

NYHC



NEW YORK HARDCORE 1980-1990

TONY RETTMAN FOREWORD BY FREDDY CRICIEN

**NYHC
NEW YORK HARDCORE, 1980–1990
BY TONY RETTMAN**

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First printing, published in 2014 by:

**Bazillion
Points**

Bazillion Points

61 Greenpoint Ave. #504

Brooklyn, New York 11222

United States

www.bazillionpoints.com

www.nyhcbook.com

Produced for Bazillion Points by Ian Christe

Cover layout and design by Bazillion Points

Photographs © Ken Salerno, Frank White, Gary Tse Tse Fly, John Kelly, Joe Foy, Greg Licht, Randy Underwood, Dave Brady, Jordan Cooper, Jamie Davis, Justine Demetrick, Adam Tanner, Chris Minicucci

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Bazillion Points thanks Magnus Henriksson, Polly Watson, Dianna Dilworth, VIVI, Fox, Tesco Vee, Ken Salerno, Freddy Cricien, Danielle, and everyone who pulled together to support this book.

ISBN 978-1-935950-12-7

Printed in China

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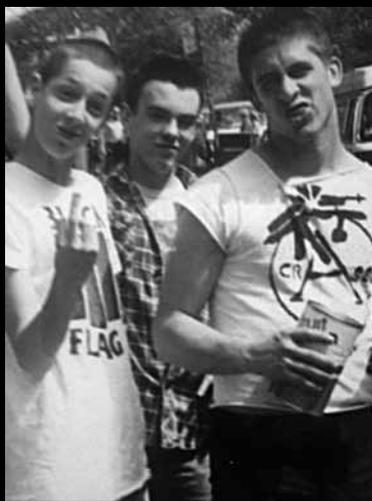
Dedication page photo: *CBGB on the Bowery, 1980s* KEN SALERNO

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Photos clockwise from top right: Kids on the LES RANDY UNDERWOOD; Hang session at the entrance of A7 including Harley Flanagan (2nd to left) NYHC scenester Blue (picking his nose) and Rob Kabula (2nd to right) RANDY UNDERWOOD; Future Death Before Dishonor and Supertouch vocalist Mark Ryan flips the bird while hanging with the Nutley, New Jersey, Crew RANDY UNDERWOOD; The doorway to NYHC's first regular live venue, A7 JOHN KELLY

17. EAST VILLAGE NIGHTS: A7 AND 2+2

KEITH BURKHARDT: I remember being at Irving Plaza with the Nutley, New Jersey, crew. I remember Harley Flanagan was there, and some people he was with were going after kids who looked like posers. They were eyeballing me until Harley came up and said to leave me alone, because by that point I was going to every show that was happening. After the show, Jimmy G came up to me and my friends and said, “You should come to A7. That’s where everybody hangs out after these shows.” It took us hours to find it, actually. Basically, you had the Park Inn, Ray’s Pizza, and a little red light on the door of A7, and that’s how we found the club. I guess I could say it was just a dump. And you know what? It might have been just a dump, but it was an amazing place to experience. To me, it was a magical time. I threw away any intentions to go to school or to do anything traditional and immediately moved into the city a couple months after that.

CAROLYN ENSEL: A normal night would start at midnight. You would start by drinking quarts of beer on the street by Tompkins Square Park.

VONNA TAMASE: It was total mayhem, a free-for-all party every weekend on the corner of St. Marks and Avenue A, and in Tompkins Square Park. People used to shoot up on the benches in the park, and just sell heroin on the street or in these buildings. There would be a blue door and a brown door; one was coke, the other was heroin. There’d be big lines of people around the block to get their drugs. One the corner of Eleventh and B, they’d be selling works. It was like total anarchy down there. The cops didn’t want anything to do with what was going down. That’s how A7 was able to flourish. There was no police presence. The East Village and the Lower East Side was the mecca of the first wave of NYHC. That’s where it all came together and I don’t think it would have been possible without A7.

DREW STONE: A band would play and then when the next band would set up, everybody would pour out of A7 and go across the street to Tompkins Square Park for twenty minutes. As soon as you'd hear the next band start to play, you'd make your way back inside. This was a constant cycle.

RUSS ISLAY (GUITARIST, CHILD ABUSE; BASSIST, MURPHY'S LAW, UNDERDOG): We'd have a fire going in a garbage can in Tompkins Square Park in the winter. Somebody would have a boom box. We would drink beers and hang out. It was like when you have a party in your room with your stereo on, but it was in the park on Avenue A and Eighth Street. It was a huge party all the time every night; especially in the summer. But in the winter, it was the same thing except we'd just bundle up. You'd get to wear your cool clothes; your leather jacket or your trench coat. The Park Inn was across the street, and that was our headquarters. Lucy's was over there too.

