

VOGUE

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FASHION

Rebel Rouser: Sheila Rock Photographs the Scene in *Punk+*

by Mark Holgate



John Lydon

Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013



Subey

Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013



Jeannette Lee, formerly of Public Image Limited.

Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013



Chrissie Hynde (*bottom*) and **Steve Strange** of the Moors Murderers.

Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013



Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013



From left: Siouxsie Sioux, John McKay, Steven Severin, and Kenny Morris of Siouxsie and the Banshees.

Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013



From left: **Paul Simonon**, **Topper Headon**, **Mick Jones**, and **Joe Strummer** of the Clash.

Photo: Sheila Rock, PUNK+, 2013

“I was never a punk, I was too middle-class,” says **Sheila Rock** with a laugh. “The closest I ever got was wearing black jeans.” Rock is an American photographer who has been based in Britain since 1970, and perhaps this remove is why her fly-on-the-wall images of the ignition of the London punk scene in the mid-70s, and its subsequent flaring across the rest of the country, are so beautifully raw and utterly compelling. Both qualities are on copious display in the imagery that she has contributed to the catalogue of the Costume Institute exhibition “**Punk: Chaos To Couture**” (opening May 9), as well as her limited-edition book, *Punk+* (First Third Books, to be released on April 29).

The latter brings together her work from that era, and has all the three-chord thrashiness of the most spiked and studded Sex Pistols acolyte. (Another reason for its energy: Rock was pretty much a beginner when she started snapping, a DIY act very much in keeping with the ethos of punk.) *Punk+* switches from capturing key provocateurs **Vivienne Westwood** and Jordan in their lair, the Sex store on London’s Kings Road, to documenting the teenage kids who got busy customizing their school uniforms with chains, safety pins, and daubs of paint.

Still, even if Rock didn't dress the part, she certainly came to know the players. She was introduced to the scene when her New York friend **Lenny Kaye**, who played guitar with **Patti Smith**, was in London one night, and asked her to go see a new band, the Clash. "I loved the way the audience looked," Rock says. "It was all about customization at that point, not buying a whole outfit from Vivienne." Rock then befriended Generation X (fronted by **Billy Idol**), and before long, she was being commissioned to shoot the likes of the Buzzcocks, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and **Johnny Rotten** (née Lydon) for the U.K. music press.

To an American just getting used to the grayness of seventies Britain—the country was financially crippled, with plenty of unrest fomenting in its cities—punk was an electric, frenzied corrective to all the bleakness and despair. "Some people think of punk as being downbeat," says Rock. "But to me, and to many others, it was a celebration of something exciting and positive."

Sheila Rock, Punk+, starting at \$75; available April 25, for pre-order: firstthirdbooks.com

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