rock had been pretty male-dominated until then." There were disadvantages, though: cameras tended to be spat at or, worse, pogoed into.

By the time the Roxy closed, its patrons had become internationally famous. "It happened very quickly and that early scene died," says Echenberg. "But for a while there, it was extremely creative." Will Hodgkinson

Punk in Pictures is at Redferns Music Picture Gallery, London W10, from Wednesday until September 16.

