

● **HIPS, LIPS, TITS, POWER!** Meet the new breed of enchantress, the spell-binding women who are taking the male bastille and giving it some earthly female perspective. **BETTY PAGE** greets the new PMT dawn with a deep, personal view of Women In Rock and lets the new women of substance have their say. Let's *frock!*

"Any unusual ability in a woman instantly raised a charge of witchcraft... Sometimes the accusation of witchcraft was a form of punishment for women who were too vocal about their disillusionment with men... Women of outstanding reputation in any field were at risk, since almost any woman's accomplishment could be defined as witchcraft."

#### The Woman's Encyclopedia Of Myths And Secrets

"This thing has been smouldering for years and now it's finally broken through. I think women are realising their own aggressive side – a side that has always been suppressed before."

— **Lesley, Silverfish**

I ncantrix... lamia... femina saga... maga malefica... sortilega... venefica... fascinatrix... screech-owl... pixidria... There were hundreds of exotic handles used in the Middle Ages to describe a witch. All you had to do to qualify for torture, persecution and death was to be a female who dared step out of line with patriarchal society. Millions of women died and with them a certain untamed aspect of the female spirit.

That suppressed anger has had its volcanic eruptions in many aspects of popular culture, but never has it had such a lava flow in the realm of rock'n'roll. Until now. Women have grabbed rock by the balls and made it squeal in agony. With their banshee wails, squalling guitars and naked aggression, they are baring their souls and they are angry. Bloody angry.

They are reclaiming rock from the strutting, posturing macho Metal peacocks and the fey, fumbling, characterless boys and dragging it down into a cathartic sexual/emotional hell for a slice of long-overdue feminine judgement.

Women are suddenly not afraid to rock. The fem-grunge onslaught in America has produced the celebrated, scathing foxcore of **Babes In Toyland**, confrontational noise merchants **Hole**, LA fem-metallists and "female Nirvana" **L7**, and an ever-increasing groundswell of newer names – **Come**, **Mudwimmen**, **Dickless**, **Calamity Jane**; the list continues to grow.

Here, we've witnessed the splattercore frenzy of **Daisy Chainsaw's Katie Jane Garside**, the earthy directness of North London crusty-grunger **Lesley** of **Silverfish**. But others favour the quieter storm; the strength and presence of **Lush's Miki** and **Emma** and **MBV's Bilinda** and **Deb**, the magnetism of **Curve's Toni Halliday**, the raw, unadorned honesty of **Polly Harvey**, are no less effective. All prime candidates, a few hundred

years ago, for the Witchfinder General.

Women In Rock. It has a hackneyed, distasteful, condescending ring to it and an overview by its very nature risks marginalising and trivialising a group of totally unique individuals whose artistic endeavours cannot be conveniently grouped underneath one big frilly umbrella. By treating Women In Rock as a phenomenon, one risks over-simplification – hell, it's hardly a new thing.

But the importance of being a woman in the rock arena cannot be over-emphasised – even in 1992, after over 30 years of the genre, it must be celebrated, because this new breed, this new chapter is gaining power, momentum and energy.

It cannot be denied that rock has always been the province of men, even if they have often aped the female. Its anthems are more often *about* women than played by them. For too long women have been the hidden gender in rock, all too often fixed in the position of worshippers at the phallic shrine, bewitched by their own male idols. Now more and more of them are taking their place on that very same stage.

In *Cool Cats: 25 Years Of Rock 'N' Roll Style*, published in the early '80s, journalist Cynthia Rose wrote: "Rock music has failed to take on woman except as an idol or a target." Her argument was that it had offered the women of rock "much worship with little esteem... choosing her image from among the already available fantasies and maybe undercutting it with a little irony."

In her view, women in rock fought against male supremacy and got little further than choosing their earrings, with the moneymen conspiring to craft an image suitable for their market. Things *have* changed for the better, but how?