DAVE SCOTT: There were rapes in the park, and it was the center of the lower New York drug scene. When you're a kid, you don't realize how vulnerable you really are. There were nights that I was walking around by myself in those areas. Thinking back on it, I was an idiot.

MIKE JUDGE: I remember having to go into the park and getting to a certain part and noticing that none of the lights worked. Billy Psycho was sitting on a bench, and he was like, "White guys don't go past that bench. You won't come back out of the dark, Jersey!"

ALEX KINON (GUITARIST, CAUSE FOR ALARM, AGNOSTIC FRONT, SKINHEAD YOUTH): I had knives pulled on me in the park. I think I remember being shot at. Vinnie Stigma was right there, and he had a garbage can lid he was using as a shield while charging at where the shots were coming from.

DREW STONE: Here's a quick A7 story: I grew up in the Bronx, and when I was in the High and the Mighty, the first time we played A7 was in 1983. We'd come down and I had a van and there was a lot of waiting at A7. You'd show up at eleven o'clock but you'd be sitting, waiting to play until three or four in the morning. Back then the Lower East Side was like downtown Beirut. It was graffiti-ridden, crime-ridden, ugly, dirty, scary, and had a lot of junkies around, so we stuck together. No one wandered very far from the van. We were all teenagers. So as we're all huddled in the van, waiting to play, this punk girl was crossing Avenue A with a beer in her hand, and a cab fucking hits her and she goes up on the hood, cartwheels over the windshield, over the roof, hits the pavement, and her forty smashes on the ground. The cab took

off, and she staggered up on her feet and just walked over to Tompkins Square Park. We were like, “Holy shit! We ain’t in Kansas anymore.”

STEVEN WISHNIA: Stephan was dating this older woman who lived in the neighborhood and she took him for a drink there. The band that was on was pretty lame, so he talked to Dave Gibson, the owner, and he said, “Hey I’ve got a band, can we play here?” We became sort of the unofficial house band because we played every three weeks. That was great; that was some of the best times I ever had playing music in my life.

BOBBY STEELE: I was banned from Max’s, I was banned from CBGB. I was banned from pretty much everywhere else because the Misfits slandered me, so I thought I’d start my own scene. I lived on Fourth Street between Avenues A and B and someone told me about A7. We walked in and there were these four or five black guys playing jazz. I looked around and no one was there. I brought a tape that I just recorded in the rehearsal space on a boom box. Dave listened to about five seconds of it and asked, “How does January 31 sound?” And that was the beginning of everything. The first Undead show was at A7. That was the show that put it on the map. There were shows going on there before, but it was bands like the False Prophets—these bands that if their girlfriends showed up it was a good turnout.

DINNA DAMASE: I discovered A7 from an Undead flyer posted by Washington Square Park. I showed up and met the people and budding musicians I’d later play with. Many of these folks I am still friends with to this day.

STEVE WISHNIA: We opened up for DOA at A7. They went on at six in the morning and they said that was the latest they ever went on. At that point, it was a punk club, not a strict hardcore club. You’d have Elliott Sharp on a Thursday night, and us on a Saturday night. One weekend would be the Undead, and then an oddball pop band like Desi Desi Desi.

NICK MARDEN: All the misfits ended up there one way or another. Whether it was hanging out in the park or whatever. There was the night DOA were playing A7 and then they went over to 171A and did a set and then they went back over to A7 and did another set and the crowd just went followed them back and forth.

JIMMY G: Most after-hours clubs were basically just drug dens with no windows and this place was more than that. There was an eclectic mix of people and music. A7 was more of a music scene than most after-hours clubs. Most after-hours places don’t want noise or music because it’ll bring police, but on



Enter the early scene—with Harley Flanagan and John Watson on hand. JOHN KELLY

the Lower East Side back then, the police didn't give a shit, because there was no money to be made down there. Most of the fancier clubs wouldn't book hardcore bands, because no one really knew what it was yet. To them, hardcore was pretty much an unknown form of punk that wasn't as well-dressed as the previous punks! People didn't want us, so Dave started to have bands. There was already a reggae scene going on at A7 at the time. Jazz bands played there, too. Musicians gathered there. Dave would let anyone who played any form of music play there, and that's how the club grew.

JACK RAEBID: The first show I ever saw at A7 was Mofungo. I think the second show I saw there was the band Jerry Williams played in, Hi Sheriffs of Blue. So, the first few shows I saw there weren't punk or hardcore at all.

