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SAN FRANCISCO'S FIRST AND ONLY ROCK 'N ROLL BAND

by Michael Lucas

Despite having independently released the first "punk rock" single of the West Coast, CRIME's legend (like that of many under appreciated bands featured in these pages) has never spread beyond a comparatively small but extremely adamant cult. The fact that they only released three singles during their existence (the first and by far the best two in limited quantities) is certainly a factor in the lack of recognition accorded them, as is the poor distribution of the recently released (and excellent) San Francisco's Doomed CD/LP [OBIK: it's long gone, so don't bother].

Probably more significant is the fact that despite "getting there first with the mostest," CRIME's music and image set them apart from what soon became discernable as the punk rock "scene". The amphetamine blues lead guitar bursts which responded to the vocal lines in nearly every song as well as the frequently dispassionate vocals set them apart from the bandwagon-jumping art-schoolers (who were all too often devoid of rock and roll attitude), as did their carefully cultivated look and their anti-social attitude. The last factor, especially during their well-intentioned, but rather silly "let's get political and organize for anarchy like the British" phase of the San Francisco punk scene, created plenty of animosity which still seems to linger (CRIME never had problems making enemies, but I'm getting ahead of myself).

Defying the wishes of those who would prefer to pretend that CRIME never existed, I hereby present the saga of "San Francisco's first and only rock and roll band," CRIME, as related by vocalist/guitarist/co-founder Johnny Strike and drummer/manager Hank Rank, with a dash of bassist Ron Ripper's unique perspective.

JOHNNY: Frankie and I knew each other from the East Coast. He moved with his mother to Napa. Meanwhile, I was getting into minor trouble with the law back in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Just a lot of little stuff--truancy, possession of marijuana, malicious mischief--but all the problems were adding up and there was this one juvenile officer who wanted to put me away. So I needed to get away from there, and I was pretty anxious to get away from the small town atmosphere as well. At first I thought about moving to New York, but I decided it wasn't far enough away, and I'd be tempted to come back. Growing up in the East, moving to California and getting away from the cold winters is a big dream for a lot of kids, and it seemed far enough away that I wouldn't wind up going back. So I did, and I never have gone back. I settled in San Francisco and got back in touch with Frankie. He'd come down from Napa and we'd listen to records. We were listening to a lot of fifties rock and roll, early British invasion and the American bands who

were copying the British invasion. That was our biggest inspiration, bands like ? and the Mysterians, the Count Five, the Shadows of Knight and the Sonics. Then I went to England to check out the glam scene, and when I got back Frankie and I both got guitars to start a band.

We each learned a few chords and taught each other to play the little we knew. We had one of the Play Guitar With the Ventures albums, but that was too advanced for us, so we decided to write original songs with our little amps turned up all the way. When the neighbors complained, they said, "Why do you play 'Batman' so loud, over and over?" We called ourselves the bloody children and played strictly instrumentals with names like "Monster X10023" and "Monster X10024". Somewhere along the line we changed the name to the Space Invaders, and Frankie had this wacky idea that we'd shave our heads and find other people who were willing to shave their heads to join the band. I dyed my spikey hair red, but was only willing to shave my eyebrows. Frankie went ahead and shaved his head and took to wearing a self-designed space suit complete with a battery powered flashing belt.

When the New York Dolls came to San Francisco, their manager stood by the door and invited various people, including myself and my girlfriend, back to their hotel for a party. The party was free for all with every possible drug floating around. I spent most of my time there talking to Johnny Thunders and told him about the band I was trying to put together. I told him I had a Stratocaster and he adamantly advised me to trade it in for Les Paul, because it was louder. I followed his advice, even though Frankie and I had matching Ibanez Flying V's for a short time. I drove Thunders, Sylvain, and Johansen to the next night's show in my green 1952 Buick Special.

The New York Dolls look was, to me, just a logical extension of Modism, or maybe a mutation. Musically they were a great rock n roll band, but far more developed than us. Even though we came from a glam background, Frankie and I were much more primitive musically than any of those bands. I think that if you get to be too good of a musician, you can become showy and lose your edge. Notice that bands' early efforts are, a lot of times, their best. [OBIK: true of CRIME as well.]

At some point we looked around for band members and started to write lyrics. We wrote a song called "Crash Baby" and came up with an instrumental called "Sound Wars" where one of us would play some short burst of noise and then the other would answer and it went back and forth.

As it turned out, the glitter era ended without the Space Invaders 'bursting onto the scene'. What we did do was take a lot of quaalude, dress up in fantastic outfits and hang around at the Cabaret with the androgynous crowd.

By 1975, we were rehearsing our songs in my apartment in Buena Vista Terrace. We had one mic taped to a book case and one of us would sing and play rhythm guitar while the other made stabs at primitive lead guitar. We felt we were getting pretty good and decided to make another attempt to put a band together.

I was working at a disco down Columbus Street called "Dance Your Ass Off". Occasionally I'd see someone interesting and ask if they played an instrument. I met Ripper, who I remember looked like a musician on the skids. He said he could play guitar, bass, drums, anything. He was a spacey cat. We always figured he had taken more than his share of acid in the sixties.

Ripper had been in many bands, including the Chosen Few, who later became the Flaming Groovies. Ron always resented not being taken along when they became the Groovies.

RIPPER: The Chosen Few, yes, in 1964 we were playing the Cow Palace with 20 local bands and 10 national bands, acts like Sam the Sham and Gary Lewis & the Playboys. I was 16 and Ron Loney was 21. Roy had to go to jail for 30 days on a marijuana possession rap, or at least that's what the rest of the band told me. So I joined another band right away, with Pete Marino. Then the Chosen Few became the Flaming Groovies. Then I was in Lamp of Childhood, who put out a single "No More Running Around" in 67 or 68.