PICTURE: KEVIN CUMMINS



**Toni with Silverfish screech-owl Lesley: nothing sells like real female spirit**

#### A SELECTIVE HERSTORY OF WOMEN IN ROCK

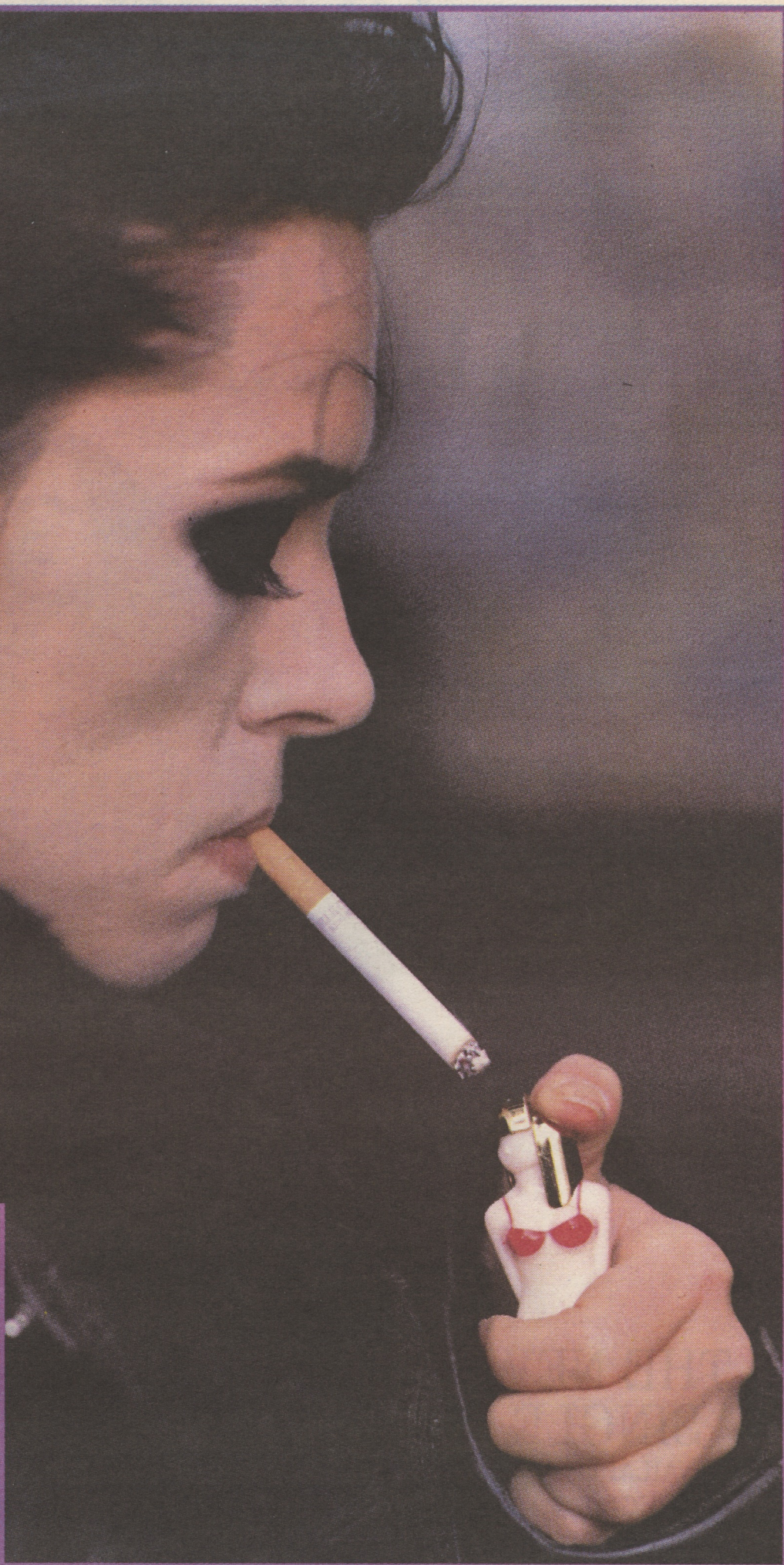
**THANKS LARGELY** to **Doris Day**, pop singers like **Sandra Dee**, **Helen Shapiro** and **Connie Stevens** and **Francis**, were sweetly feminine – nice girls, all looking for that one special guy, in their songs at least. They were hugely successful, squeaky clean purveyors of teen romance in the late '50s and early '60s, selling the great romantic myth to a generation of women. But the female pop psyche was split; its dark underbelly existed in the black R&B and jazz singers of

the time, for whom commercial success was rare and sexuality wasn't such a taboo; it was OK for them to wear come-hither clothes, drink hard liquor and sing about bad men.

