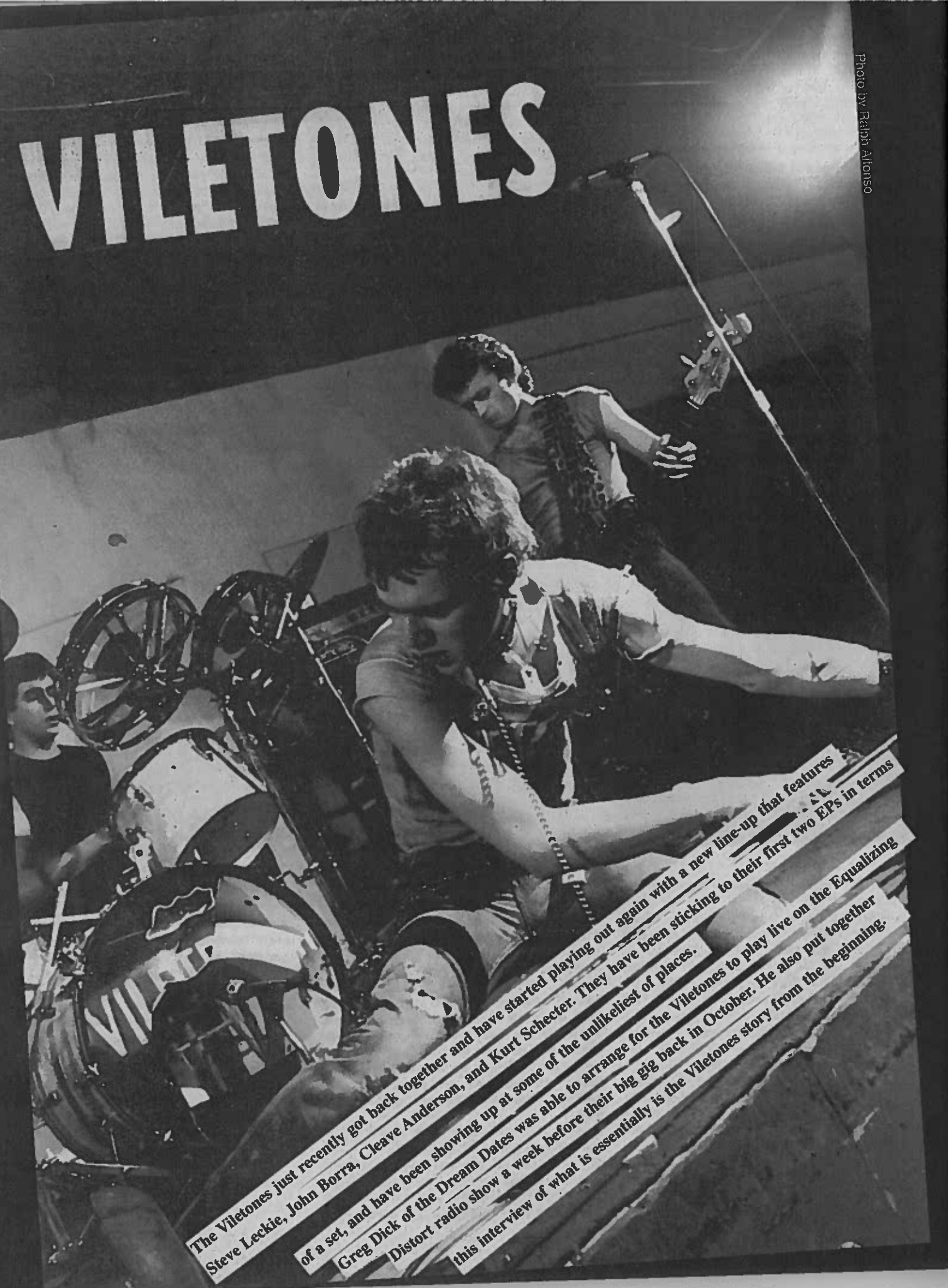


# VILETONES

Photo by Ralph Alfonso



The Viletones just recently got back together and have started playing out again with a new line-up that features Steve Leckie, John Borra, Cleave Anderson, and Kurt Schecter. They have been sticking to their first two EPs in terms of a set, and have been showing up at some of the unlikelyst of places.

Greg Dick of the Dream Dates was able to arrange for the Viletones to play live on the Equalizing Distort radio show a week before their big gig back in October. He also put together this interview of what is essentially the Viletones story from the beginning.

**MRR:** Steve, I want to go way, way back to the beginning and then go up to where we are now with the current line up of the VILETONES. There are a lot of questions we want to cover and I guess we will start with: were you originally born and bred in Toronto?

Steve: Yep. You bet, man. Yonge and Bloor.