CRIME, we were the only punk band to last 30 years, three decades. Frankie Avalon, Bobby and Dion, the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, send in your paperwork and you'll get into the Rock N Roll Hall of Fame.

JOHNNY: As far as we were concerned, there had never been a real rock'n'roll band of any stature to come out of San Francisco, which is why we later billed ourselves as "San Francisco's First Rock'n'Roll band." The Jefferson Airplane? Give me a break.

Right away I recognized that his bass playing was eccentric, but who were we to complain? We soon got too loud for the apartment and rented a rehearsal space in the Castro where we played a couple of times with one of Ripper's old friends, a drummer who I remember was fairly good. His name was Chris something and we dubbed him Chris Cat, just as we'd already dubbed Ron Greco the Ripper for the type of bass he played, a Gibson Ripper.

Chris Cat had a wife. and she was not thrilled at the prospect of him getting into another band. He'd been in one of Ripper's old bands but had retired and gotten a regular job, at a museum as I recall. His wife finally put her foot down.

Once we started working with Ripper, I realized we needed a new name. After the video game "Space Invaders" came out, we had shortened the name to the invaders, but it just didn't cut it.

I mentioned the search for a new name to (the late) Tony Green who later changed his name to Tony Steele when he published two issues of a fanzine called No Exit. Right away, Tony said, "I think you should call yourself Crime." I liked it right away. Ripper said, "Okay," but Frankie still liked the Space Invaders and still harbored some hope of us all shaving our heads I he had grown his back but was ready to shave it again, at a moment's notice). We argued for awhile, and I finally exhausted myself typing out two pages of reasons why Crime was a better name than

the Space Invaders. After that, Frankie gave in and reluctantly accepted the new name.

We also got complaints from neighbors of the Castro Street space after just a few rehearsals, which led to us being asked to leave. So, still without a drummer, we moved to another rehearsal space on Howard near Sixth Street, where we played as a threesome with newly purchased Marshall stacks as loud as we liked. People would stop by occasionally, but we didn't encourage it. One dude, an old friend or Ripper's, was a photographer named James Stark. He'd come around and hang out and take pictures of us.

One night we found a guy sleeping in the rehearsal space. We didn't bother to wake him up, we just started rehearsing. He woke up and just sat there, fucked up on drugs digging the music. His name was Michael Kowolski (also deceased).

So we were still auditioning drummers, but we were very narrow minded about what we wanted. Not only did the person have to play okay and dig the music, but looking good was just as, if not more, important. I remember night after night of drummers - rock drummers, hippies, a middle-aged black bus driver with a strange old drum kit. The bus driver would have been an interesting choice, but we couldn't quite see it. We finally gave up and decided that we simply wouldn't have a drummer. Then one night Kowolski came up to me and said that he had a drummer.

The next night Kowolski showed up with (again, the late~~d~~ Ricky Williams who we later renamed Ricky Tractor, a name he hated. I think it was because he was always talking about his toys; he'd say something about playing with his toy airplane when he got home, or his toy tank, or his toy tractor, so we called him Ricky Tractor. Later, he changed it to Ricky James.

The funniest thing about his playing was that he could never keep his drum kit nailed down and he was always chasing his drums as they moved away from him. He was always fucked up on pills, but what the hell, we were finally a complete band.

Stark took more pictures and we put together a set of about a dozen tunes. Blue Bear recording school and studios was a block away, so we looked into the cost of recording a few numbers. A few nights later, we rolled our amps down the street to record the first West Coast "punk" record although I should mention that we never considered ourselves "punk." "Punk" was a media term which we didn't especially identify with, although if you take it to mean a reaction to the boringness that rock and roll had become, then I guess we were punk to the core.

Frankie and I were wearing leather jackets and leather biker caps when we rolled our amps into the studio with a couple of people lugging Ricky's drums behind us. There was some hippy behind the board checking us out and scratching his head and we told him, "These are the songs we want to record. Here's the first song, watch this" and we ran through "Hotwire my Heart." "Here's the other song," we ran through "Baby You're so Repulsive."

The guy behind the board said something like, "Well, this is going to be difficult, I don't know what to record first."

We said, "Look, we want you to record us all playing at once, just like we did. Get it?"

"Well then, you don't need me," he said, disgusted. "I'll just turn all the knobs and let you go."

We said that sounded okay and proceeded to record. The producer, or engineer, or whatever he was, just stared at us in disbelief. During the second song he got up and left the room.

Afterwards we asked him if he could turn up the guitars; he just turned one knob and said that was all he could do. He seemed upset, which we found amusing. Stark took some pictures of us recording, wearing headphones, and standing behind the board where it looked like we knew what we were doing.

RIPPER: We couldn't afford to go back and redo "Hot Wire My Heart." Ricky really fucked up in the beginning but then he really came in hard. I told the rest of the band that the B-side, "Baby You're So Repulsive," was gonna be the hit, anyway.

JOHNNY: After we heard the test pressing, we felt ready to play live. I had told my barber, a lesbian who was active in gay politics, about the "band I was in." One day she asked if we would play a free gay political fundraiser at the Old Waldorf. I said, "Of course."

Halloween night of 1976 found the Old Waldorf half full, mainly gay politicians. There were also some people in wild fruit costumes and maybe ten friends of ours up front.

When we hit the stage I was truly amazed; it actually sounded good. We were playing together. Kowolski had been baby-sitting Ricky all day, and he even seemed with it. We could hear what we were singing and playing better than at our rehearsal.

Our friends were dancing and enjoying themselves, but a lot of people were running for the exits. When we got to the fifth number, "Murder by Guitar," Jeffery Pollack, the Old Waldorf's owner, pulled the plug. We left full of encouragement.

We looked around for another place to play and, after a sales talk with the manager of the Stud, a bisexual bar south of Market Street, he agreed to let us play one night with a one dollar cover charge.