By the time the pop charts were dominated by the girl groups of the '60s, the split wasn't as apparent. Most of them were black; now black and white girls were singing about their boyfriends.

However, the whole lot of them were being manipulated by the men who ran the music business...

The British Invasion was



**Burn baby, burn: Toni Halliday contemplates the immediate immolation of whoever thought of this 'amusing' female-torso style cigarette lighter**

underway, but the women were still good girls looking for great guys – **Cilla**, **Sandie**, **Dusty**, **Lulu** – while the blues boom lads were getting laid and getting all the plaudits. In America, flower power came to the rescue and beatnik culture welcomed in the scrubbed, bohemian but politicised folkies – **Joan Baez**, **Judy Collins**, **Joni Mitchell**.

Then, finally, came the real women rock stars – **Grace Slick** and **Janis Joplin**. By '68, the latter was being dubbed the "High Priestess of Rock". She set an important precedent, because she never conformed to the accepted feminine ideal – she had acne, weight problems, scraggy hair and a masculine voice. **THE '70s** brought gender-bending from both men

and women, first in glam rock – the androgynous **Bolan** and **Bowie**, brickies in make-up **Slade** and **Sweet**, leather-clad angel **Suzi Quatro**, and then disco – the struttingly sexual **Labelle** and **Nona Hendryx**, and androgynes **Amanda Lear** and **Grace Jones** who played out the role of dominatrix.

And then punk happened. Everything changed for both sexes, but it was particularly liberating for women. They could suddenly reject glamour and create their own, strong images. **Siouxsie** became the female punk icon, the nice middle class girl who flirted with every taboo, wearing S&M gear, fascist symbols, anything to shock and subvert.

**Poly Styrene** wore plastic and shrieked, the lead singer of the

phallocentrically named group **Penetration** was a woman called **Pauline** and there was the only all-female punk group, **The Slits**, who were years ahead of their time, wearing girls' dresses, subverting traditional female rock images and appearing on the cover of the **NME** dressed only in loincloths and smeared in mud.

Post-punk feminists **The Raincoats** were equally influential with their indie anti-fashion, anti-glamour stance and sawing guitars.

Meanwhile, in America, there was **Patti Smith**, fully fledged cult idol and female rock star whose own heroes were largely male (**Morrison**, **Richards**, **Jagger**, **Rimbaud**) and whose sexuality was ambivalent in her look and in her poems and music. She was the



# REPORT

tomboy, skinny in jeans and men's waistcoats, the vulnerable yet tough girl in big frocks and bigger boots and not afraid to expose her body — she was frequently photographed without clothes. But behind everything she did was a raw power and energy that emphasised she was her own woman. In her wake came the likes of **Chrissie Hynde**, who found it easier just to wear the trousers.

**Deborah Harry** was a very different kind of role model. **Blondie** were a group, but **Blondie** was also Debbie's alter ego, a cartoon character come to life, a girl that has fun even if her heart gets broken. "I never wanted to approach rock'n'roll from a man's point of view," she says in *Making Tracks: The Rise Of Blondie*. "I was always in a position of setting a precedent, which gave me a definite advantage. Even if I went onstage and did a direct rip-off of Jagger or Bowie it would never come off as a complete copy because Blondie is a girl."

Harry never compromised or cheapened herself. However much boys in her audiences shouted for her to get her tits out, she always rose above it. It was the first sign of a woman who fitted the feminine ideal really being in control — of her image, her success, her music.

**THE '80s**, in every way, belonged to **Madonna**. She was the living embodiment of '80s values — the self-made, in-control businesswoman and keep-fit fanatic, heroine of a materialist generation, who ruthlessly and determinedly made herself an icon, flirting, taunting, toying with sexual and religious imagery and playing dangerous games with the madonna/whore complex at the very heart of the feminine psyche.

Ambitious, competitive, manipulative — but the tough woman exterior masks a vulnerable I-wannabe-loved little daddy's girl.

It's for all these reasons that Madonna has been accused of setting back the women's movement 30 years, but she's never claimed to be speaking for the cause. "I never set out to be a role model for girls or women," she said in a recent interview, "and I don't conform to any stereotype. I don't act like a man but I play in a man's world. I think the public is tired of trying to figure out whether I'm a feminist or not. I don't think of what I'm doing as gender specific. I certainly feel I give women strength and hope, particularly young women, so in that respect, I think it's feminist."



