

A Date With Ivy Wrestling, Gridiron, Mass Murder ... and Elvis

by Kerry Buchanan

In 1966 Elvis made a movie called *Easy Come, Easy Go*, with this crazy scene of bikini clad girls having their skin decorated by a body painter and a yoga instructor putting Elvis and the girls through a few positions. This inspires Elvis to break into a song



Lux Interior on stage, London 1980.

PHOTO BY JEREMY TEMPLER

aply called 'Yoga is as Yoga Does'.

Even in something as potentially dumb as this, Elvis remains great.

I don't know if the Cramps like yoga, but I know they love Elvis and rock and roll, and that's why I love the Cramps.

To ring up Hollywood is not quite the same as being there, but the thrill still lingers. After the Cramps' answer phone dies in a hail of echo and reverb, the voice of Ivy Rorschach (lead guitar and album cover model) is heard live from her East Hollywood home. It's decorated in the same spirit as their songs:

"We have a tropical bar, with blinking tiki lanterns ... tikis are very exotic in North America. We have lots of great movie posters, a 50 inch TV set because we watch a lot of movies, and a pink TV in our boudoir. We have a pink boudoir ..."

This is an environment

and sense of style that is pure 50s rock and roll, but to many the Cramps are seen more as punk rockers or some manifestation of the Gothic ideal.

"It's really weird, we've just been to England and the people who come to our shows look like that, but we don't look like that, and we're not singing about that. But in America we don't; in America we just get very American looking people now ..."

American music comes in many forms, from the highly sanitised images of MTV to its flipside in the hardcore scene of bands like MDC and Agnostic Front. But to

the Cramps both these worlds lack something ...

"It seems to me that the only aspect of hardcore that is attractive to me is that it seems rebellious in a way. But it seems like the opposite of us — for one thing it seems asexual, it doesn't seem like a celebration of anything, just the opposite, real serious and grey."

Get REAL Gone

The Cramps' vision is the same as Chuck Berry's celebration of popular culture in 'Back in the USA' and the sensuality of the

Dominos' sex-shout of 'Sixty Minute Man'. The Cramps carry the primal secret of rock and roll, the ability to "get real gone," as Elvis says in 'Milkcow Blues'. It's the sort of feeling you hear in gospel and in the wild rockabilly of things like Billy Lee Riley's 'Flying Saucer Rock 'n' Roll' — losing one's self in the celebratory nature of it all. The Cramps play the sort of rock and roll that still sounds like the bastard son of blues and country, the underground music of the 50s, before rock and roll became legitimate. In a way the Cramps are attempting to enlighten us all, to bring us back to the truth, like some form of hellfire rock and roll preachers.

"I think we are ... we're the living essence of rock and roll. The Cramps are the essence of rock and roll. I think we are setting an example for people that I don't see many other groups doing. That we are showing the people the way to do it, and reminding them of what rock and roll can be. Because it was a very special thing, it happened several years ago, but it seems that it slipped people's minds. It wasn't something that could die, it was something that can free you, y'know."

Rock and roll is more than the music, it's an expression of popular culture, it's about "other worlds". Like professional wrestling for instance.

"Yeah it's great, it's the same thing as rock and roll ... I don't know who's current now, there could be someone who's great who is contemporary, but George 'the Animal' Steele has kinda been my favourite over a period of time ... I also like this guy 'Exotic' Adrian Street, who wrestles for NWA a lot, we met him in our house, he's just nuts, he never lets up, every minute you're around, he's just totally in love with himself ... it's so inspiring!"

Those of you seeking similar inspiration, take a look at *Grunt: the Wrestling Movie* (in all good video shops), where Exotic Adrian Street is in fine form.

The Cramps also delight in football, where their fave team, home boys the LA Raiders destroy all opposition. The Raiders' emblem is a skull and crossbones.

"The Raiders are great,

they're number one, the Cramps are the unofficial band for the LA Raiders, and that's official."

Gore and Boars

As yet they haven't recorded any homage to piggskin and cheerleaders, but their dedications to exploitation films make up for that. Their version of the theme from Herschell Gordon Lewis's 'She Devils on Wheels' is spot on, and 'I Ain't Nuthin' But a Gore Hound' ("A devil with a blue dress, blue dress on. I go crazy, going going, going gone ...") is the perfect aural equivalent to HG Lewis's manic vision. One of his movies just consists of total violence against inanimate objects, just kids trashing a room, as the camera lovingly pans over the broken chair leg, an inspiring teen epic about vandalism with a blockbuster theme song. The film's called *For the Hell of It* and the song is 'Destruction Inc.'

"Yeah, that's great — that's sorta like destruction ... we haven't done any other ones from his movies. He writes those songs too. We did that 'Faster Pussycat, Kill Kill Kill' by Russ Meyer."

Ivy thought if they ever made a movie, Russ Meyer would be first choice as director.

"I love Russ Meyer films, he's got a great look to everything and a real vicious kind of editing, and he narrates his own movies and everything, and I like a lot of 50s people — the way they did things."

One of the greatest exploitation film-makers ever is Ted V Mikel, who in *Astro Zombies* and *The Corpse Grinders* creates some of the coolest looking things ever.

