

## Music 262: British Punk

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SPEAKER:** So punk rock eventually made its way to Britain. How this happened was this guy, Malcolm McLaren, who was a store owner-- he was in New York. He was around this scene-- the Velvet Underground, Television, the Ramones. And he really got the idea to bring this back to the UK. And his idea was to create a shop that sold this S&M type clothing and this sort of sex shop. And he put it in London. And he brought this whole aesthetic of punk rock to London, through fashion.

So this became a place where these young kids in London would hang out, because they had, really, no other place to go. There was an economic recession at the time, and most young people in England, at the time, didn't have jobs. And so these young people would hang out in his shop where he sold these S&M clothes-- at times, even steal from him. It was sort of a scene. And so he got the idea-- he knows a number of his customers, about four of them, and talked them all into creating a punk rock band.

This band became known as the Sex Pistols. And McLaren, of course, became the Sex Pistol's manager. So the Sex Pistols, really, were this far-out punk rock group. They took punk to the extreme. They would do crazy things onstage. They were very rude in their demeanor. They were very anti-British. They really represented their generation in Britain at the time. They were young, and they were bored, and they were really rebelling against the staunch upper class at the time.

And really, at the time, they were thought of as a serious threat to the monarchy and to the UK. And they were viewed by the upper class as these social deviants. But they really had a major influence on a lot of bands that came after them, including the Clash, Siouxsie and the Banshees.

So in 1976, they came out with their first single, and this was "Anarchy in the UK." And this really touched off a musical and social firestorm. And it really created a fear in the establishment. And by doing so, it sold a lot of copies in Britain. However, it got withdrawn as soon as the record started selling even more. And they were subsequently kicked out of their label, EMI.

But then they created this record, Never Mind the Bollocks, and that was their only album that they created. On this record is a song called "God Save the Queen." And this was a big chart success in Britain. The lyrics are really gleefully snotty-- name calling, declaring the royalty ineffectual and irrelevant, and really showing the decline of Britain as a superpower and really ignoring the bleak times.

And the public reaction to this was really swift and hysterical, both positive and negative. The young people loved it. The older people really hated it and were very fearful of this band. By 1978, they were touring the United States, and Johnny Rotten decided to quit the band. And that was pretty much the end of the Sex Pistols as we know them.

A band that came right after that or about the same time-- it really had the job of filling their shoes-- was the Clash. Now, the Clash were kind of Sex Pistols, but they weren't crazy. They weren't cutting themselves, they weren't shooting up heroin. They were doing things more musically as well. They were influenced a lot by reggae music, they were influenced by rhythm and blues, even some disco elements in their music.

And they mixed their music with politics. So I liked the Sex Pistols, but they had more of an agenda. And their agenda was really to socially stand up for the little guy. They were managed by a friend of Malcolm McLaren-- this guy named Bernie Rhodes. And many people saw, at the time-- and maybe still agree-- the Clash as, really, the great punk band.

They really struggled to find an identity at first and really had a big job of filling the shoes and the hole that the Sex Pistols left, because they started this whole movement and then quickly ended. So the Clash were kind of left there, kind of hanging. But they persevered. They came out with some great records. In 1979, they released this record London Calling. And it really pulled all their diverse influences together and created a great record.

Another album that came out in 1982 was Combat Rock, probably their best-selling record. It reached number 10 in the United States. And they had the great hit song on there, "Rock the Casbah." So the Clash were never quite as dangerous and never quite as threatening as the Sex Pistols, but they lasted quite a bit longer.