**Lulu: toothsome grins a-go-go**



**Sandie: barefoot in the dark ages**

Americans can now do a course in Madonna iconography, so the argument continues, but whatever the positive or negative aspects of her behaviour, the fact is she changed the rules for women; if nothing else she showed that female sexuality was powerful, and in that sense transformed the possibilities for women in rock.

It's no coincidence that there are consistent rumours that Madonna is interested in talking to women like **Courtney Love** and **Katie Jane Garside** as she starts to build a roster of acts for her very own record empire. She may not be a feminist, but she knows the power of the female.

Honourable but brief mentions must also go to **Annie Lennox** and **Sinead O'Connor**, for their uncompromising attitudes, bravery, outspokenness, passionate commitment to their music and because they prove it's OK to be strong and to be

careers. Will the erstwhile crimson-lipped peroxide devil-doll, the very anti-Madonna, be raging with paranoia and brutal honesty on her next record? Or will motherhood soften the blow?

Love has already come out firmly as a feminist who believes that a certain female viewpoint needs to be given space, but even she sees the dichotomy between feminism and her 'battered slut in baby dolls' image.

"I have a very good, politically correct feminist side," she said recently, "and a very glamour-oriented attention-getting whore side, and they clash."

The way Love was originally sold — as the teen-prostitute-victim embodiment of her songs — was certainly questionable, but it caught the imagination of boy writers everywhere. It's this 'woman as victim' angle that particularly bothers other female

**"I don't think I have suffered from the male domination thing as much as other women might because I'm a belligerent, stubborn, loud-mouthed bastard, basically!"**

**— Lesley, Silverfish**

vulnerable.

And, finally, as the Mother Of All Fem-Grunge, **Kim Gordon**, who proved that women can and will make a noise. . .

## THE NEW WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE — VICTIMS OR VICTORIES?

**SO, WE** have the foundations; women do now have more control. But Madonna isn't and never has been a musician. The new breed are using boys' phallic noise toys to take rock in their own direction. As **Babes** guitarist and vocalist **Kat Bjelland** says, "all the best music is angry", and the electric guitar can make the angriest music. But with the new noise come all the old preconceptions and problems of how women present themselves.

**Hole** have been right up front with the anger thanks to newly pregnant Mrs Cobain, **Courtney Love**. It'll be interesting to see how this marriage between leading male and female grunge lights will affect their respective

musicians, especially **Miki Berenyi**, who was moved to write to *Angst* after Steven Wells' Daisy Chainsaw interview (wrongly) alluded to Katie Jane Garside having been mentally and sexually abused as a child.

"I am worried about misrepresentation," says Miki. "You can't say it's a coincidence that in every interview you see with these women the journalist always picks that five minutes where they're going on about abuse or victimisation. Then it all gets out of proportion. A bit more responsibility is called for."

Kat Bjelland states, quite simply: "All press coverage of 'female' bands leans towards irresponsible since there is nothing to do with music asked."

Katie Jane — matted hair, mad eyes, torn dresses, baby's bottles et al — presents a Dickensian image of demonic possession, self-mutilation and all. But it's the undertow of precocious sexuality, the child-woman come-on, that's more worrying. Katie Jane absolved herself of all



**Babe Kat: screeeeee!**



**Idol eyes: the uncompromising, influential Patti Smith and (inset) Mother Of Fem-Grunge, Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon**

responsibility for this when she recently claimed in the *NME* that it was all the onlooker's problem.

**Lesley of Silverfish** has been portrayed in these very pages as crude, intimidating, loud, menacing, a woman who boasts about shagging exploits rather like a man. This hardly fits the reality of what she is — a sensitive, intelligent, attractive, opinionated woman with a strong will.

**L7** LOOK like the women most likely to break into the big-time mainstream rock market, pushed along by constant comparisons to big male guns like Metallica and Nirvana. Soon they will have a global platform, which is just the place for active feminists to be.

The most stubbornly uncategorisable woman musician to have emerged in all of this is **Polly Harvey**. Sure, you can sketch in bits of influence from early Siouxsie, Kate Bush, Sinead O'Connor, Patti Smith, but she steadfastly refuses to fill in the picture. She will not be drawn on her lyrics or motivation.

