CHEAP'N'NASTY, PIN FANZINE AND THE DAWN OF PUNK IN THE NETHERLANDS

by Herman de Tollenaere

At the outset of punk in the UK it looked like an exclusively white and almost exclusively male genre, like much that had gone before it. In the Netherlands, and elsewhere it was a different matter. My Dutch band, Cheap'n'-Nasty played its first gig in 1980, supporting Crass and Poison Girls, me on vocals, bass player and female lead vocalist Terry and drummer Maarten, of partly Indonesian ancestry. Eurasians were indeed central to the origins of Dutch rock 'n' roll in the 1950s. They recognized themselves in African American musicians like Chuck Berry, who also suffered discrimination. The 'Indorockers' could build on a centuries-old tradition of acoustic guitars in Indonesia, dating back to when the Portuguese had first brought guitars to what became Indonesia.

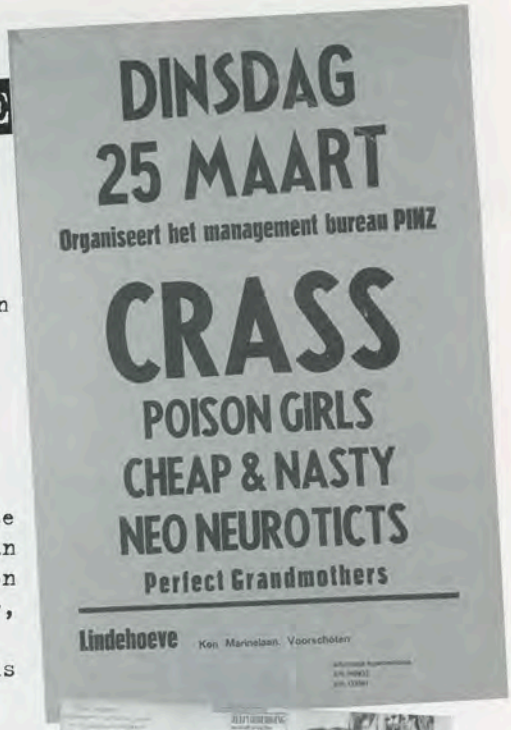
Dutch punk started in 1975-1977 at three places, Amsterdam, Hazerswoude village near Leiden, and, curiously, Paris. The Lou's, one the first continental European punk bands, showed the mixed gender and international character of punk. They were three French girls, Raphaelle Devins, Tolim Toto, Pamela Popo, and Eurasian Dutch drummer and co-songwriter Saskia aka Syama de Jong. Moving between London and Paris, she had been probably the only Dutch participant at the start of British punk. The Lou's were the first all-woman rock band in any genre in France. Still, the Wikipedia article on women in punk rock doesn't mention them. The Lou's supported the Clash in Britain with Richard Hell the other support act on that tour. Richard Hell is far better known than the Lou's though one reviewer wrote that the Lou's 'blew Richard Hell off stage'. The Lou's were the only band asked to play on both days of the Mont de Marsan 1977 French punk festival. They played with John Lydon's Public Image Ltd in France. Why, then, have the Lou's been largely written out of history?

Three answers might be, the music establishment's resistance against punk, the Anglo-American bias of reviewers and opposition to women encroaching on, so far, male territory. Caroline Coon interviewed the Lou's for Sounds in December 1977 but the Dutch rock paper Oor was less favourable. Their sexist and classist review of the 1977 Mont de Marsan punk festival called the Lou's achterbuurtmeiden, roughly translated as criminal neighbourhood or slum girls.

I was so angry about that review of the Lou's in 1977 that I decided to start a punk fanzine and a band. I didn't know that Saskia de Jong used to live less than a kilometre from me in Leiden; later she would help us in the studio when we recorded the Cheap'n'Nasty Covergirl EP and Raphaelle Devins would become our saxophone player. Starting Pin fanzine in May 1978 proved to be easiest. Starting my band took longer.

Saskia and Raphaelle moved to London, playing many concerts for Rock Against Racism in Verdict. In 1980, Saskia moved back to Leiden, where she was born. Next year, she started all female band Miami Beach Girls with Maria aka Ria as singer. Maria was Cheap 'n' Nasty's stand-in drummer when Maarten could not play because of school.

In Hazerswoude village. The local teenagers of Ivy Green, founded in 1975, played much more direct music than the rock establishment. In 1977, they found out that they had played punk without knowing it and became the most impor-



photos from top: not a bad first gig; Maarten and Terry on the day; flyer for Amsterdam punk festival 1980; Terry on stage at the Paradiso.

tant Dutch first wave punk band. In the spring of 1978, I cycled from my Warmond village to Hazerswoude to interview them for the first issue of Pin. The other interview in that issue was of Leiden band Munk the Punk and his Flying Testicles.

In January 1977, the Sex Pistols had played the Paradiso to the horror of its traditional hippie visitors. Paradiso management promoted punk concerts only sporadically, particularly in the summer of '78 when they were more concerned with catering to hippie tourists from Germany and the USA.

In 1978, Rock Against Racism started in the Netherlands. At the founding meeting in Paradiso, I was the only punk. I suggested Ivy Green for the first concert. It happened. I heard Crass would come over for RAR, and in September 1978, I went to London for the first time. I was at a killer Slits gig. I interviewed Chelsea and Patrik Fitzgerald for Pin. I took my copy of the Ivy Green LP to Small Wonder Records. They liked it and wanted to import Ivy Green from the Netherlands but their overlords at WEA refused. I returned to London in 1979, interviewing Brian James, then ex-Damned, Honey Bane, Poison Girls, Penetration, and Mark Perry, formerly of Sniffin' Glue. I started an English language edition of Pin.