**MRR:** Beautiful. And which high school did you attend?

Steve: Northern until they kicked me out in ninth grade.

**MRR:** How old were you when you started going to rock concerts?

Steve: I started going to concerts when I was fourteen. I used to go to those Winter Pops. They called them Winter Pops every New Year's Eve at Maple Leaf Gardens. I saw Alice Cooper, Lou Reed, Mott the Hoople, and T-Rex. It was a religion to me.

**MRR:** Sounds like a lot of great shows that I didn't catch. What was your first exposure to punk rock?

Steve: I didn't have a first exposure to punk rock funnily enough, and that's why the Viletones are a punk rock band. You didn't get it from anybody else. You dig? In other words what came out of London, New York, and Toronto was this explosion that wasn't contingent on us knowing what other bands were doing. So I didn't get an exposure to it. I mean punk rock was to me like Iggy and the Stooges, the New York Dolls, maybe the Ramones, but we came out of the gun just like the Pistols, the Clash, the Damned, and the other bands regardless of any punk rock labels.

**MRR:** Yeah and what exactly was the groundbreaking moments in punk rock can be disputed. How did you meet Freddy Pompelli, Chris Hate, and Motor X?

Steve: I put an ad in the *Toronto Star* looking for a... I think the ad headline was Stooges, MC5 seeking blah blah blah, and low and behold

Freddy Pompelli was a draft dodger from Philadelphia up in Toronto. You've got to remember, man, this is in 1977 so it wasn't unusual to see American draft dodgers up here then, and he was the first guy to answer and 'Boom' locked him in. He played with the Syndicate of Sound, "Hey Little Girl."

**MRR:** He was in that band?

Steve: Well, yeah. He played guitar on that single. They were the first guys that answered the ad and they were the first guys I hired.

**MRR:** That's the first time I ever heard that. Obviously the Dead Boys covered that song on *Young Loud, and Snotty*. What were the first Toronto punk bands that you saw other than your own band?

Steve: The first Toronto punk bands I saw outside of the Viletones were the Ugly, and the Curse; there weren't a whole lot. You also had the Dishes and Rough Trade who were kind of around the periphery, but they were getting a little long in the tooth. But I would say the Ugly, the Curse, B-Girls, Diodes, and Teenage Head—Teenage Head were fucking awesome.

**MRR:** Yeah, they were amazing back then. I think I know the answer to this one, but which show of the local bands were you most inspired by other than the Viletones, of course?

Steve: I think the best band outside of the Viletones—you see it's not enough to be good, you've got to be better and what we lacked with sheer musicianship we made up for in charisma and other things—but the best band musically and sonically and with a front man was Teenage Head, I think. Teenage Head were awesome.

**MRR:** I think they had a few years' head start on a lot of the bands as far as being together as a band. They were obviously good musicians. Your first gig was at the Underground Colonial and this gig has always been leg-

endary not only because it was your first gig, but also because it was the first time you cut yourself on stage. I guess a little bit of Iggy Pop inspiration or there was a bottle handy. Were you guys the first punk band to get booked into the Underground Colonial?

Steve: Yeah. For sure. Absolutely. And that was through Jimmy the Worm who was Chris Hate's brother. Jimmy has passed away since. He booked us, Ronnie Hawkins, the motherfucker was playing upstairs at the Colonial. We were downstairs, but we were the first punk band to be booked there. Yeah.

**MRR:** Eventually the punk groups started playing upstairs there.

Steve: Yeah.

**MRR:** Tell us about the Blake Street Boys.

Steve: The Blake Street Boys were a bunch of Irish kids that lived at Langeley and Logan that followed the Viletones because we were an East End band. We identified ourselves very strongly with Pape and Danforth and Langeley and Logan and Queen and Logan. This is the '70s so it's different than it is now. There was tough chemistry and we wanted these boys to know that they had a voice in the Viletones I suppose, and they were tough motherfuckers. You knew them.

**MRR:** Oh, I knew them.

Steve: And every show we did, the Blake Street Boys were there and it was good fistfights and that's the way it was in those days. You'd have a good punch out. I mean a serious punch out, but then maybe you'd buy the guy a beer at the end of it. It didn't mean that you were going to fucking shoot him, like now.

**MRR:** I have memories of you standing on tables swinging a chain while those guys were doing their business, which were some pretty crazy nights at many of the local establishments. And talking about the city, it was just so different back then. Yonge Street was a total cesspool. I don't think a lot of people even have a clue what our city used to look like. It was almost like Amsterdam with the girls in windows.

Steve: That's a good way of putting it.

**MRR:** Really, really seedy.

Steve: No, it's the best way of putting it that I have ever heard. Like Amsterdam. It was really seedy. I mean, every other door when you walked down Yonge Street from Bloor was a massage parlor, a place to get jerked off, strip joints and hookers. I mean that's what Yonge Street was, and that's what everyone knew it was. The whole country knew it was that. And when you had the killing of...