She declined to be interviewed for this article, saying that her role as a musician is more important than the fact she's a woman. Despite the fact that she sings about uniquely female experiences, she denies having feminist leanings.

Her appearance on the cover of the *NME* sans chemise has caused no end of consternation and misguided comment. She refuses to discuss why she did it, and that's her prerogative. Her flesh was exposed in the photograph, but as with The Slits, Patti Smith and Siouxsie before her, it isn't remotely titillating. To suggest that it shows how preconditioned some people are

to react to the female body as pornographic. To me, it's a celebration of her nakedness, she's 'sky clad', to continue the pagan theme of 'Sheela-Na-Gig'.

"It was widely recognised that the magic of the goddess dwelt more in the reality of her flesh than in her garments," says the *Encyclopedia Of Woman's Myths And Secrets*, "since creation was a function of the female body. Moreover, it was her nakedness that exerted its mysterious power over the bodies of men." Don't forget — clothes maketh the man, not the woman.

Polly seems mildly surprised that there aren't any men singing similar lyrics to hers. But then who could imagine a man writing a song about a 'vulva woman' ('Sheela-Na-Gig') displaying her genitals and laughing?

Harvey's songs are rich in imagery, raw and bleeding with the grist of the female experience. There is no doubt she will grow into a songwriter of some depth and power; whether she acknowledges any responsibility for breaking new ground for women in rock is another matter.

All these women are expressing a primal female energy that's perhaps unconsciously trying to balance out the spirit of rock, super-macho style. But let's not ignore the fact that, despite this, rock has been undergoing a certain process of feminisation over the last couple of years. Men aren't afraid to be soft, girly and foppish and celebrate the inner life. Much has been made of the 'feminine shape' of **My Bloody Valentine's** music, and this also extends to the 'wombadella' of **Spiritualized** and the neutered fumbblings of the shoe-gazers and much of the second division of indie rock. **Lush, Ride, Curve,**

**Blur** — all pretty, soft names. So maybe the men are discovering their feminine sides while the women are discovering their masculine sides. MBV and Lush are perhaps pointing the way with their 50/50 male-female splits. In the future, perhaps all groups will be yin and yang: in perfect harmony.

But enough of the theory; let's find out what's happening in the grist of the mill. . .

## GIRLS ON TOP — THE WOMEN OF ROCK HAVE THEIR SAY

**A DETAILED** questionnaire covering a variety of issues on the subject of women in rock was sent to a cross-section of female musicians, with instructions to answer the questions they felt most moved by. Their answers varied in length and opinion and the only common ground was a sense of gratitude that finally, someone had thought to ask them their views on the subject. . .

## Do you consider that there has ever been an acceptable or unacceptable role for women in rock groups?

Silverfish's Lesley thought the only unacceptable role was the "sexploitative pretty-face-and-big-tits-to-sell-the-record" image. Curve's Toni Halliday was more evasive. For her, the acceptable role for women has yet to be defined, and such a definition denies women's complexity. Babes In Toyland's Kat Bjelland simply said she doesn't believe in fences. Lush's Miki Berenyi, however, was considerably more specific:

"I have a massive problem with Kylie Minogue because she epitomises the acceptable role. She makes records for men. Loads of blokes like the Manics and Bobby Gillespie go on about her being a great pop star, but can you remember the words? Kylie is totally talentless, she does nothing for me. It's a shame she gets so much credibility when there are so many women worth 100 times that; it annoys me that Sinead O'Connor has a great voice but people slag her."

She also decries the double standard that dictates what men do, women can't. "Iggy Pop can be tarty onstage but if Wendy James does it, it's tacky. As a woman going onstage you have to have a degree of responsibility."

## Have you ever felt constrained by the male domination of rock music?

Kat Bjelland rather teasingly answered that she's never felt constrained by male domination — unwillingly. Toni Halliday said she's learned a great deal about women from men, "and some men are able to write about the women we dream of being."

Lesley feels it in the sense of there being so few strong female images in the business: "People still have a preconceived, stereotyped ideal of what women in bands are supposed to be and how we're supposed to perform or behave." However, she hasn't let it get to her: "I don't think I have suffered from the male domination thing as much as other women might because I'm a belligerent, stubborn, loud-mouthed bastard, basically!"

