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the invasion of **JOSIE COTTON**

BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

The history:

Texas-born Josie Cotton first arrived on the radio airwaves and music charts in 1980 with the acclaimed record, "Johnny, Are You Queer?" After signing a deal with Elektra Records, the company released her full-length LP, *Convertible Music*.

Cotton followed up her major label debut with *From the Hip*, in 1982, her second effort for Elektra. On the heels of that record came her appearance in the 1983 film, *Valley Girl*.

Cotton then took an active part in the independent label

B-Girl Records, which released items by Goldenboy and Alaska! Alongside legendary L.A. punk producer Geza X, Cotton's studio recorded a plethora of popular hits, including Meredith Brooks' double platinum smash, "Bitch," and Elliot Smith's final outing, "Basement on a Hill."

By 2006, Josie was providing the vocals for "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker" on *Brats on the Beat*, a Ramones tribute album. Later that year, Cotton released the wonderful album, *Movie Disaster Music*. The online publication, *Ink 19*, enthused, "This disc of dreamy, jazzy songs shows there's some clever lyrical constructs left in Josie Cotton." "Johnny, **continued** »

Ⓜ **continued** Are You Queer?" was also used in the soundtrack of the film *Jackass: Number Two*.

Cotton followed with 2007's *Invasion of the B-Girls*, a marvelous album of enticing and overlooked B Movie songs produced by Cotton, Geza X and Bill Rhea. Cotton established a deep bond with those neglected celluloid gems and the music birthed from these influential, maverick-crafted films.

Cult filmmaker John Waters (*Pink Flamingos*, *Hairspray*, *Serial Mom*) penned the liner notes for the *Invasion of the B-Girls* package, stating, "Josie Cotton may be singing B-list songs from C-List movies, but she'll always be an A-List singer in my book."

The same year that "B-Girls" was issued, Cotton's opus "Johnny, Are You Queer?" found itself alongside selections by Dean Martin and Ray Charles, on the tribute CD, *A Date with John Waters*.

In 2008, Cotton took part in another tribute disc; this time, the Neil Young-inspired *Cinnamon Girl*. Josie contributed her version of Young's "Cowgirl in the Sand," to the project, which included recordings by Tanya Donnelly, Jill Sobule

and Kristin Hersh.

By the summer 2009, Cotton's *Invasion of the B-Girls* had gained wider distribution through a deal with Burnside Distribution Corp. Burnside added retail outlets to a distribution mix which already included the online outlets josiecotton.com, amazon.com and the iTunes Music Store. It also allowed DJ's and music reviewers, along with Cotton's followers, to discover her cinematically informed, sonic expedition – one which has continued to increase its audience among rabid record collectors, B-movie lovers and her active fan base.

A writer and reviewer herself, Josie Cotton has contributed to *Magnet* magazine in 2009, and writes a monthly column in *Punk Globe* that began in August 2009.

Ms. Cotton is currently in the studio finishing her next album, tentatively entitled *Pussy Cat Babylon* which is scheduled for release in early 2010.

In addition to her assorted musical activities, recording studio and Scruffy Records label based in Malibu, CA, Josie Cotton is an avid animal rights activist.

Visit www.josiecotton.com

The interview:

Q: In 2006 you released *Movie Disaster Music*. Have you always felt the impact of cinema that informs songs to be written or sung?

A: As far as the impact of cinema on what I do, I guess I am influenced by everything, movies included. *Movie Disaster Music* in particular is pretty filmic in its imagery and emotional landscape. 'Beautiful But Deadly' came very close to being the theme song in a James Bond movie but at the last minute they got Chris Cornell. It's not a fluffy pop record at all. It's more like a noir spy movie soundtrack, except for a couple of songs.

Q: In 2009, your *Invasion Of The B-Girls*, received wider distribution. Tell me about the moment the concept of this album became a reality.



A: Yes, there was a eureka moment when I was watching a movie I had seen so many times, Ghidorah, The Three Headed Monster. The idea hit me to do a record of all theme songs from B movies. But only from the '60s and '70s when B movies were so amazing. B movies suck now.