My plans to start a band stagnated. Then at a Ruts concert me and a girl with remarkably coloured hair decided it was time to stop dreaming and start acting. Terry had been in punk bands PVC and Hideous. She owned a bass, though no bass amp. Soon, we were complete with guitar and Maarten on drums. Crass would come to the Netherlands again and we might play with them. During our first rehearsal, a man burst in wanting to sell his Fender Bassman amp. Deal, he and Terry agreed.

After trying in vain again to have Crass play in Leiden city, with three venues saying no, Pin succeeded in setting up a gig in Voorschoten village.

The Slits had inspired another band wanting to play with Crass. Four Leiden girls, 12-13 years old, formed the band Subtrax in January 1980. Two of them were mixed Indonesian Dutch: singer Julia. and Ciska, the oldest at 13 years, the only one who had ever played an instrument. Like with 1950s Indorock, the Indonesian kroncong musical tradition of learning to play guitar early, helped. Bass player Marion van Egmond, younger sister of Pin co-editor Ruud van Egmond, was native Dutch. Drummer Fatima was Algerian. They were probably the youngest punk band in the world.

In June 1980, Terry and me met Zounds at the Crass residence. We decided to arrange a tour for them with Cheap'n'Nasty in the Netherlands, Belgium and Berlin. Terry had kicked out our first two guitarists for not keeping up with her bass playing. Kees, of The Hague band Brommers, became the new guitarist. Before Zounds came in November, the UK Subs came. Charlie Harper paid for our petrol to go to Venlo so we could support them. The tour with Zounds went well. In Tilburg city, Terry had been one of three punks in 1977 when she was at school but to her surprise, when she returned there was an enthusiastic audience of hundreds invading the stage to sing along.

All four songs on Cheap'n'-Nasty's Covergirl EP, recorded in a day in Dordrecht on 7 March 1981, were written by bass player / female lead vocalist Terry. Even so, all songs have their own individual character. The record is on the band's own label, Smashstick Plastics. Terry and her mother assembled the packages at the dinner table. 1000 copies were pressed, some going to Rough Trade London and ninety to a New York record store. Sounds called it the second-best record of the week, 'Original ideas and a unique slant, but not less punk'. They invited us to London for an interview, which we combined with playing in Ipswich to an audience which included the Adicts. Haarlem fanzine Nononsense called the EP 'certainly the best 1981 punk 7" in the Netherlands'. We met Dutch 'post-punk' avant-gardist magazine Vinyl when we played with the Mo-dettes. Their reviewer wrote: 'Without any reservations, worth buying. I feel like cheering'. We headlined the Paradiso, with the Miami Beach Girls also playing.

Our next record would have been even better, with Raphaelle's saxophone a valuable enhancement. But then, crisis. Kees can't combine his work, his school and his other band with Cheap 'n' Nasty any more. He leaves. So does Terry, whose songwriting on bass is aimed at Kees' guitar playing. New line-up. Marco joins on guitar. Pim on drums. Heleen on bass. If Heleen cannot play, then Andrea plays. They are both at school, but with different school schedules. Crisis for Pin too. The printer manages to lose our best, 30 page, issue. Banshees, Poly Styrene, Revillos. Undertones, Damned, LiLiPUT from Switzerland interviews: all down the drain.

Forward forty years... Dutch punk in 2021? Some boys from Sassenheim have a band called Downtown District. They remind me of the Buzzcocks, Undertones and Green Day.

Three young women in the seaside town Noordwijk close to Leiden have a punk band called Lilith. Their bass player is called Tessa, like Tessa Pollitt of the Slits. Unfortunately, Tessa leaves. Lilith split up.

Coronavirus pandemic. Syama aka Saskia de Jong isolates herself in Leiden because of COVID-19 risks and her only outside contact is Bauke, 1980s Cheap 'n' Nasty roadie who brings Syama groceries.

I reconstruct the never published Pin English language issues 4 and 5 and put them on the Internet. Unfortunately, of #4 I can only save the Banshees interview. Later, I rediscover my Poly Styrene interview in an old notebook. I re-establish contact by email, sometimes

face to face at spatial distance, with Terry and Maarten. And with 1981-1982 line-up bandmates Heleen, Marco and Pim. I hear that Raphaelle and Andrea have died years ago. Terry's friendship with Andrea continued till the end.

We know that Sub-trax guitarist Ciska in the 1980s met a male 'Nancy Spungen' who got her hooked on heroin. We all think she died young. But then, we do more research on punk history. Marion van Egmond finds out that Ciska is alive, in France. The two ex-schoolmates and bandmates talk to each other on the phone, crying for joy.

Marion is now a visual artist in Leiden. Her mother lives almost next door to Syama de Jong. Marion reconstructs the original 1977 Lou's badges.

Face mask on, at spatial distance, Bauke arrives at my flat to fetch badges for Syama and herself. Bauke's fellow roadie Dorith is with her. They say that now, forty years after meeting Cheap 'n' Nasty at our first gig with Crass and Poison

Alive and kicking in July 2021, l-r: Pim, (drummer 1981-82, Herman (vocals / saxophone), Terry (bass), Maarten (ex-drums, now guitar). Photo by Gerie Hermans.

Girls,
they would as happily move instruments and amps as forty years ago, if the band would re-form. It is my turn to cry for joy. Terry has her 1980 Fender Bassman amp repaired. She has 1980 concert recordings.
Heleen and me discover 1982 concert recordings in our basements. Will we play again? Will there be new vinyl, a Bandcamp album?