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# ABSURD! OUTRAGE! GROTESQUE! POOT!

**THE PINK FAIRIES were never friends with the establishment. Playing for free, playing fucked up and often naked, they epitomised the politically charged, angry, post-hippy spirit of the early '70s. RICH DEAKIN chronicles the group's early days.**

**T**HE PINK FAIRIES EVOLVED out of The Deviants following an ill-fated trip to Canada in the autumn of 1969, during which Deviants' singer Mick Farren was unceremoniously ejected from his own band. On their return to the UK in February '70, the remaining Deviants hooked up with erstwhile Pretty Things drummer, John 'Twink' Alder and renamed themselves The Pink Fairies.

The Deviants had been something of an anomaly, even in the '60s. When many of their contemporaries were espousing the ethos of love, peace and flower power, they released a trio of underground LPs, including the experimental *Ptooff!*, that addressed social issues such as the evils of consumerism, looting supermarkets, and inner city riots. Following Farren's departure, the remaining Deviants were given a freer rein to pursue their musical aspirations, and Paul Rudolph's guitar and the dual percussive onslaught of Russell Hunter and Twink came to typify The Pink Fairies sound.

They began to place as much emphasis on providing a good time through their music, as they did getting the underground spirit across to audiences. But, despite a shift towards more serious musicianship, the new Pink Fairies retained a social conscience, and were far too steeped in the ethos of the counterculture to abandon their underground credentials entirely. Along with fellow Ladbroke Grove contemporaries Hawkwind, they were just as likely to be found supporting worthwhile community benefits, such as White Panther Party free food programmes, as they were playing for free on the back of a lorry outside the perimeter fences of mainstream commercial festivals. This was a stance that justifiably earned them the reputation of being one of the foremost underground bands in Britain.

The Pink Fairies had earned themselves a sizeable grass-roots following throughout the

summer of '70. Most notably, stripping naked at the Phun City festival, and playing for free outside the Bath and Isle of Wight festivals. They also quickly earned themselves a reputation for being a "people's band" and had begun to generate interest from a number of record companies.

Having signed to Polydor in the autumn of '70, The Pink Fairies were booked into Recorded Sound Studios in early December '70 to record a single. Head of PR for Polydor was Peter Knight Jr. and, despite having his producing days supposedly behind him, he agreed to the band's request to produce them.

Knight was the son of the renowned composer and arranger Peter Knight, famous for scoring the orchestral work on The Moody Blues' *Days Of Future Passed* and virtually all of The Carpenters' work in the '70s. Following in his father's footsteps, Knight was more accustomed to dealing with, and producing, easy listening fodder like The James Last Orchestra. Nevertheless he donned his producer's hat and gamely tackled what would become two of The Pink Fairies' most enduring and endearing anthems: 'The Snake' and 'Do It!' With its rampant lyrical imagery, 'The Snake' is fairly self explanatory; 'Do It!', the flipside of the single, is a little more political.

Legend has it the lyrics to 'Do It!' were written in roadie Joly McFie's Morris Minor on the way to the studio. Although it took its name from the revolutionary tract by American yippie activist Jerry Rubin, further lyrical inspiration for the song came from John Lennon and Yoko Ono. In an interview on Milwaukee Radio in '88, Twink said: "We kind of figured because [John and Yoko] were doing what we were doing they would jump at the chance to write a song for us, because it was all like Power To The People, you know? We were all doing it together." Twink wrote a letter to John and Yoko asking them to write a song for The Pink Fairies. When he received

a letter back from the office of Bag Productions, the company set up by Lennon to deal with public relations and finance, saying that the Lennon-Onos were too busy, Twink was suitably piqued to write a song himself. Thus 'Do It!' was born.

There were some differences of opinion over songwriting credits and individual contributions to 'Do It!' Whatever the circumstances surrounding its exact conception, with its overtly anti-authoritarian lyrics that espoused taking matters into your own hands, 'Do It!' perfectly encapsulated the mood of the times. The peace and love optimism of the late '60s faded as the decade gave way to the escalating troubles in Northern Ireland, as well as the bombs of The Angry Brigade, whilst the war in Vietnam dragged on amidst an atmosphere of growing global political foment. Peter Knight remembers the session vividly: "We took them into the studios to do the songs, and they were so loud we could hear them through the glass without turning the mics up. It was guitar, bass and two drummers."

