



HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

The following article about The Cramps mentions classic Cleveland horror host "Ghoulardi" and then NY's current favorite hipsters, "Ghoul A Go Go" in the Summer of 2003.



GRAVEYARD SMASH

The Cramps creep into town with fiendish tunes and attitude

Article By JOHN CHANDLER

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Most normal, God-fearing folks take one look at the Cramps and head for the nearest exit, muttering hasty excuses about picking up the kids from 4-H.

The band's ghoulish makeup, tattoos and leather duds are more than just rock 'n' roll accouterments: They are talismans meant to ward off normal, God-fearing folks. The Cramps mean business, bub.

Born in 1976 -- in Sacramento, Calif.; Akron, Ohio; or New York City, depending on what biography you're reading -- the Cramps were conceived by skeletal singer Lux Interior -- now somewhere in his middle 50s -- and his fishnet-sporting, guitar-slinging soul mate, "Poison" Ivy Rohrschach. Since their humble beginnings, the Cramps have hatched several cracked classic albums such as "Songs the Lord Taught Us" and "Gravest Hits." They became huge, iconic figures in Europe and played outrageous shows at such legendary New York dives as CBGB's, the Peppermint Lounge and Max's Kansas City.

One of their most memorable early shows -- captured on videotape in 1979 -- took place at a rather different venue.

"Yeah, it was the Napa State Mental Hospital," Lux recalls. "It was really fun playing there. We were kind of wondering if the patients would all be, like, comatose or crying. But it was great; it was like playing for a bunch of little kids.

"Fifteen patients escaped while we were playing," he says. "They went under a fence. We asked, 'Oh, my God, is this a serious problem?' They said, 'Oh, no. We're too far away from anything. They'll get hungry and come back.'"

A pack of escaped lunatics sounds like perfect fodder for a Cramps' song. Early on, it was Lux and Ivy's mutual love of old horror films that guided their songwriting, with tunes such as "Voodoo Idol," "Goo Goo Muck" and "Human Fly" being par for the course.

Lux developed a stage persona that's been likened to a zombie Elvis, while Ivy turned up the fuzz and reeled off the choicest licks copped from her hero, Link Wray. Harry Drumdini keeps time on the toms, driving a reverb-soaked, rockabilly stew that sounds like ghosts from Sun Studio having a wingding under the full moon.

Gradually, the Cramps began adding more naughty sex references (e.g., "Creature From the Black Leather Lagoon" or "Cornfed Dames") into their songs when rock 'n' roll took a shift in the '80s.

"We started seeing all these Goth bands wearing the makeup and singing scary songs," Lux says. "They were taking what we were doing and making it into some kind of gimmick, so we decided to move on."

The Cramps' latest record is "Fiends of Dope Island" (Vengeance Records), and songs such as "Color Me Black" and "Mojo Man From Mars" add more fuel to the band's crazed cult status and provide incendiary numbers for their live shows.

Lux is passionate about the band's lifestyle, insisting that nothing it does is "shtick." New band members have to share the same affinity for movies, music and clothes as he and Ivy. "We're more like a gang than a band," Lux says.

The truth is that the Cramps represent a more culturally vibrant America, a time of drive-ins, "Big Daddy" Roth, great rock music on the radio and late-night monster movie shows such as the one hosted by **Cleveland personality Ghoulardi**.

"Somewhere along the way too much seriousness crept into the picture," Lux says sadly. "All the things that were authentic and real examples of our folk art got phased out. Today the major motion picture companies and record companies turn out a simple product. And people just buy it, like they have no choice. It's like 'Night of the Living Dead' out there. Even the bands that are called punk nowadays are just playing pop music. They don't stand for anything.

"I keep hoping something will come along and start a revolution," he says. "I think great rock 'n' roll only happens for about a year and a half, and man, we're way overdue for that year and a half!"

When asked if there's anything happening out there on the cultural tundra that rekindles his hope for a better tomorrow, Lux perks up.

"There's this great cable access show in New York called '**Ghoul a Go-Go**,' " he responds. "It's this dance show where, like, 10- and 12-year-old kids go-go dance to scary monster music. And the show is hosted by a hunchback and a vampire!"