

Music 262: Rock Music, History and Social Analysis, New Wave

[Music Playing on Piano]

[Brian Ward]: Okay so coming out of the punk rock styles we have this new style of music that comes along in rock n' roll called new wave. Actually, it's really not anything different than punk rock. What they did was the media magazines and so forth introduced this term to give punk rock a new name that had less negative connotation. Along with this new wave kind of style that comes along is this sort of do-it-yourself indie sort of way of doing business for these bands. What they would do is the fans would create their own fanzines (magazines made by the fans) and produce short numbers of these magazines. The fans would promote the bands. They would put posters up. They would go to the radio stations and bring the records and convince the DJs to play the music of these bands. There was a real grassroots effort. We see that today. It still carries on today. It got started with this new wave movement.

Another thing about new wave though is that it ushered in this different gentler side of punk rock where you have more catchy melodies, start to use synthesizers. Now when we think of new wave we think of bands like Devo and Duran Duran where there are a lot of synthesizers. It really didn't start out that way.

One of the first bands, we see them involved in the C.B.G.B. scene in New York City is The Talking Heads. Now Talking Heads were produced by this guy named Brian Eno. Brian Eno was an electronic music expert. He was really into minimalism, which is a repetitive style of music. He was into using tape loops, synthesizers, sequencing, and he was really a fifth member of this band, the talking heads when they started making records. You also have the band being dominated by this lead singer named David Byrne. He had this high, squeaky, thin voice and the result of their music is this robot-like repetitive, emotionless kind of chant music. Also, they are really influenced by black styles of music as well: reggae, soul, rhythm and blues, and funk. In fact they had a top 10 hit, Burning Down the House that came out in 1983. It's a very soulful kind of dance number. The rhythm section of this band, Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz, the bassist and the drummer, they were actually married. They went on to create a group called The Tom Tom Club. They produced this giant dance hit in the 80s called Genius of Love.

Another new wave band that comes along (these guys are from Britain actually) is The Police. These guys are a trio of guitar, bass, and drums, the bassist being Sting who is also the lead singer. Sting really was the catalyst for this band even though the other musicians were very good as well. Really sting went on to have his own solo career. The one thing about The Police is they took this punk aesthetic and they added reggae, a little bit of soft rock, some jazz, and all these different elements that come into play. Kind of taking off in the way The Clash did, bringing all these elements into punk rock music. They are influenced by reggae, punk, and they have these catchy melodies and these great hooks. Their record Zenyatta Mondatta was a major success. That was followed up by the huge success in their record Synchronicity. What you find

with The Police though is as you go along; you find these more introspective, intellectual lyrics in their music and kind of a new age philosophy. They really succeeded in the U.S. on the radio because of these catchy melodies and these catchy hooks in their music.

There are a number of new wave bands that come along and I've mentioned a couple of them already. I'm going to mention a couple more and that's Devo. Devo comes from Akron, Ohio. They're really well known for their kitschy sci-fi look that they have going on. They create this really emotionless robot-like synthesizer heavy music that's really dance oriented. That's what a lot of people think of new wave today when they think of bands like Devo. Devo actually means the devolution. They are kind of devolving in their music and that's sort of their aesthetic.

Also another great new wave band is The B-52's and they're still around. The B-52's were also really well known for their kind of ironic singer. His voice is very flat and ironic sounding. They've got these beehive hairdos. They also make this catchy melodic dance music. That sort of seems to be the direction that new wave takes as it goes on into the 1980s.