

PLAYLIST

12 Forgotten Classics by Women-Led New Wave Bands

Listen to lesser-known songs by Nervus Rex, Josie Cotton, the Waitresses and more that arrived in the early 1980s.



The Passions, Suzanne Fellini, the Cosmopolitans and Holly and the Italians put out standout new wave music in the 1980s.

By Doug Brod

July 22, 2020



Punk began as a reaction to both the blandness and bombast of rock’s ruling class. And the shrapnel from its mid-70s explosion struck more than just a nerve, triggering a flare-up of creativity colored by a spectrum of textures, styles and ideas. [The Ramones and the Sex Pistols may have led the way](#), but it took bands like the Police, the Cars and Talking Heads to usher elements of punk aesthetics into the mainstream. While these new wave bands couldn’t help but sand down most of the rough edges, some of the spikiness and spirit of ’76 remained.

For a generation of women whose voices had gone largely unheard, punk’s anyone-can-do-it ethos became the ultimate encouragement. The result: funky, pre-[riot grrrl](#) post punks, thrillingly artsy U.K.-based eccentrics and lace-gloved, candy-colored hit makers commingled in a sonic landscape that thrived on audaciousness.

But for every Kate Bush, Blondie, Bow Wow Wow or Go-Go, there were lesser-known female artists who exuded both sharp, shoulder-padded glamour and beehived, boho cool, often mixed with quick wit and sass. The 12 songs below — obscure singles, deep cuts and near misses — reveal a hidden history of distaff pop.

Josie Cotton, ‘Jimmy Loves Maryann’ (1984)



The Angeleno-by-way-of-Dallas Josie Cotton made a bit of noise in 1982 with the cheerfully provocative [“Johnny Are You Queer?”](#) Two years later, she issued this inventive update of an 11-year-old jazz-rock hit by Looking Glass, replacing the original’s plush, velvety vibe with a memorably haunting icy synth riff. As Cotton details a hardscrabble romance in a strong, if occasionally chirpy voice, the track is enlivened by guitar twang courtesy of Fleetwood Mac’s Lindsey Buckingham and ostentatiously busy additional percussion.