**MRR:** Emmanuel Jacks.

Steve: Thank you. Then it all went upside down. The whole city changed.

**MRR:** That's when that all got cleaned up. Freddy Pompelli, the guitarist from the Viletones and I believe it was his wife Marguerita Passion had a store called New Rose. Where was New Rose?

Steve: New Rose was at Queen and Parliament. Bad part of town but for the Viletones it was good for business. Queen and Parliament in those days wasn't that much different than what it is now. That was kind of like our clubhouse. She was making really cool clothing. It was the only punk store



in the city at the time. Punk store meaning where people could buy clothes, *Punk Magazine*, and T-shirts and, you know, jeans and shit like that. **MRR:** No, it was a really cool store. You could get t-shirts and I remember there was a back room and either you guys would be hanging out in there or Teenage Head and it was a really special place. I mean, one thing about the Toronto scene, again, that a lot of people I don't think realize, was that we were right on the ball right in the beginning and we had that stuff at the same time as Tish and Snooky had their place on St. Marks.

Steve: Right. Manic Panic.

**MRR:** Manic Panic was their store. Trash and Vaudeville was across the street. Famous for their hair color of course. You, along with the Blake Street Boys, were sometimes known to give certain bands a hard time, for example, say, the Cardboard Brains or the Government. What do you feel was the difference with those bands and the Viletones?

Steve: Fuck, man. You know, I got to tell you, that's one thing that does still trouble me, why I got a notion in my head to be such a drooge on them. Like, why did I have to be so Clockwork Orange just because I didn't appreciate the kind of music they were producing? Why did that mean I had to react violently against it? Why couldn't I have just let it alone? Because I should have. So, when you do a bit of soul-searching so to speak, it does bother me, because I think actually what the Government were doing, and Cardboard Brains, was incredibly musical. It was actually really good. It's like Johnny and the G-Rays. I would never fuck up with Johnny McCloud, but he was really better than Tom Verlaine I felt. And Andy Paterson, what all those cats were doing...it's just that I was on such a mission, man.

**MRR:** Because the Viletones were on a different planet. You guys were living it 24/7 and

playing it pretty hard I think.

Steve: It was bad. It was just bad all the time. A lot of Jack Daniels, a lot of MC5, a lot of *Raw Power* and the Stooges.

**MRR:** ...and a lot of attention.

Steve: So it gave you this mindset. I should have been cooler with some of the other bands, you know.

**MRR:** Well, it's kind of like you're coming clean now. Not that that's what I was looking for or anything. Tell me about your first gig in New York City and what was your first impression of the scene in New York City.

Steve: The first gig in New York I went with a couple of guys from Hamilton. They drove me down and they had a real cool Mustang car.

**MRR:** Do you remember who it was?

Steve: It was friends of Teenage Head's. If we had enough time we'd talk about it. A big guy. He looked like a fucking angel.

**MRR:** Well, there were a lot of bikers in Hamilton. Funny, a lot of bikers used to like the punk groups.

Steve: Oh fuck yeah. Well that's what CBGBs was all about, right? If people really know their history, 3rd Street was...

**MRR:** ...the Angels clubhouse.

Steve: It was right fucking there, so... It's all Hell's Angels turf, so we went down. I talked Hilly into booking us.

**MRR:** You booked the gig yourself?

Steve: Yeah. I think I had Nick Stipantz with me, the first Teenage Head drummer.

**MRR:** And how did you convince him, over the phone?

Steve: No, it wasn't over the phone..

**MRR:** Oh, you guys were down there.

Steve: I drove down there. There's Hilly and there's me. Hilly is like 6'6" and I'm going, "You won't believe what I have got for you. I'm a real cool motherfucker, blah blah blah" and I keep talking and he goes "Alright. I'll give you a

shot" and he gave us a week. The first crack at CBGBs was for a week.

**MRR:** You played a week straight.

Steve: A whole week with the Diodes, Teenage Head, the Curse—you know, a bunch of Toronto bands. But I played there several times.

**MRR:** Wow. That's great. You said of the New York bands that there was a ten-year gap in age compared to our bands and that you feel that it was the English bands that changed the complexion of punk.

Steve: Yeah.

**MRR:** It seemed like the English were the guys that started getting the fancy haircuts and just getting a little bit more style and taking it a step further. I guess a lot of the New York bands, when you think about it, were Talking Heads who really weren't a punk band, but were a part of that, Mink DeVille who we respect a lot, Television—these guys were all kind of wearing plaid shirts and had bowl haircuts. You guys must have scared the hell out of them when you went down there.