Because he usually dealt with completely different types of artists, Knight found working with The Pink Fairies an interesting and enjoyable experience. Joly McFie related to Seth Wimpfheimer how "[Knight] kept saying it was the most exciting session he'd done," and if Twink had a reputation for being difficult in recording studios, Knight remembers he was completely motivated.

With regard to Sandy's prominent bass sound on the single, Joly infers that Paul might have overdubbed it himself. Peter Knight refutes this idea and has said: "I would have remembered that. They all played live – that's why it was so bloody loud! We did lay tracks down live and did the vocals afterwards."

Sandy says that he can't really remember Knight contributing much, but if the finished single, 'The Snake', slightly lacks the

immediate raw energy of an earlier version recorded for Top Gear, also recorded live in the studio, it remains a creditable first outing nevertheless. Peter Knight Jr. made a promotional film to showcase a number of Polydor artists, of which The Pink Fairies and their single 'The Snake' were a part. It was filmed on the set of *Oliver!* at Shepperton Studios, and originally shown at a sales convention at Polydor's Hamburg headquarters. Knight can only remember the name of one other band he filmed, an act from the Midlands that he handled called The Love Machine. Introducing the film was a then unknown Olivia Newton John.

Knight thinks it quite possible that only an abridged version of each act made the final cut, as the film was edited down to forty minutes for the presentation. It was apparently well received at the conference, but neither 'The Snake' nor any other part of the film was ever seen by the public. It was a wasted opportunity by Polydor to promote the band and the single, rush released in January '71, failed to chart.

While their debut failed to ignite the charts, its release did coincide with the explosion of a bomb at the home of the Tory Secretary of State for Employment, Robert Carr, on January 14th. Although not connected directly to The Pink Fairies at the time, The Angry Brigade bombings did have ramifications within the Cosmic Family. *IT* had been receiving communiqués from The Angry Brigade, and as editor, it was Mick Farren's duty to publish them. This brought Farren to the attention of the Special Branch. Boss Goodman and Paul Rudolph were staying at Mick's flat in Clifton Gardens when the Bomb Squad raided early one morning, and all three were accordingly dealt with as potential terrorists.

Boss recalls how he had a premonition about being busted, so he and Mick stashed their cannabis the previous night. "Rudolph didn't get back until the small hours of the morning," says Boss, "and, unaware of our paranoia, did what he always did which was to put his dope in his socks, and stick it in his sock drawer." The following morning the police arrived and the street was cordoned off. "It was a serious raid," says Boss, "and they had all these different vans, cars and bikes, and they've got dogs to smell out explosives – not drugs!"

Mick was obviously the main target for the raid, but Boss and Paul were also given the full treatment. Despite finding Paul's stash of Lebanese hashish, the police were more interested in Boss's collection of badges. Says Boss: "I used to have this tiny little chest of drawers all full of badges... buttons, and this guy, he's emptied all these buttons – 'Free Angela Davis' and all sorts, so he picks out this one and looks very seriously at me, and

then Rudolph, 'OK. Who's the fucking Commie Red?' and holds up a Chairman Mao badge, and I went 'What?' He goes, 'Who's the fucking Commie Red?' and I went 'You are joking, right?'"

But they weren't joking, and the main "Commie Red" was being given the third degree in the other bedroom. Evidence linking Mick to The Angry Brigade bombings was what the Special Branch hoped to find, but according to Mick, "all they came up with was Boss's Chairman Mao button, most of our drugs and reams of mildly subversive literature and documentation." Mick was ordered to flush all the pills and cannabis down the toilet, because, as Mick relates in his autobiography *Give The Anarchist A Cigarette*, the Special Branch wanted to avoid giving "those drug squad slags the time of day." He was then served a second warrant and whisked away for a raid on the *IT* offices.

After the questioning of Mick, Ed Barker and Paul Lewis at the *IT* offices, the Special Branch left some six hours later. They didn't find anything, although the repercussions affected not only the Cosmic Family, but were felt throughout the wider underground culture. Dozens of other people were raided that same week, thus providing the Special Branch with a useful insight into other areas of the counterculture, "learning far more than they needed to know," as Mick now puts it. The activities of The Angry Brigade weren't universally approved of, but the police activity they provoked ensured that the likes of *IT* and Friends would continue to support them over the establishment any day.