PAUL VORDAL: A7 was the central place to see bands because there were five or six bands a night. I was half in the bag most of the time, and didn't know who was playing, but I remember a New Jersey band named Genocide. They came and played, and we heard they were talking bad about Jews. I'm Puerto Rican first of all, so I'd love to dispel this idea that I was some sort of fascist skin-head. We would have black guys hang out with us and all sorts of immigrant New Yorkers. So Genocide played, and we heard they spit on some girl we knew and called her a filthy Jew, so we fought them all the way to their van and told them they would never play New York again. There was this feeling of righteous violence. Some of it was stupid, some of it was senseless, but there were times when we felt righteous in our violence.

JAMES KONTRA: Panhandling wasn't my thing. So we'd go to a head shop and buy the stuff they cut cocaine with—it was called procaine. It looked just like cocaine and it froze your mouth and the whole thing. You could buy a whole

jar for five bucks. We'd bag it into coke baggies and sell them. All of a sudden, this black dude comes up to me and Bloodclot, John Joseph, in front of A7. He says, "I met some girls at the Pyramid who said they got some coke from you and they're zooted, they're flying. Can I get an ounce?" I'm like, "Yeah! For you? Eight hundred dollars." So I dumped what we had into a bag and gave it to him. He was like, "That's a healthy ounce!" Next thing you know, he comes back ten or fifteen minutes later. John Joseph and I went to Stromboli's and bought beers, we bought pizza, we were partying! Dave, the black guy who owned A7, came back with the guy. The guy says, "Yo, motherfucker! Do you know who I am? You sold me bullshit, give me back my fucking money!" I was like, "Nigga, fuck you! You went inside with my shit and you come back out twenty minutes later? I don't know what the fuck I gave you, get the fuck out of here!" The guy pulled out a knife, so we pulled off our bike chains from around our waists and beat him fucking stupid. We got eighty-sixed for a good seven or eight months, because that guy knew Dave.

KEVIN CROWLEY: I used to give haircuts to people in the bathroom. I walked around with a backpack with clippers, and I would just cut people's hair. The big thing was to find someone who it was their first time there and they had long hair, and I'd shave them bald. I'd tell them, "I'm just going to take a little off," and then shave them bald.

CAROLYN ENGEL: You'd have someone get you on the guest list, or you'd whine at Victor, the doorman, until he'd let you in. Then you would hang around inside until dawn.

ALEX KINON: I remember going into Midtown to see the Dead Kennedys play. I forget where it was. We came back to A7 afterwards and my friend Kim was working the door. You couldn't just walk into A7; you had to ring a bell to be let in. She pushed open the door and Jello Biafra was standing there, and she just goes, "Okay, ten bucks." I was like, "Nah nah nah, let the guy in."

WINNA TAMASE: You had Doug Holland bartending. You had Steve Jones nodding out in a corner. The bar ran along the back, with Leroy or Victor manning the door, lots of ganja and reggae on a bad PA system, the house equipment was always broken. Dead Space Records, the folks responsible for funding the No Thanks 7-inch, were the house coke dealers. I also remember a pizza box replaced the house drumhead for a while.

RALPHIE G: Dave hired Doug Holland to work the bar and Jimmy G and Ray Beans, aka Raybeez, to work the door.

TOLIS HOLLAND: I was basically the manager of the A7 club. Every day I had to go to the bars and the liquor shops and get a list of what liquor and beer I'd need for the night. So that was another part of my job while the boss stayed up until 11 a.m. for reasons unknown.

TIMMY G: I started working there as a DJ and bouncer because Doug became the bartender. I was fifteen and I was flipping records and flipping people out the door! Every now and then, the cops would come to the door and raid the fuckin' place. They'd take all the booze and money and leave. It was sort of a blessing in disguise, because the cops would feel sorry for me and throw me a hundred dollars. It would take me two weeks of working at A7 to make that much money!

JESSE MALIN: The equipment was nailed to the wall. There were no advertisements in the *Village Voice*. If you wanted to play, you saw Dave. You came down, there was a sign on the wall written with marker. You never knew who was going to be playing on the bill.

MIKE JUDGE: The first time Death Before Dishonor played in New York at A7 it was with me singing. We got there and actually left to go see the Necros, and when we got back we were still able to play our set. We played at five in the morning. I remember being done playing and walking out into daylight. That's just how A7 was.

JACK RABID: I remember the Effigies having a gig at A7, and they waited around until three in the morning to play. Eventually, they just got pissed off and left. They were a touring act with records out who were sitting there having to wait while all these two-bit bands who barely existed were having their sets.