Steve: Uh huh.

**MRR:** I think they pretty much only had the Dead Boys or a few bands that were out of town that were living in New York. In today's *Toronto Star* you are quoted as saying "I may be the last guy standing. Me and Dave Vanlan of the Damned. John Lydon doesn't count. Never did to me because the Sex Pistols weren't a real band." And you go on to compare them to the Monkees. It's actually a fairly accurate portrayal.

Steve: Yeah, I wish more people would get hip to that. The Pistols are not an actual band that organically formed and then a manager got wind of them and said "Okay, let's make a record." It was a project that a manager picked the guys that would be in it, you dig?

**MRR:** Yeah, yeah.

Steve: There is nothing genuine about the Pistols.





If you put Chris Thomas, the producer, after Chris Spedding and Virgin Records and all that money behind it—trust me, you could make any four guys sound cool. That's not to take away from the power of a song like "Anarchy in the UK," but the Sex Pistols are not a real rock band. If they had come from Toronto, they'd be no different than the way we view the Forgotten Rebels. No different at all. They are just the Forgotten Rebels, but they've got that huge Virgin Records/A&M money behind them. So I have a lot of contempt for the Sex Pistols, but not for Malcolm McLaren.

**MRR:** Malcolm McLaren spearheaded the whole project and turned it into a money-making machine and they were almost perhaps his puppets. I know that you met Malcolm McLaren a few years ago. What was that like?

Steve: Fucking awesome. I love Malcolm McLaren. I love his philosophy. I love his managerial skills. Everything about him. I love the Swindle. I love a guy who "I'm conning you and I am going to show you how I am conning you and if you want to keep being my friend you're going to get hurt, but you are going to have a lot of fun in the meantime." That's kind of cool.

**MRR:** I guess he wound up getting the short end of things when they finally went to court though. I guess they wound up getting a lot of money from him.

Steve: So they say.

**MRR:** Who inspired you more then, the English or the Americans?

Steve: The English bands. I think the Viletones are essentially rooted in the feel of a band like the Troggs and the Animals. Eric Burden and the Animals. Not anything to do vocally, but musically I would say the Troggs, the Animals, and there is a bit of MC5 in there, which is American. A bit of Who, but I think that's our reference points. We're not too broad. I don't feel we are anyway.

**MRR:** I remember you guys did a gig at the Horseshoe. I have pictures of it. Opening for the Troggs. Did you get to meet them after?

Steve: Yeah. Fuck yeah.

**MRR:** Yeah, that was a great show.

Steve: Yeah I know Reg Presley.

**MRR:** I think it was him and the original drummer. I think that was it. Something like that.

Steve: Yeah, it couldn't have been the whole band.

**MRR:** And another gig, a really cool gig—I wasn't there so I didn't see it, but I wish I did—was when the Viletones played with Edie the Egg Lady. When you did that gig, did the Viletones go on first or did they just do it?

Steve: It was the Viletones without me, and Edie and Chris Hate and Freddy Pompeii came up with a set during sound check that was good enough for them to do an actual performance. But it wasn't anything particularly planned out or anything. Yeah, that's how that happened.

**MRR:** I hear there is an actual recording of that floating around somewhere, which I would certainly love to hear.

Steve: Yeah, there is I think.

**MRR:** There must be one lucky guy who has all that stuff. Can you explain the character of Nazi Dog?

Steve: The character of Nazi Dog is actually a symbol of freedom. A symbol of rebellion and freedom. In the '70s it was so loose with everything, pre-AIDS, pre-MTV, that the swastika—man, look at the Kiss logo. It's got the SS. The motif of the swastika with Sid Vicious and Siouxsie and the Banshees and everything, it didn't mean anything like you were anti-semitic or a nazi. It was like you were giving the middle finger to society. You were like rubbing their nose in it and saying like "Okay, we're free, we're really liberal, this is the '70s so let's see just how far we can go," you know. If you look at an old Roger Connan biker movie, a bad biker movie with Jack Nicholson before he became a star, you'll always see the guy three people down and you'll always see a cat looking all wild and that kind of stuff who is wearing the big swastika, but it didn't mean he was anti-semitic. It was



fucking loose. It was rebellion. It was like, "Well, you want to give me liberalism, how much are you going to give me?"

**MRR:** I think things, I mean you can't do pretty much anything half to the extent that you could back then as far as political correctness goes. You get watched a lot closer now. And just for anyone out there wondering what we were all laughing about, there is a band from Auckin, Germany who contacted CIUT and they released a new album and it's called *Chase the Man* and they have named themselves the Nazi Dogs as a tribute to Steve, which apparently has ruffled a few feathers over in Germany. The cover is a take on the *Easy Rider* album cover.

Steve: That is fucking so cool, man.

