

The Joneses

The Joneses formed as the Southern California Punk movement found new life at the beaches: Venice, Hermosa & Long Beach. After 1978-79, this 2nd generation of Los Angelean punk-rockers filled the breach caused by the demise or major label contract-signing of Hollywood punk role models The Weirdos, X and The Germs. Drawing from influences as diverse as Hank Williams and The Hollywood Brats, the Joneses arrival on the scene heralded much that was to follow in coming years. They were years ahead of their time in appearance and sound: both were the aftermath of a high-speed, head-on collision between an Exile-era Stones and The New York Dolls - with The Ramones riding shotgun and The Clash being pulled behind in a trailer. This, while surfers at the beaches finally cut their hair, only to chase and curse The Joneses and their ilk, yelling: "punk rock faggots!" and suchlike.

The Joneses first seven-inch, 45 rpm single was "Criminals in My Car" b/w "Jonestown." Less than 1,000 copies were pressed. They next released a pair of songs, "Graveyard Rock" and "Pillbox," on the seminal 1982 SoCal Punk, 1st BYO Records compilation, "Someone Got Their Head Kicked In." "Pillbox" has been critically acclaimed as one of founder and sole permanent member, Jeff Drake's, finest moments. "Pillbox" presaged many of the best of Drake's songs that were to follow. At it's finest, Drake's songwriting combined wicked hooks and melody with a world-weary, intelligent humor. His dirty Les Paul Jr. guitar, whining vocals and lean-though-potent instrumentation, started early references to the Joneses as "The Heartbreakers, West."

The EP "Criminals" was the Joneses next released recording.

Another essential L.A. punk rock compilation, "Hell Comes to Your House, Volume 2," included the three Joneses tracks: "I'm Bad," "She's So Filthy," "Black Cat Bone."

The Joneses were voted "Best Live Band" in the 1985 L.A. Weekly Readers' Poll. Arguably the best-loved incarnation of the Joneses, the 1985-86 line-up included, in addition to Drake, three ex- or future-ex members of The Mau-Mau's: Scott Franklin (the Cramps), Paul Black (L.A.Guns) and Johnnie Sage (Christian Death).

A full-length LP, "Keeping Up With The Joneses" was ultimately released. Unfortunately, as most critics noted, the version of the band that Drake assembled for the record was second-rate compared with previous incarnations. Furthermore, any mere recording of the Joneses material could never capture the tumultuous on-the-edge live performances of the Joneses at their peak. Their reputation was made and maintained on the barely controlled chaos of these shows. Bulky Steve Olson, rock-steady on bass; the whirling and twirling John James; Johnnie Sage careening around on -- sometimes falling off of -- the stage, never missing one of his G-string bending notes; and always, in the eye of this storm, Reverend Jeff Drake himself, regaling hundreds in his audience with wry humor and a dead-serious slide guitar.

In any case, the Joneses moment to break big had passed. Bands like Guns 'n Roses and L.A. Guns tried to use the Joneses singular look and sound as a template. To it they added guitar-hero pyrotechnics, self-serious lyrics and vocals, and a general excess of self-indulgence. What band from that time -- so close on the heels of the explosive Clash and Sex Pistols -- what band could cover Paul McCartney and Wings and still respect itself in the morning? To these bands, it was as if punk never happened. Their hair-metal music, it must be noted, while ridiculously profitable, was reminiscent of nothing if not mid-1970's Progressive rock. Prog-rock and it's attendant excesses caused punk to happen. The innovative collision of punk and blues that Drake and his Joneses perfected could not be duplicated by many would-be imitators.

It is commonly said that The Joneses were too far ahead of their time. Because of it, they were overlooked by the staid, conservative Corporation for Rock and Roll Recording and Profit-Making, Inc.

"Criminal History," released by "Sympathy for the Record Industry" 2/29/2000, is a 20 track retrospective of the Joneses recorded material.

As of this writing, Jeff Drake is a professor in northern California, Scott "Chopper" Franklin recently retired from the Cramps, Paul Black is a father in Hollywood and plays shows with "Paul Black's L.A. Guns" around the world and Johnnie Sage graduated from nursing school as an R.N. in 2007.