## Would you accept that the major role models for women musicians are, at one end of the spectrum, Debbie Harry and Madonna, and at the other, Joni Mitchell and Tracy Chapman? Who was yours?

Kat would like it if the only role model was Diamanda Galas. L7's Donita and Jennifer grew up with bands like Motorhead and The Ramones as role models, but agree that women definitely have better role models now. Jennifer came up through the LA rock

CONTINUED OVER

9 May 1992 New Musical Express—Page 19



scene where plenty of women were playing; Donita and the others came from Chicago, where it was a lot sparser. "The only women we really saw come into town were Ivy from The Cramps, Tina from Talking Heads, Chrissie Hynde and Patti Smith," said Donita.

Toni thought it was up to the individual: "Madonna and Debbie Harry fulfil your iconic dreams, a possible ideal. Joni Mitchell makes you feel alright about yourself. It's up to you to calculate the risks."

Lesley hedged her bets: "Yeah, at the one end there's the sex goddess and at the other the 'serious musician'. But I think it's pretty much the same role for men, there's the poodle-boy rock problem, and then there's REM. I think if I could ever call anyone a role model, for me it would be someone from both categories — Madonna for her strength of character and Joni Mitchell for her musicianship, and her lyrics are bloody great."

**Do you think some female musicians sacrifice their femininity for the sake of being in a rock group?** "It depends what you call femininity," said Lesley. "I've always resented the ideal of the frilly frock and girly giggle as the symbols of femininity — dungarees and big boots should not be considered any less female or feminine. Unfortunately, it's still the case that you have to dress down to be taken seriously. That's why I really appreciate the frilly frock and big boots image of Hole, Babes etc — it symbolises a finger up the nose of the feminine stereotype — two opposing images together — frocks and boots and loud, trashy, aggressive music. It's a spanner in the works, and that's got to be good news."

Toni: "It depends how important femininity is to them. You rarely come across anyone, male or female, with enough gall to get onstage who doesn't at least, at some point, try to display their true nature. The possibility of witnessing someone's true nature is the main reason for wanting to see music performed live."

Miki, who's often been portrayed as 'one of the boys': "It's bollocks really. Lesley and even Emma and I are being seen as lads, unfeminine, trying to be blokes. Lesley's like she is onstage and off, so's Kat. People think feminine is getting your tits out and being vulnerable and weak, all doe eyes and pouting. Men define what women should be like. Page Three girls are traitors. Wendy James getting her tits out in *The Face* was. It backfires on most people."

**Have you ever found it difficult to express yourself and your sexuality freely in your music?**

Kat's not experienced any problem; music for her is the "ultimate outlet for all emotion." Toni has: "Lyrically, no, but sometimes on a performance level. However, I think this is English reserve and nervousness."

Lesley still has to deal with idiot boy hecklers: "Women cannot express their sexuality freely in any area of life, especially in popular music. Because yer average gig-goer is still stuck in the 'wink wink, nudge nudge' mentality of the '70s. When it comes to women and sex, most men have still got a really crap attitude. To them, a woman talking about sex is like a come-on."

"I know that every time I mention sex in the press or in a song, the next few gigs I do, I'm going to get stupid, sexist, sexual heckling from at least one dickhead in the audience. It's all so predictable but I'm f—ed if it's gonna stop me."

**Are you comfortable with the image of the angry female dressed in little girl's clothes?**

Kat seemed offended by this one.

**"What gets to me is if there's a woman in a band it's quirky, it's got a negative vibe to it. It's a war, there is something to fight for; you shouldn't stick up for Kylie, she should be fought at every turn." — Miki**

**Lush's Miki Berenyi takes a breather after another skirmish in the war against preconceptions and, erm, Kylie. . .**

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked. "Who cares? No-one," came the rebuff. Lesley was totally happy about it. Toni felt it was a loaded question: "I don't see any harm in the world seeing women as they see themselves," she commented. "You reflect your personality. That can only be good."

Jennifer and Donita maintained a diplomatic distance on the subject. "Whatever they do is fine," said Jennifer, "we're not here to dictate what other people should do."