We decided to do a poster for this show and I thought that since we were called Crime we should feature famous criminals on our posters. First a series of war criminals, then gangsters, then serial killers and so on. So I thought we should start off with Hitler. The other guys okayed it and it was done.

Not surprisingly, stores refused to display the posters. I remember Aquarius, which promoted itself as some kind of alternative store was especially nasty about it. The owner, Chris Knab, was also very slimy when we brought in our first single. He and Howie Klein, our self-appointed nemesis, later started "The Outcaste Show" on KSAN and it was about as outcast as Knab's pseudonym, "Cosmo Topper." Even though the first two singles got attention in England and our shows in San Francisco did well, we were ignored by the local "rock press" and the self-appointed "representatives" of "punk" and "new wave" to the mainstream. The only honest attempt to get things right was when the first issue of Search and Destroy came out.

[OBIK: You can hear the almost-confrontation between CRIME and the Outcaste radio show on "Love Us or Hate Us, We Don't Give a Fuck", or just download an mp3 from my web page.]

HANK: Howie was a very ambitious guy. If you look back on the progress of Howie Klein from small-time music critic and radio host to presidency of Reprise Records, it seems that he had a very clear notion of what he was doing. To the extent that now, he's been able to rewrite history by making himself producer of the Ramones' first two records [on their CD reissue] while the rest of the people he associated with have sunk without a trace. But he did seem to look for ways to get under our skin.

JOHNNY: At any rate after we stuck these posters up all over town the guy from the Stud called and without any discussion told us that the show was cancelled.

We heard that Bill Graham saw the poster and had told people working for him that we would never play Winterland. We went down to his Bill Graham Presents to confront him about this, but of course couldn't get in his office. Frankie quickly wrote a song called "Crime Wave" which included the line "We don't play Winterland."

It seemed lame to continue with the criminal posters at that point, and we still needed to find another venue. Wandering in North Beach one night we saw posters announcing a group called Switchblade playing at a weird-sounding place, the Mabuhay Gardens. We decided to investigate.

The Mabuhay Gardens was a Philipino supper club with acts like the Philipino Elvis and Amapola. We met Ness Aquino and asked if we could do a show like Switchblade. He said that they had not done so well, but we argued that we would. He agreed and gave us a night. I don't know for sure if the Nuns or Mary Monday played there before or after we did, and I don't think it matters much.

Tony Green had a friend named Alan Purcell who was a nail salon owner, photographer and fancied himself another Andy Warhol. We did a photo session at his south of Market warehouse and I gave him a picture of a snarling fashion model with slicked back hair that I had cut out of some snotty European fashion

magazine and asked him to do a poster for the Mabuhay show, since he was playing with the idea of managing us.

For the next flyer we used a picture from the same magazine. Since Alan had gone off to do something else, I gave the picture to Stark, and showed him how we wanted it laid out. This was the procedure for all the posters that followed. Stark was the layout man and I guess it was our own fault for letting him sign the finished, usually stolen, artwork.

I remember he spelled Halloween as "Holloween" on one poster and his spelling hasn't improved over the years, judging from the book he later put out. He spelled Frankie's last name "Fixx" instead of "Fix."

After Hank joined the band, he essentially took over managing the band, which I had been doing up until then. He was especially involved in the posters, but on one occasion, for a show with the Dils opening, we both felt we were too busy to find an image for a poster. Hank and I sat down with Stark, who claimed to be a painter and had some lousy psychedelic paintings lying around his place. We told him to make a simple drawing of one of the badges we wore with our police uniforms; I think we gave him one to copy. Then we showed him how we wanted the information to read. We thought it would be hard to huck up, so we had him drop it off at the printer.

When we went to pick up several hundred posters, we were appalled. The "badge" looked more a pineapple! We destroyed posters. We took our posters very seriously.

Years later, Stark claimed total credit for the posters, including some that Hank laid out, in an enormous and meaningless coffee-table book called The San Francisco Rock Art Book [The Art of Rock] or something. There's a photo of him with the caption, "The artist in his studio." The one poster he avoided taking credit for was, of course, the Hitler poster.

Our second show, the first one at the Mab, was something of a nightmare. A hundred or so people showed up, and we hit the stage in our leather biker outfits. It was completely different from the first show; the audience was eager, verbal and ready. We slammed into the first song and noticed the next big difference--the sound was dreadful. The vocals were nonexistent and there was constant feedback.

Frankie and I looked at each other and at the crowd, who were going wild. We shrugged and continued on through the set.

The quaalude days were on their way out and at this point the homemade jobs were still around. Ripper was probably just on coffee and Ricky--well, it's anyone's guess.

I remember different people, Don Vinyl and Ricco dressed in S/M & Clochuork Orange fashions spinning themselves into a frenzy. A tall kid named Michael Lucas wearing a homemade t-shirt with a crude Crime logo and "Hot Wire My Heart" written on it towering over some people and staring into Frankie's eyes [actually, I was staring at both fretboards trying to cop some guitar playing secrets - ML].

Bambi, a blonde transvestite who sang torch songs, danced nearby while Vale (of Search & Destroy, later ReSearch) stood over to the side taking it all in.

Over the next few months, the Mab gained some notoriety as the "Punk" place to play in San Francisco, and some guy named Pat Paulson, who rented out a couple of rehearsal studios and had put out a rather weak "alternative" newspaper called Psyclone, worked his way into the Mab and sponsored a show with Blondie. Ness asked us if we wanted to play with Blondie and we agreed, figuring that we were so different that it would be a good show.

This seemed like our first "real" show in some ways, since other people were promoting it and Blondie would be the main attraction. The night of the show found Frankie, Ripper and myself backstage with the place packed and no sign of Ricky. As it got closer to show time, we became frantic and depressed.

Some guys from Blondie started arriving and we explained the situation to them. The drummer for Blondie offered to play drums for our set. Ten minutes before we were supposed to go on, we started running through our songs for him; two minutes before we went onstage, Ricky showed up looking stoned (as usual).