Q: You, Bill Rhea and Geza X produced this album. How was this collection put together? And, you decided to sing songs and do vocals of obscure tunes that were in movies like "She Devils On Wheels" and the number, "Green Slime" by the film of the same name. What drew you to this sort of repertoire?

A: I had done a pretty avant-garde record with Bill Rhea called *Frightened By Nightingales*. He had produced several records for the Del Rubio Triplets who he discovered back when they were doing gigs in nursing homes. I knew he had a really sick sense of humor much like my own and when I told him my idea he totally got it. I didn't know at the time no one had ever done this before and it would be a huge undertaking to get all the rights for the songs.

Q: Many years ago you basically lived at Mondo Video shop in Los Angeles for a while renting movies done by Russ Meyer, Herschell Gordon Lewis, and the guy behind Three Headed Monster. On "B-Girls" you acknowledge Ted V. Mikels' *Black Klansman* and did a rendition of "Black Klansman," the title song on your "B-Girls" endeavor.

A: I went on a year-long B-movie-watching

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Josie Cotton (center) with her band, backstage at Hollywood's Key Club at their 2007 record release party.

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safari that I lost boyfriends over. The seasons came and went, and I could not exhaust my hunger to watch every cheesy B-movie of the '60s and '70s I could get my greasy hands on. I had to find the perfect theme songs. I often watched several a day. I was never bored, and ended up having the largest and latest late fee bill Mondo Video ever had in years and years of being in business (twenty years, I think)! I kept the movies so long they stopped sending me bills. A year after I finished the record, the owner hugged me in this massive bear hug. It was all very sweet and funny.

"Mondo Video was my university and I rented every B-movie I could locate there looking for theme songs. I was far from versed in B movie culture so I had to educate myself and that was almost as much fun as recording the record. I accidentally discovered *Black Klansman* there and prayed there was a theme song I could use on it. But the best part was when it came time to get the publishing rights in order, no one would admit to having written it. I loved that.

"I also just always adored sci-fi movies. It was the ultimate escape for a kid who didn't care for reality much. I still read every sci-fi book I can find, no matter how trashy. *Godzilla* and *Mothra* were in my pantheon of heroes as a kid. All was right with the world if any movie of theirs was playing. It's still true. I'm sure there's something wrong with me!

Q: Can you briefly describe how the songs were picked and why you selected them?

A: My criterion was, it had to be a quote *great* song from a quote *bad* movie. To be serious for one second, to me *Faster Pussycat Kill Kill* is not a B movie as much as high art. It's visually stunning; the plot line pushes all the boundaries and all the buttons. John Waters says it's the



Josie Cotton (right) and Joan Jett performed together in 2007 at the Los Angeles GLBT Pride celebration.

greatest movie ever made. The theme song is just spectacular. The chord changes alone are so musically complex and believe me it was a challenge singing it.

"As far as singing goes, I've always felt like an actress when I sing and when I sing other people's songs I feel much more free to let that part of me out. I guess feel somewhat weighed down by my own writing. I don't know why. On some songs, like 'Beyond the Valley of the Dolls' I engineered and composed my own vocals. Which was incredibly liberating. Singers are always deferring their performances to others, and nuances get overlooked that only the singer herself can appreciate.

Q: Discuss some of the musicians on the album?

A: Devo drummer Dave Kendrick played all the drums in his swingin' Sammy Davis style. [The late] Tom [Corey] of the Fibonaccis played guitar on 'Run Pussycat' and others



Cotton's first album, *Convertible Music*, featured the song "Johnny Are You Queer," which she performed in the 1983 film, *Valley Girl*.

as well. The legendary Fowler Brothers who played with Frank Zappa and Tower of Power did all the horns. My philosophy was to never have horns on a record ever until this record then I had to have them. And these guys are as good as you get. The Fowler Brothers were the ultimate pros. David Ralick put the horn section together for 'Who Killed Teddy Bear?' There are, in fact, no synthesizers on this record. Real everything. Recorded on a two-inch analog Stevens machine.