"Even if you want to dress really scantily clad that's your business," reckoned Donita. "We're for choice right across the board. Doing the whole male fantasy trip's always been a negative image for women to project, but we're not gonna change it by telling people what to do. We can only do what we do and if it rubs off, then fine. If it doesn't, f— 'em."

"I happen to believe variety is the spice of life, it just happens to be that women end up victimising themselves a lot, or subjecting themselves to a lot of bullshit to get some sort of coverage. They're selling themselves short."

Miki had her reservations: "I've met Kat Bjelland a few times, she was first with the dresses and socks, and I thought it was a good image. I don't have a problem with it. But once it catches on it gets dissipated, and people start thinking 'in order to be angry, you have to be a child'."

"I'm not too keen on Katie Jane, though, she looks like she's been pulled through a hedge backwards, and all this drinking out of a baby's bottle, it sounds like she's using it as a gimmick. I don't see 'Love Your Money' as a feminist anthem."

**Do you think it's necessary to stress the femaleness of all this, or should men and women in rock groups be considered in the same way?**

The issue of equality struck a similar chord in all responses; a resounding yes, they should be considered in the same way, and that means, as Kat said, "being asked about music, not gender or clothes". Lesley wants sexual equality, but doesn't believe attitudes have yet changed enough: "We don't yet have true equality; until we do, women will

have to overstress themselves and overprove themselves just to be given the same level of respect as their male peers. Until there are as many and varied women in bands as there are men, we will always have to shout a bit louder just to be heard."

"Men and women's experiences are obviously related," stated Toni, "but I believe they're transposed in a very different way. Usually, their transposition appears in the songs, but men and women are definitely capable of the same things."

**Have you ever felt so angry about men that you've been moved to write a song about it?**

Kat's songs have been described as "virulently anti-male", so it came as a surprise when she said: "Who said I was angry about men? I love them." But maybe she was being ironic. The other two replies were short and to the point.

Toni: "Frequently. They're a constant source of amazement."

Lesley: "I think at least 50 per cent of our songs' lyrics come from my anger at men and sexism generally."

**Have you ever felt angry about the misogyny rampant in the lyrics of certain rap groups?**

A resounding yes from all but Kat, who contrarily stated that she thought the direct, uncensored attack of rap is beautiful and even quoted NWA as an example of this.

**The Breeders' Kim Deal** takes a very strong line on this. And I mean, *strong* . . . "I think they're completely disgustingly gross. The people who think they're true rappers, they dog women: 'Yo! You bitch! You slut! Bend over! Do this one for me! Yeah, bitch, with the big butt, let me stick it in you, suck on this!'

"Men who are rappers have to be sexist or they're gonna lose their credibility, so they're gonna continue to dis women for as long as it proves their manhood. The ones on the cutting edge will, to the day they die, hate white people and women with as much passion as the KKK would hate a black person."

Toni was rather more circumspect: "Yes," she said, "but doubt has bitten my tongue. I

know I'll never know what it's really like."

Lesley? Angry? "CONSTANTLY! The easiest way for a male rapper to make himself look big amongst his equally stupid male peers is to put women down. Because he thinks a woman is not gonna get up and smack him in the face. The thing that really pisses me off is the hypocrisy — these guys all rant on about how they're so shat upon because they're black but it's OK to shit on women. Bigotry is bigotry

whoever's dealing it out.

"When are these guys gonna start using their brains instead of relying on their balls — macho arseholes. They come up with excuses when they're accused of misogyny — like 'We don't dis women, just some women — just bitches and ho's'. F— OFF! They're so full of shit. There! I'm glad I got that one off my chest!"

**Have you ever felt you've been judged as a woman first and a musician second?** The old problem: a different set of rules for each sex. The general view was that yes, women are seen as females first and musicians second. Lesley doesn't really judge herself as a musician anyway, but was quite happy to be judged as a woman first because she is "immensely proud" of her gender.

Miki saw it as a battleground: "What gets to me is if there's a woman in a band it's quirky, it's got a negative vibe to it. It's a war, there is something to fight for; you shouldn't stick up for Kylie, she should be fought at every turn. Everything that someone like Toni does, Dannii is pulling in another direction. Toni might do it, she's seen as sexy, but she's taken seriously. She might pull it the other way."

Kat brought it right back to basics: "Good thing they don't burn at the stake these days."

