

Clubs begin to give new wave new listen

By MICK MARTIN
Staff Writer

A new sensation in popular music is being touted nationwide by the record industry — new wave. Of course, new wave is not all that new. It's been with us for at least the last two years. And, further, it's really just basic rock 'n' roll.

But now, with the loss of interest in disco by the major record companies, new visibility is being brought to the music, which began in England and moved across the Atlantic to New York.

IN SACRAMENTO, this is causing club owners to take another look — and listen. And new wave is finding its way into the local night spots...albeit very slowly.

Club owners are using off-nights to test its popularity. Local bands like Ozzie, the Mumbles, the Suspects, the Twinkeyz and Urban Action, which have been playing new wave for some time, and newcomers like Charlie Peacock's Autograph, Labial Fricative, Alternative Learning and 1-2-X-U are finding it a little easier to play in public.

"Things are going pretty good now," said Connie O'Donnell, manager of the Suspects, a new wave act out of Davis. "Clubs are opening up to the music. Also, we play San Francisco a lot and in the Bay Area. We were at the Mabuhay recently and the Bear's Lair which is on the Berkeley campus."

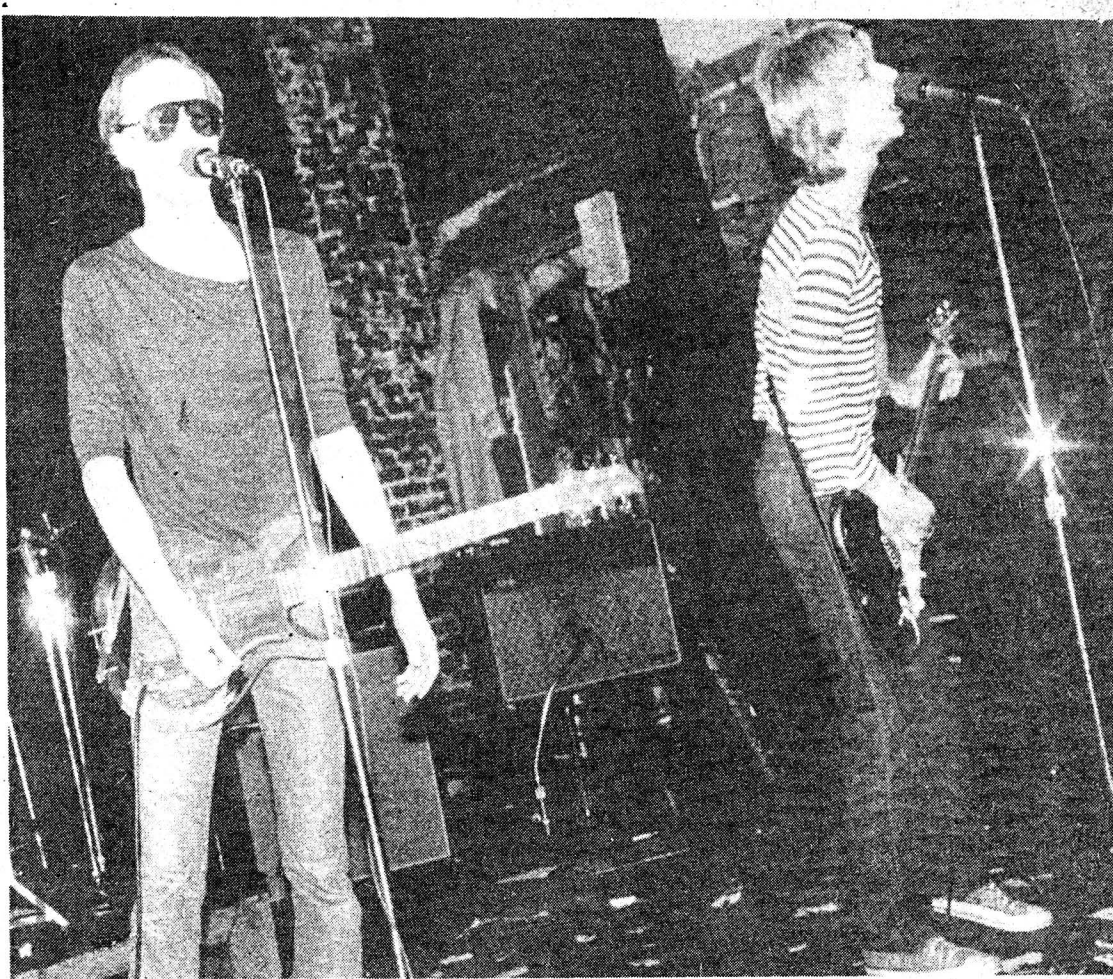
The Mabuhay Gardens in San Francisco was the first club in Northern California to make a go of an all-new wave program, way back when the music was defiantly called punk and had an audience to match. Other Bay Area clubs followed the trend but Sacramento club owners were reluctant to switch from top 40 to this new, alien form.

