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# The PANDORAS

From a backyard garage...to the Sunset Strip

The Pandoras sound comes on like some Phil Spector renegade girl-group chorus deciding to give it a go after discovering speed, and some cheery Vox instruments in a backyard garage.

The Staudells just happen to be "the boys next door," and they take the Pandoras out for a wild night on the Sunset Strip where they're discovered by big time record producer Jerry Mogul, who likes their looks and gives them a big record deal.

That night the Staudells teach them "Dirty Water," and "Good Guys Don't Wear White" in preparation for the Pandoras' national television debut that Friday night on "Hullabaloo." With the first lip-synched words of their new smash hit "We're the New Generation," the studio audience starts gyrating in their mini-skirts and bellbottoms while doing the Monkey, the Swim and the Pony. It's "Pandora-monium" as "New Generation" goes to the top of the charts one week later.

The Los Angeles-based Pandoras' lineup: Paula Pierce, writer, guitarist and lead singer; Melanie Vammen, keyboardist and backup vocals; Kim Shattuck, bass player; Karen Blankfield, drummer.

The real story (as told by Melanie): "I got in the band cause Paula liked the way I looked. I didn't even know how to play! A year before I joined the band I'd see Paula in clubs and she was having problems with the original band. She'd come up and go 'don't you play an instrument?' and I'm all 'no, I don't 'cause I'm all scared and I'm going 'I can't do this. I can't see myself being in a band and then finally I saw her at the Music Machine in Santa Monica and I said 'Yeah, I can play chords on a keyboard. And she says 'Yeah! Yeah!'"

The Pandoras' "Let's Do Right" ("That's our happy song," Melanie says) boiled down to the essentials: "Ahhhh right... oohh good. Wahh! Let's do right, it's alright, alright... oohh... good let's do right baby oh it's alright, aahhh do right, do good, do right, do good... oohh all righttt, ooh good."

Inspirational. 16 Magazine sorta stuff, huh? Yes, you too can be a 19-year-old hangabout who likes the campiest of thrift store threads and the grooviest of mid-1960s garage punk anthems and from that — You Can Become A Star!

Our real story begins in 1983 with one Paula Pierce, an LA connoisseur of the crude, rude snarl of the circa-1966 punk explosion that sprang up in every other garage and basement in teenage Mid-America. Only two years after forming the original Pandoras (who self-destructed in a bonfire of fishnet stocking dissension), Pierce was able to form a new and improved Pandoras. The

new group signed with Rhino Records, a record label that specializes in novelty records and '60s re-issues. The Pandoras' big break came when a major label, Capitol, agreed to handle U.S. distribution for their new record, "Stop Pretending."

Another true story by Melanie: "I was driving down Sunset Boulevard and I go 'whoah!' There's this giant painting billboard of the band up on the Tower next to Arcadia (Records) and I didn't even know it was there! And then I go in record stores and there's our posters and stuff. Rhino's putting up so much money and so much promotion for us. It's like... great!"

Promotion or not, it's obvious that Pierce has done her research. Often, the songs are exercises in mixing and matching your '60s favorites. One song starts with the "I'm Not Your Stepping Stone" riff, then lifts the "You Really Got Me" melody line and then, omigod, it's back into "Stone" for the chorus. Sometimes, the song reference is on the tip of one's tongue but you can't place it: "I thought for sure that was the rhythm from 'Time Won't Let Me' but then they went into that other bit..."

Pierce's vocals snarl authentically, adding a guttural "wah!" scream at appropriate junctures. The guitar and organ bludgeon out chunks of three-chord variations. The effect is a bit hollow sometimes, but for those who treasure this kind of sound this is a necessary document of updated garage music. The Pandoras might perform a narrow genre of music but it's a genre that rocks.

Pierce's lyrics are a takeoff on the typical gender-to-gender complaining of most '60s garage-punk lyrics. But here it's transposed — finally we're able to hear the woman putting the man in his place after all these years.

Melanie fills us in about one song, "The Way It's Gonna Be": "That's funny because I was just talking to Paula about her lyrics. That song was written about someone she was going out with and she said 'I can go out with whoever I want and you can't and that's the way it's gonna be.'"

Other than this engaging, modern twist, don't expect anything remotely avant garde about the Pandoras. But then again, who wants to be arty on a Saturday night? Sometimes it's fun just to groove on a group that has mastered a form, limited though it might be.

"I'm not Liberace or anything; I'm not a really fantastic player," Melanie says, "but I've come a long way from two years ago."

The Pandoras will perform Saturday night at Max's Tavern, 550 E. 13th Ave., following the Surf Trio, which opens the evening at 9:00. Admission is \$2.

The GO GOs may be long gone but the LA-based Pandoras are prancing ahead with their garage-punk sound which they will be performing tomorrow night at Max's. Pictured below from left are: Kim Shattuck (bass,) Paula Pierce (guitar,) Karen Blankfield (drums,) Melanie Vammen (organ.)



Story by Paul Sturtz

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