

In the Spirit of Things

Revenge of the She Punks, compiled by Vivien Goldman (2CD, Tapette Recrds)

Inspired by the book of the same title, this wonderful double CD gathers up 28 tracks which 'demonstrate how girls around the world, with no or few role models, found ways to thwart blockages and become self-expressive musicians, breaking traditions and expectations, setting new standards with every chord.' That's quite a claim, and this is quite a compilation!

Goldman has chosen four themes she feels are common issues: Identity, Money, Love/Unlove and Protest. She also notes she paid attention to the sound and not the lyrics when sequencing the music, and discusses how open and inclusive she has chosen to interpret the term 'punk' as, more interested in 'the spirit of punk' than any other definition, especially one reliant on 'frenetic full-frontal sonic attack', though there is of course some of that here too. But the loose definition allows for welcome appearances by Grace Jones and Neneh Cherry.

Goldman clearly doesn't believe in punk being limited to any specific period of time either: the album opens with a 2006 track by Tanya Stephens who arrived in the music scene in the late 1990s, and a 2005 track by USA hardcore band Fertile Misery, who only formed in 1990. Skinny Girl Diet's song is from 2016, as is Big Joanie's track. It's kind of hard to see anything rebellious about 21st century punk, and even harder to see the reason for Goldman's inclusion of her own track, 'Launderette', when she states she didn't have room to include all the songs she wanted.

Anyway, what do we get? We get hardcore, punk, pop-punk, power-pop, dub, ska, hip-hop, rock, poetry, no-wave funk, and unclassifiable hybrid music from the wonderful Raincoats. Patti Smith struts her stuff, Debbie Harry pouts and poses, Grace Jones lusts after her stoned 'Jamaican Guy', Poly-Styrene screeches in front of X-Ray Spex, and Crass are, as ever, unlistenable, despite all their good intentions.

It's an exhilarating anthology, with lots of new names for me to investigate. It's a celebration and a showcase, it's a great listen, but it's also confused and unfocussed. There are questions about empowerment, femininity, gender and sexuality, race, money, culture, and abuse of power raised here in the songs, all deserving more in-depth and serious attention and consideration. And there are unasked questions too: about women fronting male bands, about whether music changes society, about whether punk – however defined – changed anything, about why there is so little experimental material here. Where are the female grime and jungle artists or those involved in ambient, electronica and improvisation? The rappers and performance poets? Or the current female pop stars? Are they not empowered, assertive and questioning? Aren't they making music articulating female experience?

I hope Goldman will be able to write more in depth about the issues she touches upon in her book, and to contextualise this music more than she has done here. Maybe I'm taking it all too seriously, but Goldman clearly considers it possible for women to use their creativity to

'mould their own environment, create their own space, and live as self-actualized artists'. I agree, but let's see even more evidence please.

Rupert Loydell

(535 words)