"We had Ozzie and the Mumbles, when they were called Permanent Wave, here one night," said Russ Martinez who owns Bitter Creek, "and some guy came in with a baby doll's head pinned to his T-shirt. That was just too weird for me."

IN THE INTERIM, the scene has changed. The punk stance of both the acts and their audiences has, for the most part, faded away. But there is another factor that has slowed the growth of new wave; the bands play nothing but original music. Most bar owners favor groups that play hit songs, music that their audience will be familiar with. So it was up to another kind of place to bring new wave to the area.

"The local scene really started at the Coffee House in Davis," said Jack Hastings, bassist and vocalist for Ozzie, the first local group to play its own peculiar brand of music and be dubbed new wave. "When (UCD)

Suspects open
UCD show
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Three examples of the local new wave scene are Richard McGrath, left, and Jack Johnson of the Mumbles (above), Kendra Smith of Suspects (right) and Spencer Sparrow of Ozzie (far right).



New wave gets a listen

✓—From D1

started booking new wave acts on a regular basis, that brought the music to the area with recording acts. (And they used local bands to open some of the shows.) Then came Slick Willy's."

Slick Willy's, which had been a hardcore rock 'n' roll club since it opened, was the first local night club to take the plunge, setting up a new wave night every Tuesday.

"We tried it on a slow night," said Debbie Dyal, who books the club, "and it worked out very well. Our Tuesday nights still do well, especially when we have a new band."

But Slick Willy's isn't about to go completely new wave.

"We featured new wave on the weekends a couple of times," said Dyal. "But, although we got a good crowd, our regulars threw a fit. We've got such a large crowd of regulars that comes in every weekend and, I guess, we've got to remain true to those people. So, (the owner) has more or less said no to new wave on weekends."

RECENTLY, Great Northern Food and Beverage has started a series on Monday nights and Bitter Creek and Tootsies are experimenting with new wave on Sundays.

Martinez changed his opinion of the viability of new wave bands after a recent weekend at his club that featured Charlie Peacock's Autograph, which he booked partly because it features former members of the Sal Valentino Band, and the Mumbles.

"Things went fine," he said. "(Peacock) was dynamite. And Ozzie was here last Sunday and they blew me away, their show is tremendous...I was entertained the whole time. So, I'm going to try it on Sundays."

Dane Henas, of the Mumbles, said it's been a long time in coming.

"Club owners are *finally* coming around," he said. "Linda Ronstadt comes out with a new wave single and it's changing. But bands that aren't going after money playing in a bar, (those that are pursuing) the recording thing have always had a bad time in this town. They've either had to move down to L.A. or go to San Francisco. It's twice as bad with new wave music but it's still that basic problem."

NO CLUB WAS willing to try it on a regular basis on weekends until this month. One local spot, the China Wagon, which formerly offered live disco, will begin featuring new wave acts Thursday through Saturday starting Feb. 20.

"The guy's (Milton Chin) business wasn't doing very well," said Bo Richards, who, with Carol Gale, runs Can't Tell Productions, a new wave booking agency here. "Rick DiPrato of Labial Fricative talked to him and got him to put in new wave on Thursday nights and then I (followed it up). I told him I could supply him with a steady flow of bands from San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Vancouver and he decided to do it."