I can't remember if we were any good or not, but I do remember halfway through the set, in the middle of a song, not hearing any drums and looking back to see Ricky walking off the stage. We kept playing to the end of the song and then stalled for a bit. Eventually, much to our relief, Ricky walked back on stage as though nothing had happened. After the set, he told me that he had had to shit. I thought he was having an asthma attack, because he was using inhalers all the time. He was a garbage can drug user and seemed to be deteriorating. Once I found him in my bathroom taking my girlfriend's birth control pills.

We started keeping Ricky prisoner before shows. We'd deliver him to Ripper's place in the Excelsior, where he lived with his parents in an old house which was full of clocks which Ripper's dad collected. Ricky hated going there; he'd always look terrified when we'd drop the two of them off.

We were driving down Divisadero one night and Ricky was passed out in the back seat. We stopped at a traffic light nearby, some guy was standing around while his dog was pissing. Ricky suddenly woke up and looked out the window, blurting out "piss on your dog" before passing out again. That became the title of the only song that Frankie and I wrote together.

We were anxious to learn new material and "get tight," but Ricky started missing five out of six rehearsals. We finally told Kowolski to tell Ricky to come around and pick up his drums.

Among the people I met hanging out at the Mab was one guy who was always there and said he was a drummer and had been in various bands, the most interesting sounding one being the Circus Pimps. I invited him to play drums and he agreed. This was Brittle Black, who regarded himself as a latter day Keith Moon and

whose parties (and drunken Cadillac accidents) are legendary, for people who still talk about such stuff.

Brittley, whose real first name was Larry, was the son of a semi-famous jazz drummer who had played with Turk Murphy among others. Brittley was a "real" drummer, having, taken lessons from his dad since his childhood. In a way, it was almost a problem because Brittley wanted to do so much on drums and this egged Ripper on to greater eccentricity and forced Frankie and me to play a little bit more complexly.

Rehearsal sessions often consisted of Frankie and I talking about the aesthetics of rock and roll until we finally wore them down and they would play more basically for a while.

This is the line-up that recorded our second single, "Frustration" and "Murder By Guitar" at Mills College [early 1977] with Novak producing, and it worked out nicely on those recordings.

Dirk Dirksen, who had become Ness's partner at the Mab and taken over the booking, told us the Damned were coming to town and asked if we want to play that show. We agreed and went to work on a poster, billing ourselves as the headliner.

Dirk and Ness freaked out when they got wind of the poster and called us saying, "For Christ sake, the Damned are the headliners."

"Why?," we asked. I mean, we packed the club anytime we played. "Hot Wire My Heart" was getting good press in the English music papers, Melody Maker and the New Musical Express had us on their charts, so surely the Damned knew who we were.

For our audacity we were quietly taken off the bill, but we still put up the Crime as headliner poster. We actually did open for the Ramones at the Old Waldorf, where we were completely fucked by their sound man. We weren't getting much volume out of the PA, so we had to have our amps a lot less loud than we were used to. Then the Ramones come on and the PA was twice as loud.

We were always fairly responsible about rehearsing three nights a week, but Brittley began to miss rehearsals and then stopped showing up completely. We finally confronted him at the club and he explained that he was being wooed by Howie Klein and some other asshole to play drums for a pre-fabricated band called the Readymades; they were promising him money and other bullshit. We told him we thought he was an idiot, and when the Readymades made their debut we were proven right.

It reminds me of something the Screamers, who had a good sense of humor, said, "San Francisco is the four H's: Hippies, Heroin, Howie and Homos."

HANK: I knew Novak through the whole Mills Center for Contemporary Music scene. Other Music, which I co-founded while I was in college, played on a variety of home-made instruments, and had a member, David Doty, who was enrolled in a post-graduate program at Mills.

In 1976, what had been called "New Music" (a term which oddly enough wound up, several years later, synonymous with "New Wave") for several decades was showing a certain punk influence. Phil Laurie had a band called the Scientists, who were sort of a precursor to Devo, who came out in white jump suits and wielded battery-operated electronic instruments of their own invention while running through the audience. This was his thesis concert.

Of course, there was a whole body of work that laid the groundwork for this stuff. Bruce Conner, who was a Mabuhay regular in the early days, told me about performing in LaMonte Young's thesis concert in the late Fifties or early Sixties. Bruce's role was to stand in the back of the theater and yell the word, "Green!"

At any rate, it was interesting that there were people from the New Music scene like Phil Laurie and Novak who were thinking in terms of bands, and of course a lot of the early Mabuhay bands came from some sort of art school orientation. Novak and his associate Megan Roberts told me that they were in this band, called Novak, and they were playing this club, the Mabuhay Gardens.

I had seen the Ramones when they played the Keystone in Berkeley, because an old friend of mine, Pete Heimlich, had sent me a copy of the Ramones album. I guess he thought I'd like it, and I did, So I went to see them, and there was pretty much nobody there. Most of the audience were college kids, beer-drinkers who had come to rock out to the opening band, Earthquake. And when the Ramones came on, we just stood right in front of them on that tiny stage. It was one of the best shows I'd ever seen in my life; they played as if they were playing to an arena. That was sort of a wake up call to me, that everything I'd loved about music in the late '60s which had died in the early '70s was back.

So I went to the Mabuhay. The show was on a weeknight [Monday, May 9, 1977], so it wasn't very crowded. The scene hadn't really started in earnest, since "punk rock" didn't really exist until a news report on TV showed the footage from England. We sat right in front and Novak did a funny show; they were kind of a joke band, but a good joke band. Then Crime came out and did a very impressive and short set, about 15 minutes.

