

The Great Post-Punk Explosion

REGULAR MUSIC WRITER MARK PRENDERGAST TAKES A CLOSE LOOK AT THE POST-PUNK ERA OF ROCK

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No matter where one was during November 1976, it was impossible to ignore the visceral energy of Punk Rock's greatest debut song in history. The Sex Pistols' revolutionary *Anarchy In The UK* (the band's only single on EMI) also gave birth to the golden songwriting partnership of Glen Matlock and John Lydon, which would produce one classic after another in 1977 including *God Save The Queen* and *Pretty Vacant*. But the raw-as-steel impact of *Anarchy* literally cut popular music in two, forever. The Pistols had thrown down a gauntlet to the youth and somebody had to follow.

Soon Britain and Ireland were awash with Indie labels which adopted a guerilla attitude to making music: Rough Trade, Cherry Red, Factory, 4AD, Warp, Beggar's Banquet, to name a few. Anyone who wanted could record a single; bands formed overnight, played a few gigs, made a record and disappeared into oblivion. The best stayed around for a while, with names like Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Ultravox, Cabaret Voltaire, Joy Division, Echo & The Bunnymen, Depeche Mode, Wire, Pere Ubu, The Cure, The Durutti Column, Public Image Limited, The The, etc etc.

Take a Post-Punk single example of genius. American band Pere Ubu were from the post-industrial blight of Cleveland, Ohio. Their frustration mirrored the Pistols, pouring out on their debut single *Final Solution* (originally from 1976 but re-issued in 1980 by Rough Trade as *Datapanik In The Year Zero*).

Post-Punk finally found its form in the album. One could be forgiven for calling this Progressive Punk, but a year-zero always has to progress. What follows are some of the finest long-playing platters recorded in the years following Punk.

1. PERE UBU The Modern Dance Blank, Jan 1978



Aficionados go back to the two *Datapanik in the Year Zero* singles, the one mentioned above and a 12" five track effort released by Radar in 1978 and

which mopped up their early Hearthan singles from 1975 to 1976, to find the roots of this extraordinary American band.

Untitled (an early version of *The Modern Dance*) is breathtakingly ambitious, where the sound is stretched, destroyed and built back up again. It set the stage for the album, which appeared at the beginning of 1978. Searing, uncompromising and committed, the album never lets up. A more polished version of *Modern Dance* sees found-sounds jostling with the repeated refrain 'merdre, merdre', with Thomas wailing effectively over Tom Herman's guitar; *Chinese Radiation* and *Sentimental Journey* simply up the stakes further.

2. WIRE 154 EMI Harvest, Sept 1979



In two years, Wire went from the punk thrash of their 21-track debut *Pink Flag* to this minimalist masterpiece of drones, pop songs

and bleak, harrowing music. Still dissonant and intellectually detached, Colin Newman, Graham Lewis, Bruce Gilbert and Robert Gotobed were clever sods from South London who saw music as experimental art. Interestingly once this album was done the group split, so 154 is the highlight.

Wire was democratic: Lewis and Gilbert

write and sing as much as perceived leader Newman does. The album reaches a zenith on *A Touching Display*, a Graham Lewis slice of desolation with Newman's distorted guitar. In contrast the album's second pop masterpiece *Map Ref. 41 N 93 W* soars to such heights that the band seem to be quoting Baudelaire.

3. THE POLICE Reggatta De Blanc A&M, Oct 1979



Formed in early 1977 after a chance meeting in Newcastle between Sting and American drummer Stewart Copeland, in August guitarist

Andy Summers was recruited and the classic Police sound was born. Sting made a huge impression as a songwriter, with *Roxanne* and *Can't Stand Losing You* proving instant Post-Punk classics.

But the second album *Reggatta De Blanc* made The Police stars, full of brilliant Sting writing, especially *Message In A Bottle* and *Walking On The Moon*, Reggatta De Blanc (roughly 'white reggae') was an embarrassment of riches. Recorded in only four weeks at Surrey Sound, with the same producer Nigel Gray, where Sting dominated their first album, Copeland contributed to 50% of the album and Summers received a writing credit on two tracks. Both *Deathwish* and *Walking On The Moon* illustrate just how sharply the band had perfected its 'white reggae' sound.

4. PIL Metal Box Virgin, Nov 1979

An iconic album of the Post Punk era, Public Image Limited's *Metal Box* is experimental and live, courtesy the bass of Jah Wobble