"If it really starts going, we can do it other nights. But even now, it's the only club in Sacramento where you can see all-original music on the weekends."

IT'S AN IMPORTANT step for the local music scene but also a risk. As far as other club owners are concerned, new wave on the weekends is a rather distant possibility. According to Paul Cook of Great Northern, there are other reasons besides the fear of offending long-time customers.

"The biggest (drawback to) having new wave on the weekends," said Cook, "is that most of the bands, about 95 percent, don't have enough material to work a whole night. So, you have to have two to four, sometimes even five bands to fill out a night. And there are just not any clubs in Sacramento with stages and exits large enough to permit bands to tear down in between breaks and set up again."

Dyal, who always has at least two acts on Tuesday at Slick Willy's, cites another problem.

"I don't know if there's enough people to support it on the weekends," she said. "With two bands, we charge \$3. It works on Tuesdays but I wonder if people would be

willing to pay that all week. And San Francisco is so close. There's such a heavy new wave scene there that it's very easy for the fans to just pick up and go there."

THE BANDS are stuck with pursuing night club work if they want to play in Sacramento, even though their music might not be danceable, one of the absolute musts of the bar band scene.

"Keeping the music in the bars has a tendency to shape the music," said Don Martinez, alias Donny Jupiter, who leads the Twinkeyz, which has an album out in Europe. "The music on our album is not bar band music but when we play in a bar, there's pressure to change."

"And, another thing about new wave or avante garde music, a lot of the fans are under 21 and can't get into the bars anyway."

The Twinkeyz have had it a little rougher than some of the others. The band's music is more avante garde than new wave and just doesn't fit in the local bar scene.

"It's one of the problems," said Rick DiPrato of Labial Fricative. "New wave is an awfully general term. It takes in anything out of the ordinary. We play kind of a fusion of avante garde, rock and jazz...but the label is new wave. And there's hardly anywhere for a new wave band to play in Sacramento. So, we're going to L.A."

NOT ALL of the local new wave groups have those kind of complaints. O'Donnell insisted that the Suspects have done just fine.

"I think that's because we're go-getters," she said. "We take it seriously. We feel there's no use in having a band together unless you're willing to take it to the limit. So, we're into promoting ourselves, getting gigs and keeping our name up there so people see it all the time."

Several people in the club business feel that things will change for the better on the local scene.

John Tarro, who books the Sunday afternoon sessions at Tootsies, said, "(Once) people (in the club business) have the guts to do it, new wave will work in Sacramento. If they can get away from the mystique of (proven acts) and not be afraid to try something different, it can work. Sacramento is not really a 'let's take a chance' town. But I like new wave because it's simple rock 'n' roll."

IT'S THAT FACT that makes Cook even more positive about new wave's future.

"I think people have misconstrued the music," said the manager of Great Northern. "It's labeled new wave but it's the music that will be on the radio this year and next year...it's just basic rock 'n' roll. That's like Ozzie, they're a basic rock 'n' roll band. They don't consider themselves new wave but they're labeled that way. I just see it as a move away from disco back to basic rock 'n' roll."

Chuck Ashworth, alias Charlie Peacock, sees the day when the music will become a staple of clubs because the bands will be able to play longer.

"I think that as the popularity of the music increases," he said, "you're going to find bands that play their original material and material by bands that they respect just like what happened in the '60s. Bands are not going to play exclusively original material if they want to play clubs."

'La Traviata' tickets on sale

Tickets are on sale for the Western Opera Theater production of Verdi's "La Traviata," to be performed at 8:15 p.m. Feb. 29 in Freeborn Hall, University of California at Davis.

The production is in English.

Tickets are \$5 general admission and \$3.50 for students. They are available from the UCD box office, the Sacramento Civic Theater box office and affiliated agencies. Mail orders are available by sending a stamped and self-addressed envelope to the Regents, UCD, campus box office, Freeborn Hall, Davis, 95616. For details, call 752-1915.