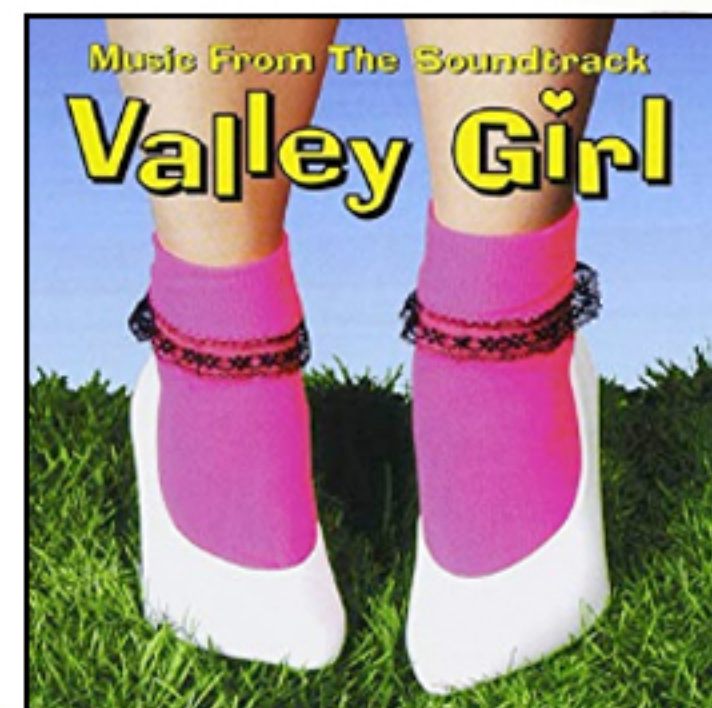
"People didn't really get 'Invasion Of The B Girls' record at first. It wasn't until (DJ) Rodney Bingenheimer began playing it on KROQ this past summer that people started taking notice and then it was everywhere I went. I would go to parties and everyone was dancing to it. I'd go into clubs and DJ's were playing it.

"Obviously, *Invasion Of The B-Girls* is influenced by movies and my upcoming new record, *Pussycat Babylon* has a lot of references to Kung Fu movies and sci-fi references. It wasn't deliberate. It's just the lens that I view the world through.

Q: In your live show you cover The Ramones' "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker." You first did it on a Ramones' tribute album.

A: Well, Precious from L7 was producing this Ramones record for kids called *Brats On The Beat* on Go Kart Records ...all the proceeds going to St Jude's Children Hospital research. She asked me to be on it and then wanted to know what Ramones

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song I'd like to sing which is probably every rock singer's dream question. 'Sheena' didn't immediately pop into my head at all but I listened to all their songs and then it was so obvious. It was almost too good to be true.

"All these legendary punk bands are on this record The Adolescents, The Dwarves, Queens Of The Stone Age, L7 and TSOL. The Donnas do a song on it too. The only problem was the tracks she had me sing on were in Joey Ramone's key and I only got to sing it a couple of times through. I still cringe a little when I hear it but it was for a great cause.

Q: You've also contributed a rendition of Neil Young's "Cowgirl in the Sand" on an audio tribute to him.

A: This was another great cause for breast cancer this time on American-Laundromat Records. I was, and am, a huge Neil Young fan so I couldn't pass this up. The owner of the label, Joe Spadaro asked me to be on it as his mother had died from the disease and he did this for her. It's called Cinnamon Girl... Women Artists Cover Neil Young.'

"The thing that always intrigued me about his writing was that I don't always fully understand what his lyrics mean. Like in 'Cowgirl in the Sand.' Is he in love with an underage hooker who spurned him and he's mad about it or does he want to help her? Is it an indictment of the female sex in general or is it just a beautiful and sad love song to a girl lost in the face of his yearning. Something is going on under the surface and it builds all this tension. I never could figure it out but when I sang it there was an avalanche of emotion you could tap into but emotion for what I still don't understand. It is mystifying how that is possible.

