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Foreword Review MUSIC

Punk Avenue: Inside the New York City Underground, 1972-1982

Phil Marcade
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Marcade's stories surprise and delight, reviving an influential, exciting moment in American culture.

The brief, insane explosion of the punk scene in 1970s New York has fascinated people ever since and left a lasting impression on art, culture, and music. *Punk Avenue: Inside the New York City Underground, 1972–1982* is a first-person account by Phil Marcade that brings this savage decade to life.

Marcade, a long-haired, acid-dropping Parisian, comes to the United States at age eighteen to look for Jack Kerouac. In a sense, he's chasing the American dream. The antiestablishment movement of the early 1970s was taking hold, and Marcade jumped in, looking for the most counter counterculture he could find. He ended up in New York City, smack in the middle of a scene defined by its cool rejection of mainstream values. He meets Debbie Harry, Lou Reed, Andy Warhol, Legs McNeil, and Sid and Nancy, among others.

Marcade's recollection of the New York underground is mostly lighthearted. Even an encounter with Nancy's heroin-addicted cat isn't without a streak of dark humor: "He had been all right at Nancy's, but now he was going through withdrawal and was completely flipping out. It took a long time … but Nancy Spungen's cat finally managed to kick the habit." And that's the tamer stuff. From the 1977 blackout to Marcade's wedding at city hall to the "Venus of Avenue D," Marcade lays it all out.

He may have come from France, but Marcade is clearly not a tourist in the world he portrays in *Punk Avenue*. And he's no sideliner or groupie, either—his band, the Senders, took the stage alongside other punk rockers at CBGB. What's relatable is Marcade's comfort among the freaks and weirdos that populate *Punk Avenue*'s pages. He's rarely starstruck, and his sense of humor makes these punk rock legends seem accessible. After all, they were just kids—young people experimenting with the new freedom of the 1970s.

Marcade's memoir leaves no skirt unlifted and is peppered with familiar names, faces, and places. Even at their saddest, his stories surprise and delight, reviving an influential, exciting moment in American culture.

CLAIRE FOSTER (May/June 2017)

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