Afterwards Dirk came out and announced that Crime was looking for a new drummer. I'd already cut my long hair, but I went down to a hair stylist to get my hair to look like theirs was on the record. Then I had my girlfriend Carola take some Polaroid photos of me with this Hagstrom guitar I had, and I put it in a package with a letter saying, "I've seen you guys, I understand what you're doing, I'm not a drummer but I'm willing to learn." I sent the package to their PO box via special delivery, covered in one cent stamps so that it would stand out from the deluge that I imagined they'd be getting. Within 24 hours, Johnny called me and said, "We don't care if you can play; anybody who would do this is in the group."

Within the next couple of days I went with Ripper, since I didn't know anything about drums and he used to be a drummer, to Don Wehr's Music City. Ripper helped me select a Ludwig stainless steel drum kit. Ripper and I had an odd relationship.

He seemed...mistrustful of me from the beginning, and we never really melded into a rhythm section in the traditional sense. Ripper always pursued his own musical ideas, regardless of what anyone else in the group was doing. There was no way to control him, or to understand what he was doing. He just did what he did. After he went with me to buy the drums. Ripper was not very helpful. He never told me how to set them up, hold the sticks or any other pointers. As a result, I had them set in a position where I was constantly breaking open my knuckles on the rims. I held the sticks in the way that felt natural to me, which turned out to be completely wrong and probably prevented me from ever becoming a really accomplished drummer.

When I bought the drums, the salesman asked me what size sticks I wanted, and I didn't even know that there were different options. I told him that since I was playing for the loudest band in San Francisco, I supposed I needed the loudest drum sticks that they had. He sold me a pair of marching band sticks that were huge and ridiculously heavy. I suffered with those for a long time, which probably prevented me from getting up to speed as quickly as I might have. My hands got so blistered and torn up that I had to tape the sticks to my hands for a while, because I could not bear the pain of holding them.

When I joined the band, the next show had already been booked. I had two weeks to learn to play drums as well as to learn the songs. The songs weren't very difficult to learn, of course, it was mostly a matter of knowing where the stops were and how many times things were repeated. And those things tended to change from show to show, so there was a limit to the amount of preparation that you could really do.

When I started taking over the management tasks from Johnny, it became very clear that there was an inside and an outside to the "scene" and that, for whatever reason, Crime was always on the outside.

The band had all these self-imposed rules and dictates that came back to haunt us. We felt very strongly about not opening for any other local bands, for instance. In fact, it was a very short list of bands that we would open for. While I was in the band, we opened for the Ramones at the Old Waldorf and the Weirdos in LA. The Weirdos were a band that we liked a lot, and we'd open for them in LA and they'd open for us when they came to San Francisco.

But it was the refusal to open for other local bands that ultimately kept us off the Sex Pistols show at Winterland.

We were offered third slot, under the Avengers, which we refused. The Nuns were only too happy to take that slot. We often lost a sense of perspective, and some things that we felt were important to our fans were, ultimately, not that important. Things that we thought people were scrutinizing us about that I don't think anybody outside the band was actually conscious of.

For instance, our insistence on closing shows sometimes worked against us. There's a prime time to get on stage, when people are lubed up but not too drunk and

sloppy and the club is at its most full and the people aren't burned out yet. We hurt ourselves many times by insisting on going on last, which we thought was important to our fans. And it wasn't; they just want to see you.

We used to torture our fans a lot by stretching things out and making them wait and wait and wait, so that it would sometimes be an hour after the band before we ended their set before we played. Frankie was especially into this because he thought it was whipping the crowd into a frenzy, when it was actually dissipating the energy in the club.

JOHNNY: It also probably frustrated the crowd, which was probably why there was so much violence at our shows. Fist fights and police visits weren't uncommon, and one time the entire front window of the Mab was smashed.

HANK: Then there was the whole political thing, where groups looked around for various causes to rally around like the coalminer's strike. We did the fundraiser against the anti-gay initiative [The Briggs' Initiative, Prop 6 of 1978], but after that the band took a public stance that we wanted no part of the political world. And there was this momentum that was gathering around those bands that eventually really helped them. The political thing was a good hook, a good angle. And that put us further on the outside.

JOHNNY: Our response to the political thing was to proclaim the period the Summer of Hate and ourselves San Francisco's First AND ONLY Rock'n'Roll Band.

HANK: It seemed we were constantly playing ping pong with our image, or our perceived image, or what we perceived our perceived image to be, which is, I think, very different from what our perceived image was. And our stock would go up or down, depending on how wild our last show was.

I think the first indication that we were guilty of hubris was the Bimbo's show, which was a disaster. We were constantly at odds with the Mabuhay management and, in a moment of madness, we thought that we could book a bigger show on Halloween, which is the biggest holiday of the year in San Francisco, and steal the thunder away from the Mab.

We rented out Bimbo's, which appealed to us for its swank, underworld atmosphere, and we booked the Weirdos, who we perceived as being the biggest band in Los Angeles, to open. Bimbo's is a very fancy, very expensive facility, and we had to charge more than anyone had charged for a punk show.

Advance sales were terrible. To add to the aggravation, Phil Kaufman was filming a scene for his remake of Invasion of the Body Snatchers in the alley next to Bimbo's and his truck was blocking our access to the club, and we couldn't get our PA in, and it was a big mess--I ended up yelling at Phil Kaufman that his film would never be as good as Don Siegel's original, and I was right. But it didn't do me any good.

Not very many showed up. It was a very sad, very depressing show. We really stuck our necks out, and we really took a bath. Of course, word quickly spread about this fiasco, and we went back to the Mabuhay with our tails between our legs for another engagement after that, to reestablish ourselves. And by that time, the Mabuhay had so much momentum behind it that it didn't seem to matter who was playing on the weekends; it was the place to be. Conversely, a band playing on the wrong day or at the wrong time was doomed. One of the best shows I ever saw was Suicide, but they played a 7:00 show because Dirk had a cabaret thing with some of the Tubes' dancers in the late slot. Consequently, there were about 11 people in the audience.