**What do you think has provoked women musicians to start singing rude and violent rock songs and why has it happened now?**

"Just because some women are screaming, it doesn't mean they're being rude or violent," wrote Kat, putting it into perspective. "It's just the right place, right time," penned Toni.

Lesley saw it more as a letting-off of repressed energy: "I think this thing has been smouldering for years and now it's finally broken through. People used to ask ten, 15 years ago, why weren't many women playing aggressive music. Now everybody's askin' why are all these women playing aggressive

music. Yer answer's in there somewhere. I think women are realising their own aggressive side — a side that has always been suppressed before."

Donita attributed it directly to the feminist line: "Because this is the first generation that's grown up with the women's revolution. When we were in school they were saying 'you can be anything you f—ing wanna be', and I think that was the first generation of women that ever heard that, except for thousands of years ago. We grew up in the '70s, and that's what we were told, and then we grew up and all of a sudden they say no, you can't do that. It's really weird. I didn't experience sexism 'til I was an adult."

Miki was worried that this important development might be passed off as a fad, a 'scene' people will get tired of: "To some people it's already a gimmick, but it's very important, a lot of people have a lot to say. I'm worried that the whole scene will be looked at as women who are abused screaming at patriarchy, as if the uniting force is that they're victims. This is supposed to be the strongest set of women to have turned up in rock for ages, but it's not healthy if it's based on f—d-up women."

While applauding the women of anger, Miki was worried that it might mean that anyone who writes about anything less traumatic and violent is considered to be less important.

"Myself and Emma have been criticised as being 'not as substantial as Courtney Love', which is massively limiting. Lush don't sing about the sort of thing that Hole and Babes sing about, but it doesn't say anything less worthwhile about women's experience. Female music in general is denied. What about all that's gone before, like Delta 5, Au Pairs, Raincoats — this hasn't suddenly happened. Male music has a heritage which is admired, men are allowed to have that. Women's music is a progression of the feminist ethic in society. It should be acknowledged."

## THE HALL OF SHAME — TOP TEN GENDER TRAITORS IN ROCK



**Wendy James: 'tits out for the lads', her boy fans cried, so she obliged**



**Sex Kylie in her now familiar squat-thrust position**

**1 WENDY JAMES:** For grabbing her crotch and (almost) baring her breasts in the name of the 'strong woman' when all it did was titillate and reinforce the objectification of the female form. And for trying to be a second division Madonna.

**2 KYLIE MINOGUE:** For her video performance in stockings and suspenders and an uplift bra, all pouting and sexually available, giving a dangerous message to the young girls to whom she's a role model. And for trying to be a second division Madonna.

**3 FUZZBOX:** For appearing on the cover of the *NME* with kittens, thus falling into the 'pussy' joke trap. (And this very paper for being sexist enough to do it.)

**4 SHEENA EASTON:** That 'sexy woman in control' thing won't wash — don't forget, this is the girl that sang *"My baby takes the morning train/He works from nine to five and then/He takes another home again/To find me waiting for him"*, without a hint of irony.

**5 SAMANTHA FOX:** For trying to make out that there's no harm in Page Three and going on to her pre-destined role as a bimbo rock chick exhorting her listeners to touch her and feel her body, helping another generation of idiot males think that women are there purely for their own gratification.

**6 VANITY/APOLLONIA 6:** For willingly allowing themselves to become Prince's wet dreams, and for thinking that performing in basques and suspenders was a good idea.

**7 KIM WILDE:** For allowing herself to be subjected to year after year of pathetic changes of image which only serve to make her look uncomfortable, especially the latest one, with the expensive Marilyn Monroe dress, loads of cleavage and sub-Belinda Carlisle rock balladeering.

**8 ANNABELLA LWIN:** For allowing Malcolm McLaren to exploit her girlish sensuality and feed a thousand underage sex fantasies.

**9 All the female rappers who've fallen in line with the misogynist myth by calling themselves degrading names like BYTCHES WITH PROBLEMS, OVERWEIGHT POOCH and HOES WIT' ATTITUDE.**

**10 All the women that appear in American Metal videos in various states of soft-porn undress, notably the blonde in Warrant's 'Cherry Pie', a sexist's dream of tawdry suggestiveness (you can imagine the lyrics).**