**MRR:** And the two guys on the album cover, on Harleys, one guy is George Bush and the other one is Adolf Hitler. And Adolf has his Evli Knelvel suit on.

Steve: Did you see that? Holy fuck is that good.

**MRR:** You're getting a band named after you, Steve, that is pretty good stuff. Okay, during a

1977 CBC film clip you talked about being stabbed in New York City. How did that happen?

Steve: I was on the stage. I was singing, doing my routine, and a chick came up—this was in the Summer of Sam, right? There was a lot of real—it was like *Taxi Driver*. New York in those days was like one long Travis Bickle. I'm doing my fucking thing and she comes bolting out of the crowd and like a picador, what you do to a Mexican bull, and stuck me. It happened right in my fucking foot. Thankfully Mary, Gary Cormier's sister-in-law, took me to St. Vincent's Hospital in the Village.

**MRR:** Yeah, I think I got Johnny Spacely out of there once.

Steve: So that's what that was about. It was just a random crazy fucking act.

**MRR:** Was that during your weeklong stint?

Steve: No that was another show. That was another period. Another time that we were playing at CBGBs.

**MRR:** In the same interview you also said that violence was a part of your life and you pulled a screwdriver out of your sock I think and made a statement that you were surprised that you could bring a screwdriver around with you on the streets of Toronto for protection but if you carried a knife you would have got arrested. You could do a lot more damage with a screwdriver. I guess back in those days and being a punk walking around the streets, that came in handy once and a while.

Steve: Yeah. I'm sorry to say, but you know Greg, in those days, as you will remember, punk rock was a bloodsport.

**MRR:** Oh, you would constantly—I don't think younger people actually understand that—sometimes I feel like we died for their sins for these little kids walking down Queen Street with their Marilyn Manson look-a-like gear. Back then we didn't even look a tad like that but we were chased and...

Steve: Yeah. It was hardcore, man. Real hardcore.

**MRR:** It was different, but that's what made it great. It was such a small, cool scene but it was such a strong scene. One of my favorite quotes from that interview, you said "We're trying to create a generation gap because there hasn't been one in years." Do you feel you achieved that?

Steve: Yeah. I know the Viletones did. We fractured, and I mean that's all I lived for. I wanted to fracture Fludd Goddo and Mornington Drive and Rough Trade and give kids a sense that this cat is singing for me. He's lost, but he's got a voice and I'm lost but I don't have a voice, but I am going to follow that. We created a generation gap. And that was my little reward. Everyone else got all the cheese and all this stuff. I got that.

**MRR:** Who thought of the name the Viletones?

Steve: I did.

**MRR:** Did you have it before you meet those guys or was it something?

Steve: No, it was before. Yeah, I mean, I had sort of a weird concept. "We'll call it Viletones" and they were like, "Why would you have a derogatory

tory name for a band? Shouldn't it be something favorable?" I'm like, 'No, no. Let's make everything negative and bring that to the forefront and that'll be cool.' And they kind of went along with it. Yeah, Viletones, Nazi Dog, "Screaming Fist," fuck, that's a sure fire way to... How can you lose?

**MRR:** I remember after that point everybody was coming up with Johnny Vomit and Joey Shithead and I remember I introduced myself as Greg Dick to people and people go, "That's a cool name, man. What's your real name?" And I'd be saying "No, that's my real name." They wanted to see my ID and I would show it to them and they thought I changed my name or something. Making a record in the late '70s was harder and much more expensive than it is now. How did you finance the first two singles and how did you distribute them?

Steve: We had to borrow money. We had a so-called manager situation. But what is really groovy about the Viletones is—see, you think about this—is the Pistols are on Virgin/A&M. The Clash are on Epic. The Dead Boys are on Sire. The Ramones are on Sire. The Viletones really do have their own label. We put up our own money for "Screaming Fist" and you can say the Viletones in the same breath as you can say the Clash and the Sex Pistols. That's astounding. Think about that. You know what have you done with your life? And this is 30 years later that people are still talking about it. I can die any day, man, and God knows I want to, and just to have people say "There was a cat who fucking lived. He fucking lived." Because that's awesome. When you really think about it, it's almost like, anyone listening to this... Any kid band just like I was when I was eighteen, you put five grand up. Five thousand lousy dollars and you go toe to toe with the biggest fucking names in music and are

still talked about 30 years later.

**MRR:** That's excellent.

Steve: It's a motherfucker, man. Jerry Lee Lewis style.

**MRR:** But the second single, wasn't it on a different label? Did you name it something different? It had a red label.

Steve: Yeah. That second one was on Razor Records and that was with Roger Mayne who was in the Ugly Ducklings, which ain't a bad pedigree—hey man, if I am going to hang out with someone, I want to hang out with the guy who wrote "Gaslight." He has since passed away, but Roger was, well, he looked exactly like a Brian Jones. They opened for the Stones at Maple Leaf Gardens so that ain't bad company.