The Pink Fairies would later play benefits for those arrested during the course of investigations into The Angry Brigade Bombings, as well as a myriad of other countercultural causes and benefits. Some 30 years later, Seth Wimpfheimer encapsulated it perfectly when he described 'The Snake' as "one of the most unrefined and blistering pre-punk tracks ever released," adding: "On both sides of this debut release they burn full steam ahead with not a care for anything else in the world, except in going for broke with unlimited raw power. Here everything follows the awesomely HUGE and ever-widening guitar sounds of Paul Rudolph as he navigates both sides of this screaming single into exuberant proto-metal rave ups fuelled by dope, rock'n'roll and fucking in the streets as lifestyle and shoved into the tiny confines of a 45 rpm single..."

Remember them this way.

Adapted from excerpts from the book *Keep It Together! Cosmic Boogie with The Deviants and The Pink Fairies* by Rich Deakin with an introduction by Mick Farren, published by Headpress [www.headpress.com](http://www.headpress.com)

## Rich Deakin speaks with Duncan 'Sandy' Sanderson!

**SHINDIG!** Why were 'The Snake' and 'Do It!' chosen as cuts for the first single?

**SANDY:** Peter Knight Jr. thought they were really exciting songs, and it had something to do with the twin-spangled Ludwig drum kits that cost a bloody fortune, as paid for by Polydor with their advance. Plus we didn't have too many of our own songs at that point!

**SD:** Like The Clash at CBS some years later, The Pink Fairies were criticised by some fans for signing to Polydor. Did you feel you had to justify yourselves to anyone when you signed to Polydor in late 1970?

**DS:** No, I don't think so. I don't think anybody really gave a fuck. No one was interested enough that we'd signed with a major, because in those days there weren't any minors – there were no Rough Trades... there was nowhere else to go. What we did find was that Ronan O'Rahilly [Pirate radio entrepreneur and later MC5 manager] was pissed off because he wanted to sign us to RCA, and he's saying [adopts Irish accent] "I'm talking telephone numbers here!", and we just went, "Yeah, whatever."

**SD:** The lyrics to 'The Snake' are pretty much open to interpretation, but whom or what was the original inspiration behind the song?

**DS:** "That old snake, he just wants to come inside" – excuse me Paul! Are you really singing that? Ha ha ha ha ha.

**SD:** How do you think 'Do It!' fitted in with the mood of the times?

**DS:** I think, politically, it hit the button actually... maybe Paul came up with the riff, and it was Twink that got the lyric, but it was agit-prop. It's still kind of relevant – "Do it, 'cos you can always get out on bail!"

**SD:** Peter Knight Jr. was an unusual choice of producer for your first single given his easy listening background. How did you find working with him?

**DS:** As far as producing goes we had a kind of good relationship with him. His father Peter Knight was a big band leader in the '30s and '40s so he knew his music, and he was excited about new stuff and what was on the horizon. He was actually quite a big guy and I liked him.

**SD:** What are your memories of filming the promotional video for 'The Snake'?

**DS:** That was filmed on the set of *Oliver!*, in the snow. I can remember Peter Knight Jr. turning up in his Roller with half a bottle of brandy, and me getting off the set every now and then, jumping into the back of the car, and the others looking down their noses at me because I was in the warm, drinking brandy with the head of A&R. Ha ha ha. So, he was responsible for that shoot.

**SD:** The Pink Fairies are now often referred to as "pre-cursors of punk". How do you feel about this label, having also been cited over the years by the likes of Captain Sensible, Brian James, Tony James and John Lydon, amongst others, as an influence?

**DS:** It makes me feel quite good actually! I mean, The Dead Kennedys and people like that say, "Wow, fucking Pink Fairies!", you know? We didn't play like anyone else, or do the single

market thing, or whatever. So there was this bit of anarchy going on, plus the agit-prop that had come down through with Micky [Farren]. So there was a slight political stance, but with the Fairies it was a political stance that was more about the music business rather than the politics of the nation shall we say?