I think that, essentially, people weren't necessarily fans of the bands or the music, they just wanted to be there because it was a "scene." And as with any scene, it seemed like the center of the universe to the people in it, but we were always trying to reach beyond that scene.

For instance, when Lynn Hershman, an artist who organized programs of bands playing San Quentin, asked us if we'd be interested in playing San Quentin, it seemed like a great idea to us. We got an incredible amount of publicity out of that show; there were pictures that just begged to be printed. We even got in the World Weekly News [OBK: America's finest news source].

We were the only punk band on the show. The prisoners divided themselves into groups--blacks and non-blacks. There were bands that came on before us and after us, and when a black band would play, all the non-blacks would stand up and leave en masse and wander around to the other side of the exercise field--and vice-versa. But when we played, just about everybody got up and left, because they didn't like us at all. They did like the girls who were with us, who were dancing in front of the stage. The prisoners were kept behind a roped-off area, but they were picking up pebbles and throwing them at the girls' butts which kept them entertained for a bit while they suffered through listening to us.

We got an incredible amount of publicity out of the show, but it wasn't enough to help us get anywhere with record labels.

JOHNNY: We had a reputation for being difficult, which we often were, and I think that it hurt our chances for getting any small label interested in us, and we were too over the edge for any "real" company to even consider. So there was really no place for us, although Seymour Stein of Sire was interested enough to come to our rehearsal studio to see us play. But any possibility of a deal seemed to be blown when Frankie told him that he was wasting his time with the Ramones and that they were hippies who should get haircuts. Stein was very offended by that.

HANK: For a short while we had a manager, Mort Mortiarty. It was just a verbal agreement. There was never anything on paper, since he didn't have a California management license. In fact, he had managed the Tubes until they got signed, at

which point they fired him. Then they sued him for managing them without a license.

He arranged for us to do some live in-studio demos with a friend of his, Eliot Mazer. Eliot was a pro who managed to get a very good sound considering that we were at! Just blaring away at the same time [note: the material on the San Francisco's Doomed LP and CD on England's Solar Lodge label is taken from these sessions].

We eventually cut some demos at a real studio. Different Fur, with Henry Kaiser producing one session, a pre-stardom Huey Lewis producing another, and one produced by Stacy Baird. This and the soundtrack to the film that Larry Larsen shot live at the Mab is the only unreleased material left, although somebody bootlegged some of the demos on a 7-inch a few years ago.

I made some forays down to LA with the demos. I played one for someone's label, and he told me, "That isn't a song. That is not a song."

JOHNNY: Well, when Kerouac wrote On The Road to publishers they said, "This is not a novel. This is not a story." As soon as somebody makes money off of something, then it's valid.

HANK: That meeting pretty much summed up my major label experience. On the independent level, I met with Greg Shaw [OBK: of Bomp! records] but his offer wasn't very good.

We played LA on the infamous Fun Bus tour, and a van-load of friends and fans came along [March 1979. One of the two roadies on the trip was Joey D'Kaye, who later played bass for Crime. The other was Jonathon "Formula" Plenn, who died of cancer in early 1995]. We had two really good shows, but there was a big scene with Frankie before the third show.

JOHNNY: One of the guys on the Fun Bus was Vadar, who said he came from another planet. He lived in an airplane hangar and used to do megadoses of acid and listen to tapes he made of our shows. He was really stuck on Frankie, and kept pumping Frankie's ego all weekend. After the second show, Frankie tells us he wants to stop playing guitar and become the lead singer. We told him no, we thought it was a stupid idea, and he started sulking.

So the third show wasn't too good. Afterwards, on our way back to San Francisco, we stop at a gas station in the San Fernando Valley and a couple of guys motion for us to come over to their car. I think it was just because we were in a van that said "Crime" in big letters, but maybe they'd heard us interviewed on KROQ the night before (a highlight of the interview was Rodney remarking that it was funny that we were called "Crime" and dressed in cop uniforms while "The Police" didn't, and had we ever thought of playing with them?). At any rate, these guys had a huge amount of speed, and they gave us a bunch. So we get back on the road, and we all take some, but not Frankie. He's still sulking, and we're all going,

"This is great speed. Are you sure you don't want some?" Frankie says, "No" and keeps sulking. Finally, he gives in and has some and he starts feeling better and starts talking about plans for the band.

It really was exceptionally good speed. Hank, who was driving, yelled "Jews on speed will take over the world!"

[OBIK: read the saga of the fun bus on my webpage.]

HANK: Ripper quit. I'm pretty sure he was getting pressure from one of his many girlfriends to settle down, but at any rate Joey D'Kaye, who had been a roadie and sound man for us, took over the bass. We started letting Frankie do a couple of songs as a lead singer as a compromise. Something he always wanted was for us to do was wear lime green jogging suits, but with badges; we never caved in on that. But we made another attempt to boost ourselves by playing the Boarding House, a fairly prestigious club, two nights in a row [September 7-8, 1979].

The first night we had Buddy Holly Jr, a Buddy Holly impersonator who played guitar and sang with pre-recorded accompaniment, open for us. The second night we wanted the Residents, but we settled for Snakefinger.

JOHNNY: The Boarding House shows were very low energy. We weren't at our best; Ripper had just quit and it was the first show where Joey was playing bass. It was also the first show where Frankie had his vocal only numbers, and the sound we built up with two guitars was lost with me doubling up. The place was also not right for us; the club's security were very wary of having a punk rock band play, and they made sure no one in the audience got "out of line," and their idea of "out of line" was pretty ridiculous.

HANK: The overall attendance on the two nights was not too hot. We bought radio spots for the show on the local Top 40 station, which seemed to have no impact. Everything we tried wound up being a big cash drain, and the morale of the band was deteriorating. There was a big rift between Frankie and Johnny over songwriting, among other things. Frankie kept coming in with the same song with different titles.

