

THE FILTH AND THE FURY 1978: SEX PISTOLS INVADE TEXAS

By Tim Wilton

It's January 10, 1978, and the rather large marquee holding sway in the parking lot of the Longhorn Ballroom, a Dallas nightclub founded by swing king Bob Wills and briefly managed by Jack Ruby, said it all:

TONITE SEX PISTOLS JAN 19 MERLE HAGGARD
--

It was almost thirty years ago last month that Britain's controversial, albeit seminal punk rock outfit the Sex Pistols--flushed with success and notoriety from their controversial 1977 debut album, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*--launched their one and only American concert tour. And true to their punk credentials, they scheduled most of their shows in America's Deep South.

Their manager Malcolm McLaren had explained later that unlike other British bands who traditionally premiere their tours in New York City or Los Angeles before influential music journalists, he wanted his boys to play in front of "real people in real places." Places like Atlanta, Memphis, Tulsa, Baton Rouge, San Antonio, Dallas and San Francisco. It was a regular Sherman's march through the South, U.K.-style.

Formed in 1975 and consisting of Johnny Rotten on vocals, guitarist Steve Jones and bassist Sid Vicious, and Paul Cook on drums, the Sex Pistols gave birth to the British punk movement and had both infuriated and fascinated the public and press on both sides of the

Atlantic. It had gotten to the point that the Pistols were all but banned from playing live in their native England because their concerts usually ended in riots.

They had become a curiosity bordering on legend, but with no place to play. It was only logical that McLaren would pack up the boys for a quick buck in the Colonies, and maybe even stick it to the man in the process. Thus the tour through the land of Dixie, chicken fried steak, long necks, and oddly enough, San Francisco.

Artistically and economically, the tour was doomed from the start. The Sex Pistols were constantly fighting with each other, their fans, the press, the operators of the venues they played, and their own demons. Most notably, bassist Sid Vicious was deep in the throes of heroin addiction. At the end of their last tour date in San Francisco, the Sex Pistols broke up.

However, despite the "failure" of the tour and the accompanying demise of the band, the Sex Pistols put on one hell of a show.

Especially in Texas.

As tour manager Noel Monk would later write in the opening chapter of his tell-all book, *12 Days on the Road* (Harper/Collins):

Sid Vicious' face is smeared with blood. Not all of it is his. The Sex Pistols have hit Texas, and Texas has hit back.

Their first Texas stop was in San Antonio at Randy's Rodeo on January 8, 1978. The show was preceded by outlandish stories in the press that the Sex Pistols were performing live sex acts in their show, as well as the de rigueur spitting, cursing, and vomiting on stage and other "indecent" behavior. To calm the nerves of the fine citizens of San Antonio, the city's police department assured the public that the Pistols would not break any obscenity laws while on their watch.

Each of the earlier shows in Memphis and Atlanta barely drew 500 paying customers. However, Randy's Rodeo would sell out as more than 2000 ticket holders packed the room at \$3.50 each. Rounding out the audience were media representatives from national and British newspapers, reputable magazines such as Newsweek and Time, FBI agents and DPS officers, and numerous members of San Antonio's finest.

As was typical for each of their Stateside dates, the Sex Pistols put on a furious set, going through each of the songs from their one and only album to date including *Anarchy in the UK*, *God Save the Queen*, *Pretty Vacant*, and *Holidays in the Sun*. And as was also typical for each of their dates, the band goaded and taunted their audience--a mixture of cowboy hat wearing curiosity seekers and fervent fans outfitted in standard punk attire--into raising bloody hell.

Lead singer Rotten, head blazed with spiked bright orange hair, wore a T-shirt showing two cowboys having sex. Sid Vicious had scrawled "Gimme a Fix" on his bare chest (a souvenir from their Memphis date) and kept calling members of the audience "f*****g cowboy faggots." Throughout the entire set, longnecks and beer cans rained down on the band. An irate fan even tried to rush the stage to assault Vicious, but was turned back after Vicious hit him over the head with his bass guitar.

After all was said and done, the band declared the San Antonio show their finest live performance to date. The next day, the front page of the *San Antonio Express-News* declared in bold capital letters: "SEX PISTOLS WIN S.A. SHOOTOUT."

The January 10 Dallas show at the Longhorn Ballroom upped the ante another notch. Once again, the Sex Pistols had sold out the cavernous dance hall as more than 1800 people gobbled up whatever tickets were available. And just like the San Antonio stop two nights earlier, all bloody hell broke loose. Rotten, clad in brand new black Wrangler jeans, white shirt and a cowboy-fringed leather vest, kept taunting the audience with obscenities. Vicious, bloodied from earlier self-inflicted wounds, had his nose gashed open by a solid head butt from

an "adoring" female punker who was at the front of the stage. As security was about to rush the offending girl, Vicious called them off and, like a zookeeper feeding meat to hungry lions, he proceeded to tear the bloodied bandage covering the rather large gash on his arm and threw it into the awaiting crowd. The smirking bloodied Vicious watched as the rabid fans ripped it into shredded souvenirs. In return, the band received their fair share of thrown beer bottles, glasses, and spit. And just like the gig two nights before in San Antonio, the filthy band from the U.K. firmly staked their claim to fame (or infamy, depending on who you ask) in the legendary annals of Texas live music.

As mentioned earlier in the story, the Sex Pistols did break up abruptly at the end of their last concert in San Francisco. Sid Vicious would later die of a heroin overdose. The other Pistols went their separate ways, only to reunite almost twenty years later to tour again. They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2006, and true to their punk sensibilities, refused to attend the ceremony, calling the museum a "piss stain." Today, their debut album is considered one of the most influential in rock history.

The Texas leg of the tour also sprung a tidal wave of punk bands in progressive cities such as Houston, Dallas and Austin. Among the more notable Texas-based punk bands of the late '70s and early '80s were The Dicks, The Huns, and Big Boys out of Austin; Really Red, The Degenerates, The Hates, and The Judy's of Houston; and Dallas' The Cringe.

To read more about the Sex Pistols' notorious concert tour of the American Deep South, be sure to pick up a copy of Monk's *12 Days on the Road* at your local bookstore, or check out the numerous websites that give first hand accounts of their Texas leg of the tour, especially www.randysrodeo.com.