Q: You are working with producer Paul Roessler on a new album, Pussycat Babylon that is almost



Josie Cotton.

finished and slated for early 2010 release.

A: Paul is my partner in Scruffy Records and we have a Valentine's Day release date slated. We have been at it for about six months now and it's been a great collaboration. He is also in my band and of course is way overqualified to have that job! Paul has turned into the most amazing programmer, producer and arranger. To Geza X's credit he saw something in Paul from the very beginning and spent years grooming him for this. He wanted to pass on his knowledge to someone worthy and Paul rose to the occasion. He lives for music.

Q: Comment on the direction of this album. I know it quite differs from B-Girls. Can you offer some insights about the change of direction and the concept of this album?

A: The record is called Pussycat Babylon and I think it's the one my fans have been waiting for a long time. It's not that dissimilar to Invasion Of The B-Girls as it's very high energy and dance, post punk, power pop but edgy kind of like a kitten with a switch blade knife; cute but dangerous.

Q: I wanted to ask you about "Johnny, Are You Queer?" It is not a novelty record. It has made

impressions worldwide.

A: At first glance it might have seemed like a novelty record, but if it were just that it wouldn't have been banned in Amsterdam. If anything it shows the power of language.

The Jack Ass Number Two director had been looking for me cause they really wanted that song to be in the movie. It was the scene where these giant anacondas were hidden in a swimming pool covered with balloons. They jump up and bite Johnny Knoxville so hard and they won't let go. I think he cries in it. After the movie came out my fan base was all 15-year-old boys, friend requesting me on MySpace.

"Geza X and I were invited to go to the Jack Ass Number Two movie premiere in Hollywood at Mann's Chinese Theatre. We were running really late so Geza dropped me off on the street to go park and I had the surreal experience of standing alone under all these neon lights on Hollywood Blvd. hearing my song blasting to the world while I watched from a distance. People were cheering. It was a moment.

Q: Tell me about your touring band?

A: Marcus Watkins has been my guitar player for years. He has several bands, one an

experimental instrumental band called Double Naught Spy Car. Guitarist Geza X. with all his production credits, like Red Cross, The Germs, and the Dead Kennedy's. Paul Roessler has played keyboard with everyone from The Screamers, Nina Hagen, Mike Watt and The Deadbeats, in addition to his massive body of original material. My drummer Princess Frank has an avant-garde marching band called Killsonic with 24 other musicians. Eric Holden tours all the time playing bass with various bands and is a very serious player. He might be the only one among us who is leg

MAGNET

Real Music Alternatives

JOSIE COTTON'S B-MOVIE GUIDE: "SHE DEVILS ON WHEELS"

Josie Cotton may have stolen the prom scene in a cult-classic film (1983's Valley Girl, singing new-wave hit "Johnny, Are You Queer?"), but she never committed such cinematic high-camp crimes as found in vintage b-movies. Each day this week, Cotton surveys one of her favorite films and offers a song from her latest album, Invasion Of The B-Girls. Read our Q&A with Cotton and her memoir about "Johnny, Are You Queer?"



Q: What are some of your all time favorite albums and singles?

A: This is hard. I'm just gonna throw some things out there. For records: 'The Velvet Underground and Nico' stands apart. 'Frank's Wild Years' from Tom Waits" is one of my favorite records of all time. 'OK Computer' by Radio Head. 'Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots' by Flaming Lips, Beach Boys' 'Pet Sounds,' and The Rolling Stones' 'Aftermath.'

"Singles would be MGMT's 'Time To Pretend,' Beck's 'I'm A Loser, Baby,' 'Gay Bar' by Electric Six, Iggy Pop 'Now I Want To Be Your Dog.' I love MIA's big song 'Paper Planes' and old stuff... like by Bobby Byrd's B side 'My Concerto,' 'Kung Fu Fighting' by Carl Douglas." And oh yeah, 'I Believe In Miracles' by Hot Chocolate. Stuff like that. I'm sure I'm leaving out something really important. I was always a big 'British Invasion' gal. **R&B**