JOHNNY: Frankie's ego seemed to grow larger every day, and he walked around like some little god and you just wanted to strangle him.

HANK: We used to meet at Hanno's, a newspaper bar near the rehearsal space, before going over to rehearse. And after a while, we wound up staying longer and longer at Hanno's before going over to rehearse, until finally we spent a whole rehearsal session at the bar. That's when I knew that things were going down, and I had to leave.

JOHNNY: After Hank left, Ripper and Brittley rejoined and Joey started playing synthesizer. We were trying something new, and sometimes when you try something new it works and sometimes it doesn't. I don't think it worked. Live, you couldn't

hear the synthesizer anyway. Berkeley Squared records released a single ["Maserati"/"Gangster Funk"] before we finally called it quits. What originally set us apart from the other bands around, at least in SF, was that we were a lot older, being in our late 20s when most of the other bands seemed to be in their early 20s. And Frankie and I both had older siblings, so we grew up listening to a lot of Fifties rock and roll, blues, jazz and all the rock'n'roll and soul in the Sixties, and that gave us a broad and solid base. I don't know what happened with that last single. All I know is it wasn't happening. Something was definitely lost.

RIPPER: It was depressing, because I knew the end was coming, I couldn't change Frankie and Johnny's minds, because they thought things were going nowhere. Brittley and I were doing fine as a rhythm section, and we were happy with our direction. But the guitarists, as frontmen, had their directions, and it seemed like Johnny wanted to go more techno and Frankie wanted to go into Funkabilly. Frankie and Johnny were basically married and couldn't go to parties every night like Brittley and me. And I said, "Look. Berkeley Squared is going to come up with more money. Just sit tight."

JOHNNY: By 1982, things were getting stale. A few of us were strung out and nothing exciting was happening with the band. We were on a hundred bucks a week salary from Berkeley Squared, our "managers/producers." They started paying us off in drugs and then lost interest completely. I saw it was time to either get back in gear and take control or bail out. We weren't even rehearsing at this point, we were just waiting for Berkeley Squared to realize that they couldn't live without us and call us. I could see that this wasn't going to happen so I called each member and tried to convince them that we had to start taking care of ourselves again. They wouldn't budge. I set an ultimatum: either we get off our asses or I was quitting. The rest of the band evidently thought I was bluffing. That was the end.

Many years later, Frankie tried to regroup for a comeback, I declined. They played and Hank and I went to witness the spectacle. Brittley and Ripper and some rock looking guitar player and Frankie wearing a slouch cap and mittens. After every couple of songs he would run back and do a costume change. Meanwhile, the music seemed to deteriorate with each song. At one point, Frankie got locked in the dressing room, so the rock guitar player started singing; he sounded like a bad Neil Young. We heard that this band did a few more bad shows before packing it in.

[OBIK: see the MRR article for an interview with the reformed CRIME.]

HANK: It's like the scripts for the Monks movie. I don't know if you could really make a movie about it that many people would want to see, but I could identify with it because it was essentially the story of a band that didn't make it.

JOHNNY: Crime's initial idea, in fact, was not to make it. Our original idea was that we would not sign any contract, period. Of course, that idea was long forgotten by 1977.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

JOHNNY: has just completed a novel, *Dreaming In Samui*. In his current line of work, he sees a lot of people from the Mab days, especially musicians (he works in a methadone clinic). His current musical endeavor, REV (Rational Emotive Voodoo), is an outgrowth of his counseling. It is an experimental group conducted in the dark with percussion and voice. Studio work with DAT tapes compiled from various sessions is underway for possible release.

[OBIK: Johnny is alive and well, still writing and playing in a new band, the Venus Hunters. Check <http://www.angelfire.com/sc/unclejack/mainpage.html> for more info.]

FRANKIE: was involved in a number of questionable telemarketing schemes; one, Kids Against Drugs, resulted in a puppet and talent show (with a performance by the Phantom Surfers) with Frankie as the MC, although no schools sent students to attend (it happened to be held on a holiday). He is currently living in a shelter for the homeless and says, "I dare Rancid or Green Day to cover one of our songs."

[OBIK: Frankie died in 1997(? not too sure about the year).]

RIPPER: operates an antique store, specializing in "spooky Victorian stuff" by appointment only.

RICKY: After forming and singing in various bands such as the Sleepers, Flipper (legend has it that all of Ricky's many pets were named Flipper) and the Toiling Midgets, Ricky died under mysterious circumstances.

[OBIK: Ricky is, as far as I know, still dead.]

BRITTLEY: lives in the Mission district in San Francisco in a room decorated with Sixties and Seventies rock memorabilia, a lava lamp, a lightning lamp and a black light.

HANK: is currently an independent film producer. He recently went to Cannes with *The Beast*, the only US film in the Short Main competition. Among his previous productions: *Mod Fuck Explosion*, *The Living End*, *Sure Fire*, and *The Vermeers*.

JOEY: worked for a time as synth sound man for Tony Tony Tone. Current whereabouts unknown.

CRIME interview from Punk #11 (1977)

Interview by Ike Horn

I'd been hearing weak grapevine rumors about the Crime band. So I decided to catch their act. I took Page, the world famous bring-em-back-alive photographer, along with me.

We caught up with Crime at the Cinemadrome, a bombed-out rehearsal hall near the corner of Sixth and Howard in San Francisco. The neighborhood featured warehouses, a sprinkling of bondage bars and a methadone clinic, so the band's black limousine really stood out. Three of the band members were there when we arrived:

Frankie Fix (Guitar, Vocals)

Johnny Strike (Guitar, Vocals)

and Ron the Ripper (Bass)

They were sitting on a ratty couch down at one end of the cement-floored room, staring at the egg cartons that had been nailed to the walls to give the Cinemadrome that **studio** look. We sat down, and Crime opened up.