"We met him here, he lived in a castle in Glendale. It was really a castle, a medieval castle, and he never wore a shirt and he wore boar's teeth. And he lived with I forget how many women there, he called them his Castle Women ... he had to leave, he lives in Las Vegas now."

One of the most exciting aspects of Ted V Mikel's work is the appearance of Tura Satana, a woman of exceptional beauty, who also appears in Meyer's *Faster Pussycat*. It comes as no surprise that she is Ivy's fave actress.

"Tura Satana, as far as inspiring me, I haven't seen her in much, but God she's great. She just plays herself, I guess. Because Ted V Mikels put her in one of his movies [*Astro Zombies* and *Doll Squad*], I guess she was his girlfriend for a while; he said that in real life she had a scar from a bullet wound and all sorts of stuff ... she's a tough cookie."

In the world of modern crime fiction there's nobody tougher than Jim Thompson, whose prose can whip Mickey Spillane, and sends Pendleton's *Punisher* series down the toilet.

"I like this book called *Killer Inside of Me* by Jim Thompson. It's fiction, but first-person point-of-view — from the killer's point-of-view, but also kinda dumb. It sounds like the guy who wrote the book was a killer too, which makes it more interesting. He's great, but I like a lot of true crime books about mass murders. I'm reading one about the zodiac killer."

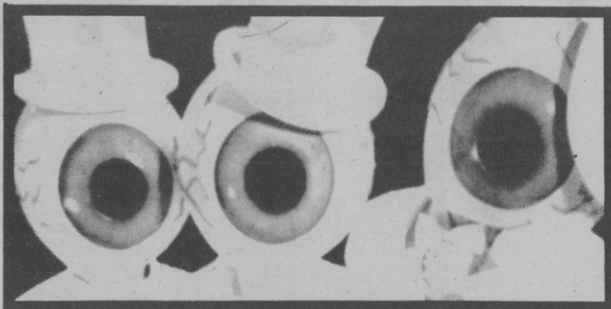
Songs like 'People Ain't No Good' might suggest a certain ill feeling towards mankind, but no, the Cramps have a love for all, including a Mr John Wayne Gacy, convicted and charged with the death of 33 boys. Lux and Ivy write to Mr Gacy, who in turn sends them paintings and his own letters, which are:

"Really crazy and charming and charismatic. They just are, which is just weird because the guy killed 33 people, or at least that's what they know for sure that he killed. But it's just weird reading his letters because he's just bubbling with personality. They're very sarcastic, real kind of acid black humour. He sent us an astrology chart that describes the character of people born under each sign ... Most of them try to make everything sound positive but he writes a negative thing. Like under Capricorn he'll write, 'There's never been a Capricorn born of any merit. You might as well kill yourself.'"

He sounds like a nice guy, almost as good as Johnny Carson. Perhaps he should be a talkback show host.

"Yeah, he'd be good for that ... he'll be great. Because there's this photo of him shaking hands with Rosalyn Carter — a real American."

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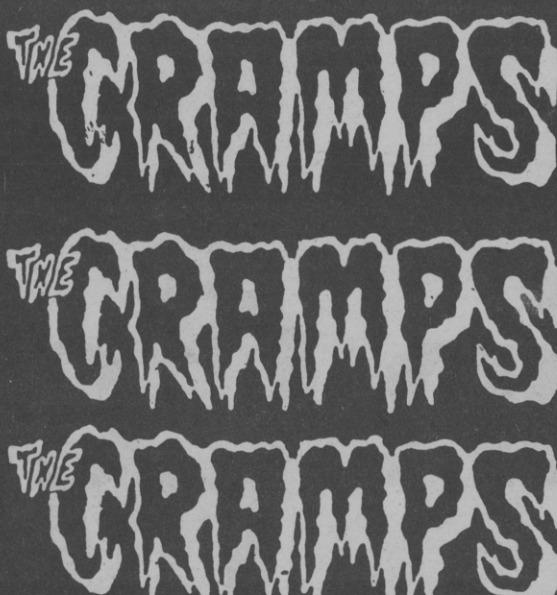
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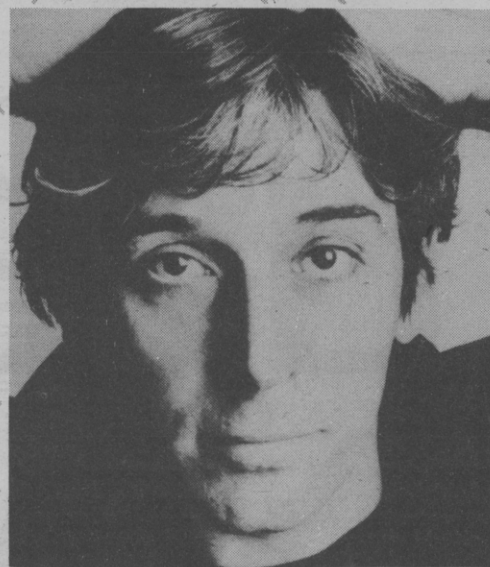
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