**MRR:** Did those records make it over to Europe? I mean, I think half of them are in Japan now.

Steve: I would look on the internet and the Viletones shit is crazy....

**MRR:** Yeah *Look Back in Anger* seems to be going for the most right now because it seems like it is totally unreleased whereas the first one has been bootlegged numerous times.

Steve: We're doing good so that when John Bora, Cleave Anderson, Kurt Shefter and myself, when we hunker down, get a battle plan, we are going to pay some attention to Europe, recording and performances outside of Toronto. We want to really give this a run. We've all committed ourselves to a certain timeframe that I will keep to myself, but we are all very committed to understanding that we've got something here and it needs to be looked at.

**MRR:** We could feel that from tonight's performance. Was there ever any major label interest in the Viletones in the '70s?

Steve: Yeah. There was and it has been documented and our friend Blair has all that docu-

mentation, but the thing was we were snagged up by Mega Media. Our biggest interest came from was Casablanca Records.

**MRR:** Wow. Nell Bogart, Donna Summer and Kiss.

Steve: That's right.

John: And Parliament, too.

**MRR:** What happened? Did they come over and party at your house or something?

John: They met them. (Laughter)

**MRR:** Are there any unreleased recordings from the '70s?

Steve: Tons.

**MRR:** And are they at your disposal?

Steve: We've got a web page set up, [www.viletones.net](http://www.viletones.net), and we're going to be putting on some of our unreleased shit and also some footage from the past and some current stuff, as well. So it'll give the kids an opportunity to hear exactly what you're talking about. But yeah, there is a lot of stuff that was unreleased that we are going to let people hear.

**MRR:** Great. I mean, considering how hard it was to film gigs back then, it's amazing how many of your gigs were actually filmed. The Colonial Underground, the Outrage concert. There is just a lot of stuff out there. The CBC stuff that most of us have been able to find and it's really fortunate that that stuff is in good bands now. At the Shock Theatre there was a scuffle on stage and it ended up with you having Freddy Pompelli in a headlock. Was this the beginning of the end for the first line-up?

Steve: Probably (laughs). Fuck. When it gets to that point...

**MRR:** Motor, Freddy, and Chris formed the Secrets with Diodes' John Hamilton and you recruited Sam Ferrara and Tony Vincent from the Ugly. How did you convince those guys to join?

Steve: That was actually magic. There was no question about it. I didn't see it coming with the first break up. I was incredibly heartbroken and cried and the whole fucking thing, but at that point we were a five piece. And it went around the table. We had a manager at the time and he was going "So are you going to join the Secrets? Are you going to join the Viletones?" And Sam went "Nah, I'm sticking with Steve." And I felt like a million bucks and then a week later when Tony called because it was hard to get away from Mike Nightmare. This is a guy who would have a fucking gun, right? Like for real. And Tony called, I remember it like it was yesterday. And me and Sam were there and the voice said "Do you guys still need a drummer?" and it was Tony and we said "Yeah." And I thought, "Fuck," because if you are going to play with anyone, I mean, they were the best. I mean, Sam and Tony were—they looked immaculate, but in Manhattan when I would go down with Sam and Tony—Tony and I would go down to Little Italy and people would move out of the way when they saw Tony. I mean, he looked that cool.

**MRR:** Was there any friction between you and Nightmare after that?

Steve: Well, he didn't kill me. He was upset that he lost his band, but I suggested "Why don't you

photo by Bill Mison



get the Viletones, then?", which was Chris Hate and Freddy. I think Chris Hate and Freddy were pussies for doing that. I really do. It was too much. It freaked everyone out. Like, the fame in those days was so big. We were fucking Debbie Harry in the back of a Cadillac behind CBGBs. That's heavy stuff.

**MRR:** I would say. Tell us about the photo on the cover of the *Look Back in Anger* single.

Steve: Taken on the corner of Queen and Sherbourne. Me behind a guy who was having his struggles.

Cleave: Who was the photographer?

Steve: The photography was Eedie Steiner. It's an amazing shot actually.

**MRR:** It's an incredible shot. Did that guy know the picture was being taken?

Steve: I doubt it.

John: Did that guy get any money for that shot?

Steve: You know, we gave him a couple of bucks. Truth be known we did. But he was a little under the weather.

**MRR:** Rest in peace. He probably doesn't know how much his record is going for now. You guys played the Last Pogo but you weren't on the bill. Why weren't you on the bill and why did you end up playing?