FRANKIE: There's a lot of bands that want to cash in on the punk scene and get in on the fad, but **we're the real punks!** It's tough making it big here in San Francisco, and we've talked about moving to another city, but as long as we're here...

JOHNNIE: Some people think the Nuns are the big punk band around town, but they're not. I hate to say it, but **we're the only punk band** happening at the present time in San Francisco.

PAGE: How long have you been together?

FRANKIE: About a year.

PAGE: Where are you from?

FRANKIE: Er, Harrisburg. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Ricky James [aka Ricky Sleeper/Tractor/Flipper], the drummer, entered with Dee Dee, a female friend, and we were introduced. Ricky never said a word the whole time we were there.

FRANKIE: Yes, as I was saying, Johnnie and I had a record shop in Harrisburg. We've been together a long time.

JOHNNIE: We're the first and **only** Rock and Roll band in San Francisco!

This evoked a dead silence. We just looked at each other for a minute or so.

HORN: When I can't think of good questions to ask, I just keep my mouth shut.

FRANKIE: That's OK, we'll ask the questions.

HORN: What bands do you guys like to listen to?

JOHNNIE: Oh, the Nerves, Patti Smith, Bob Marley, the Ramones, the Dogs, Quick, Killer Kane...

HORN: Where do you play?

FRANKIE: At the Mabuhay Gardens, the Stud Bar... We played the Sonic Rendezvous for a SIR party, a sort of gay Halloween trip...

HORN: I'll bet it's hard to pay the rent on this place.

JOHNNIE: Yeah, we all pool our unemployment checks and just barely make it. It's too bad we can't sleep here.

HORN: Then Crime does not pay?

FRANKIE: No, not yet.

JOHNNIE: But it will.

HORN: That's what the all say.

RON: Are you a real photographer? Where's your portfolio?

PAGE: I don't carry me portfolio around with me, darling! I was a combat photographer in 'nam for four and a half years!

I had 86 pages in Life Magazine! I'd need a fuckin' **semi** just to haul me **slides** about! I just carry me camera and a few lenses for jobs like this one! (takes a picture of Ron) You think I'm not a photographer?

DEE DEE: Do you take pictures for Rolling Stone?

PAGE: I'm freelance, like Ike Horn. I'll take pictures for anybody...I did some shots for Steve Miller's album cover last year... I shot the old Doors, the Soft Machine...

JOHNNIE: I haven't listened to Steve Miller in about ten years.

PAGE: What do you want on **your** album cover? An egg carton?

FRANKIE: No, two dead chicks with their heads busted open in an alley...lots of blood.

PAGE: (gets excited) You want dead people? I've got lots of left-over slides from 'nam! Lots of corpses! I just sold some to Hustler, but I've got some good ones left. How about a couple of chicks napalmed Vietnamese chicks with their heads blown off?

JOHNNIE: Naw.

HORN: We haven't gotten to your message yet.

FRANKIE: We like to come on strong...get real boring...leave 'em stoned.

PAGE: Where'd you get your combat boots?

FRANKIE AND JOHNNIE: Huh?

PAGE: Your boots! (points to Frankie and Johnnie's look-alike shiny new khaki combat boots.) Where'd you get those A-1s?

FRANKIE: The Army-Navy surplus store.

PAGE: I've got six pairs at home. I've got all sorts of gear that I brought back from 'nam.

JOHNNIE: Got any Nazi stuff?

PAGE: No, but I've got a real nice selection of Viet Cong pajama suits, fragment grenades, camouflage material, AK 47s...

Crime lost interest at this point, and went to the far end of the Cinemadrome to tune up, so we turned out attention to Dee Dee, who looked a lot like Eva Braun.

She was leafing through a copy of the Philosophy of Andy Warhol and chewing gum, but she took the time to answer a few questions.

HORN: Where are you from?

DEE DEE: Detroit.

HORN: Are you a musician?

DEE DEE: I'm a vocalist.

HORN: Are you in a group?

DEE DEE: Not right now. I'm looking around, checking things out. I might put a group together. San Francisco sucks. HORN: What do you think of the Nuns?

DEE DEE: They're OK. I like Crime better. They have good material, but I don't care for the way they put it across. HORN: How do you spell your name?

DEE DEE: Dee eee eee Dee eee eee.

We need more new music in Detroit.

PAGE: Yes, but do we need Detroit? I mean, **really!**

Crime launched into their set at then and conversation became impossible. They did 'Raw Rumble', 'Hotwire my Heart', 'Money Crazy', 'Galvanized Grime', 'Manic Mainline', and were half-way through 'Murder by Guitar' when Ricky broke his drum pedal.

Page had shot a roll of film, so we decided to leave. We'd heard enough. Crime was super loud, with their Marshalls turned up all the way. Their drone reminded me a little of the old Velvet Underground, but they didn't make me feel like dancing. They posed a lot, totally into their self-image of a bad-ass neo-Nazi killer punk band.

They were fake punk.

HORN: Hey, we'll see you later.

JOHNNIE: Have you got enough for a story?

HORN: Yeah, was that last song 'Guitar Lover'?

JOHNNIE: No, that was 'Murder by Guitar'.

HORN: Oh...sorry, I guess that was a Freudian slip.

FRANKIE: Come back any time. We're here rehearsing every night from seven 'til ten.

We eased our way out the door and back onto Howard street. It was a bleak, cold night with the usual Frisco fog.

My ears hurt.

PAGE: Where's the fuckin' safety pins? They're not a **real** punk band, that lot!

HORN: They want to be one, though. More than anything Crime wants to be the number one, killer punk rock band in San Francisco.

PAGE: They're too shitty to be punk!

HORN: Well...I think they're **straights** posing as fag punk rockers. But what if they are? I'm a liberal, let's check out the Nuns...