PEAN ISLAY (DRUMMER, CHILD ABUSE, MURPHY'S LAW, UNDERDOG): Child Abuse played A7 once with JFA, and then there was another show with a bunch of New York bands. By that point, I think I was about twelve or thirteen. I remember I took a nap. I couldn't stay awake until we played. I was in the back room of A7 falling asleep on a pile of coats and then someone woke me up to play.

ERNIE PARADA (DRUMMER, GILLIGAN'S REVENGE, TOKEN ENTRY, UNDERDOG): The second hardcore gig of my life, I was playing. That gig was at A7 and I think we were playing with Murphy's Law and Bad Posture. A big crowd at that time was thirty people, and that would be almost the entire scene in attendance! Doors at A7 opened at like 2 a.m. I was all of maybe fourteen or

fifteen years old. Eddie Sutton—later of Leeway—sang a lightning-fast cover of “Paranoid” with us.

EDDIE SUTTON: Before Leeway, I was doing Grandmaster Flash songs at a local bar for free beer and shit like that. That was my first attempt at performing in front of a live audience, singing “Paranoid” with Gilligan’s Revenge at A7.

VITO MONTIEL: We went to Johnny Waste’s place in the Ravenswood projects and Billy Phillips showed me how to play two-finger chords, the most basic stuff, and the next Saturday we played the A7 club. We pushed all our equipment there in a shopping cart and got off the subway at Eighth Street and walked down St. Marks Place.

TODD YOUTH: I learned how to play music in that back room. One night I’d be in there and the band didn’t have a drummer so I’d play drums. That band Virus, their first show they didn’t have a guitar player yet, so I played guitar. My first gig with Murphy’s Law was in 1982 or ’83. I played drums because Guzzy, their drummer, didn’t show up. There would be a reggae night once a week. All the dreads in the neighborhood would show up and jam, so I learned how to play reggae just sitting in with those guys.

WENDY EASER: Hardcore always had a dear part of my heart, because I was younger and the kids were younger and punk was such an older thing. The bands I saw at A7 were completely different, and it wasn’t just the music. Hardcore is more than music. It’s a way of life and a way of thinking. The music is just one part of the whole, because it was the entire scene that made it something special and something different.

DAVE SCOTT: It was very much like your own social club. It was more than a music club. It was sort of like the way a biker gang would have their hangout. In New Jersey, they weren’t used to seeing punk rockers. We’d get our asses beat or get chased through the mall or have jocks kick the shit out of us. But in New York, there were so many of us, nobody fucked with us. That was probably the first time I experienced that fraternal brotherhood of the scene. If anyone messed with anyone in the scene, they’d get their ass whooped.

CAROLYN ENGEL: When the bands would finally stop, you’d go eat pierogies at Leshko’s on Avenue A.

VINNIE STISMA: We’d get out from A7 being in there all night with our hands all dirty. Then we’d go across the street and eat at Leshko’s and have breakfast and then go home.

RALPHIE G: Hardcore got so big and out of control that, for a short time, Dave rented a larger loft space called 2+2, where we did some bigger shows.

TONNA TAMASE: A7 opened an annex on Houston and Second Avenue in the summer of 1982. The Bad Brains were supposed to play there one night, and HR didn't show up, so Maggie McDermott and I got up and sang for them. That was fun.

JIMMY G: The funny thing about the A7 annex place was before Dave took it over it was this after-hours club with the bar in the freight elevator. So if it got raided, they'd just send the elevator down and the cops would come up, and it would just be people hanging out in a room!

LOUIE RIVERA: Dave expanded his thing and opened up 2+2. I worked the door there. What I loved about that place was how raw it was. You had to be careful, man. You had an elevator shaft right in the middle of the floor. There was an element of danger in that building!

JIMMY G: Everyone likes to go on about CB's, but CB's didn't support the scene like Dave at A7 did. He was the first to put on the shows. CB's had already had its history at that point with the Dead Boys and Blondie and the Talking Heads, and they didn't have time for us then. Hardcore is worldwide now, and we're still doing it, and I say thanks to A7.

RUSS ISLAY: I would say A7 stopped having shows sometime in '83. That's just around when I joined Murphy's Law. I know I didn't play there ever in a band, and we all know Murphy's Law played there plenty of times.

MERYL HURWICH (GUITARIST, XKI): When A7 closed, it was like someone cut out the heart of New York City punk. I don't think it ever was the same after that. Of course, we had CBGB to play at, but to me nothing was ever as good as A7 had been. I remember people feeling like they had no home! Anyone could play at A7, and I mean anyone; that was the whole point of punk in New York City for a while.



Photo: Harley Flanagan and Jimmy G, flanked by two Jersey punks, running wild in the East Village, 1980s
RANDY UNDERWOOD