Steve: Didn't want to do it. Heard that Colin Brunton was giving hand jobs so the Viletones said "Sounds alright." No. We weren't on the bill because—it's kind of a stupid thing. We should have just went. It was one of those stubborn stupid Viletones fucked up things. We should have just went "Yeah, we'll play" but we were being, you know. And then we heard that we couldn't headline. Teenage Head would so we said "Goddamn, if that's the case we are going to cause a goddamn riot."

**MRR:** Which you definitely did.

Steve: And we brought the place down and that's why Teenage Head couldn't play. If people watch the movie they'll realize that. Teenage Head couldn't play because the Viletones created such pandemonium that it was impossible.

**MRR:** At the Last Pogo, you guys showed up with no equipment. Tell us about the gear you ended up using.

Steve: It was Teenage Head's gear (laughs).

**MRR:** I remember Sam had a hard time because Steve Mahon plays his bass upside down.

Steve: And the strings are all in the configuration of...

John: And the volume knobs are all on the wrong side.

Steve: All the set-ups are opposite and Sam, who was like an idiot savant, looks at the bass and kind of figures it out and then after a little while goes "Okay I get it. Everything is opposite, so..."

John: Sam is playing an upside down bass, basically. If you know the volume knobs are all on the wrong side of things and...

**MRR:** I thought he didn't even...that night he just seemed a bit confused by it. He



Photo by Ralph Alfonso



looked really cool, but...

Kurt: And who played guitar that night and what happened to that guitar player?

Steve: You know, that's a cool question.

**MRR:** Who was that guy? You can have my job now.

Steve: Do you know who that guitar player was? Dig this. Cam from Brutus. Walter Zwol and Brutus.

Cleave: I know Cam but I didn't know he was in Brutus. I remember Brutus.

Steve: Great guitar player. Like a real in the pocket. I used to have to pay him to practice and all that shit. Okay, give the cat \$20. It doesn't matter.

Kurt: \$20, must be the '70s.

Steve: Well that's a good fee even now.

**MRR:** I saw you guys play with him at the Turning Point, upstairs. He played there.

John: The Learning Point.

**MRR:** I think we have all played in that place. In 1978 the Damned made their Toronto debut at the El Mocambo and I remember when you entered the venue, security went ballistic and they quite forcefully removed you. Why were you barred from the El Mo?

Steve: I don't know.

**MRR:** You never played there I don't think.

Steve: No.

**MRR:** They would never book you.

Steve: But do you know about that Damned show? They used Tony Vincent's drum kit. Rat Scabies ended up getting a hold of me when I lived with Eva on Isabella Street. So here's Rat Scabies. He's calling "Can I borrow your..." He was just really in a panic, right, and Tony goes "I don't know, is it right? We can't even get in there and we're giving this guy our drums." And I go "Oh fuck. It doesn't matter." And we went along with it. But yeah, they really had a hard on for me.

**MRR:** Yeah, you went near that place and...

Steve: I think it was because I threatened to bomb it when the Rolling Stones played (laughter) and they never forgave me.

**MRR:** Finally we find out after all these years. What inspired the Viletones into a rockabilly direction, a look and a sound that you unveiled at the Danforth Theatre with the Gang of Four and the Buzzcocks.

Steve: Longevity. I needed to find a vehicle that would make us last a little bit longer. Punk changed so dramatically after Sid Vicious died. Sid Vicious dying was to me like, "that was the end." That's it. No more fucking around. And if you're going to continue, you better either be a new wave band like Talking Heads or Blondie, but if you're going to be a band like the Viletones and transfer yourself, you better come up with something and I thought rockabilly would be a good thing. You know, it's funny, Sam always told me that I might of well have said Motown. Why didn't we become a Motown band?

**MRR:** You guys had the songs "Don't Mess With My Ducktail," "Rockin' Rockabilly," "Little Girl Linda." In 1997 you re-released





your 1983 live album *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* in expanded form with extra tracks on the CD, but also leaving certain tracks exclusive to the vinyl. Why did you do that?

Steve: Just to give something for the collectors. To make it exclusive. To make it something personal for the fans.

**MRR:** It's the old British philosophy of putting the unreleased B-side on it. I think it's really neat. In 2005 Carmen of CJ Sleaz and the STDs had her autobiography *Poor Little Bitch Girl* published. In it she tells of you meeting Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen. How did you end up meeting them?

Steve: Well, I'll tell you. I hated fucking Nancy with a passion. I knew Nancy Spungen and she made Courtney Love look like a choir girl. I mean, Nancy was way over the top but it looked very similar I thought. So I knew them. I fucking knew them alright. But you know what's funny? When you look back at history, and—I'll tell you this Greg, and you'll know this from your factual information—when Sid would do his gigs at Max's Kansas City, there'd only be fifteen people in the crowd. Like, towards the end...

**MRR:** They were all at Dancetria watching Liquid Liquid or something because a lot of that stuff was over.

Steve: Hello. Sid wasn't a real calling card, but now, because he's dead and all this time has gone by, people put a different thing on him, but in real time Sid Vicious was nothing. It wasn't a big deal. At all.

**MRR:** Yeah. Everybody loves you when you're dead. There seems to be renewed interest in the Toronto '77 punk scene with Collin Brunton producing an expanded DVD release of *The Last Pogo* and Rodney Bowes compiling a photo-documentary and Blair Martin's film project. What do you attribute this renewed interest to? It seems to be just exploding right now.

Steve: Yeah, there is a real good momentum with the Toronto punk scene and I think it is one of the most unexploited scenes and has the potential for

being the most exciting. What Colin's doing? What Blair's doing? And the other cat?

John: I think it's self-explanatory. It's never really been thoroughly documented.

**MRR:** Yeah, it's always kind of upset me to see. Not to take anything away from the San Francisco scenes and the Washington scenes, whatever, but Toronto was so vital and so on the money and right there when it happened before so many other places and nothing has really gone down about it. Thank god for guys like Collin Brunton with the film stuff and Rodney Bowes and Blair who is working on this stuff. I hope this stuff sees the light of day. Rodney Bowes photos are beyond belief.

Steve: It will. And what Colin's doing with revisiting the Last Pogo and what the Toronto bands were doing back in '77 and '78 and then taking it till now. What Blair Martin is doing is sensational—fucking incredible. And Rodney Bowes photos. I'll tell you, there is a show at the moment at Art Metropole.

**MRR:** Yeah, Will Munro has put that together. Sorry I forgot to mention that, but that's just an incredible show. That's documenting all the archival things for the *File Magazine*, which is just incredible. What's your current take on pop culture and where do the Viletones fit in?

Steve: I'll tell you what I think. What went down in the *Toronto Star* today is that it's been ruled by eunuchs. There are a bunch of eunuchs in the harem. Here's all the gorgeous girls. Here's all the sex you want. Here's all the everything, but they're eunuchs. They don't know how to fucking do it, so this Billy Talent or whatever the fuck his name is and they all have the same posture and Alexisonfire and Sum 41—they are a bit slicker but that's because they've got money behind them. It ain't about fucking talent, it's about fucking money. And us cats have really seriously been around the block. Us four. When I say money I'm talking about \$500,000 to make this video look good. Like they're not fucking around. This is the sweepstakes, right. But they are impotent. They don't have the fucking heart and whenever I am sitting across from Kurt I feel like I'm sitting across from someone in the MCS or the Stooges.

Kurt: You are sitting across from me, so go for it. You're doing great. I am fucking fascinated.

**MRR:** In a '90s television ad for your boutique gallery Fleur de Monde you said the Viletones conducted yourselves more like a gang than a band and then described robbing a gas station outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan. When did this happen?

Steve: We did that actually several times.

**MRR:** I hope you guys

know what you're in for when you go on tour. Steve: We didn't rob them like at gunpoint. We just...

Kurt: It's okay, we're going to Japan, right?

Steve: But yeah, the Viletones did that several times. We would just load it up with gas and the guy would come—and it was typically a kid in the middle of Michigan—and say, "That's \$20, sir."

**MRR:** It's an amazing commercial. It's too bad it never showed on TV. I'm not sure if it did. I have my own copy of it. There has been talk of a book for quite some time tentatively titled *A Taste of Honey*. When can we expect to see the completion of your book?

Steve: Six months before I die and I'm getting kind of close.

Kurt: So six months from now, then.

**MRR:** So the current version of the Viletones, you've got Cleave Anderson from the Way Outs and the Battered Wives...

Steve: And Blue Rodeo.

**MRR:** We've got Kurt Scheffer from the Raving Mojos and should we mention the big star he played with?

Steve: Let's just say Kurt Scheffer is...

John: ...trying to live that down.

**MRR:** And John Bora was in an amazing band from the very early '80s called A Neon Rome. I was talking to John about a month ago and they just blew me away when they had a good night. And of course Steve Leckle. Will there be any future recordings and touring for the Viletones?

Steve: Yeah, definitely. I think that's job number one after we get this gig behind us. We want to record.

John: Yeah, record some songs, play some more shows. We are having a lot of fun doing this.

**MRR:** Great. Well, I know there is interest all over. There is definitely interest out there and in you guys from other countries.

Steve: And John Bora was also in Change of Heart and is generally regarded as the premier bass player in Toronto. I would say the country.

**MRR:** These guys can really play. It's just a natural vibe they've got going down. Anything you guys want to say before we sign off?

Kurt: God bless the Viletones.

John: Let's keep this music alive.

