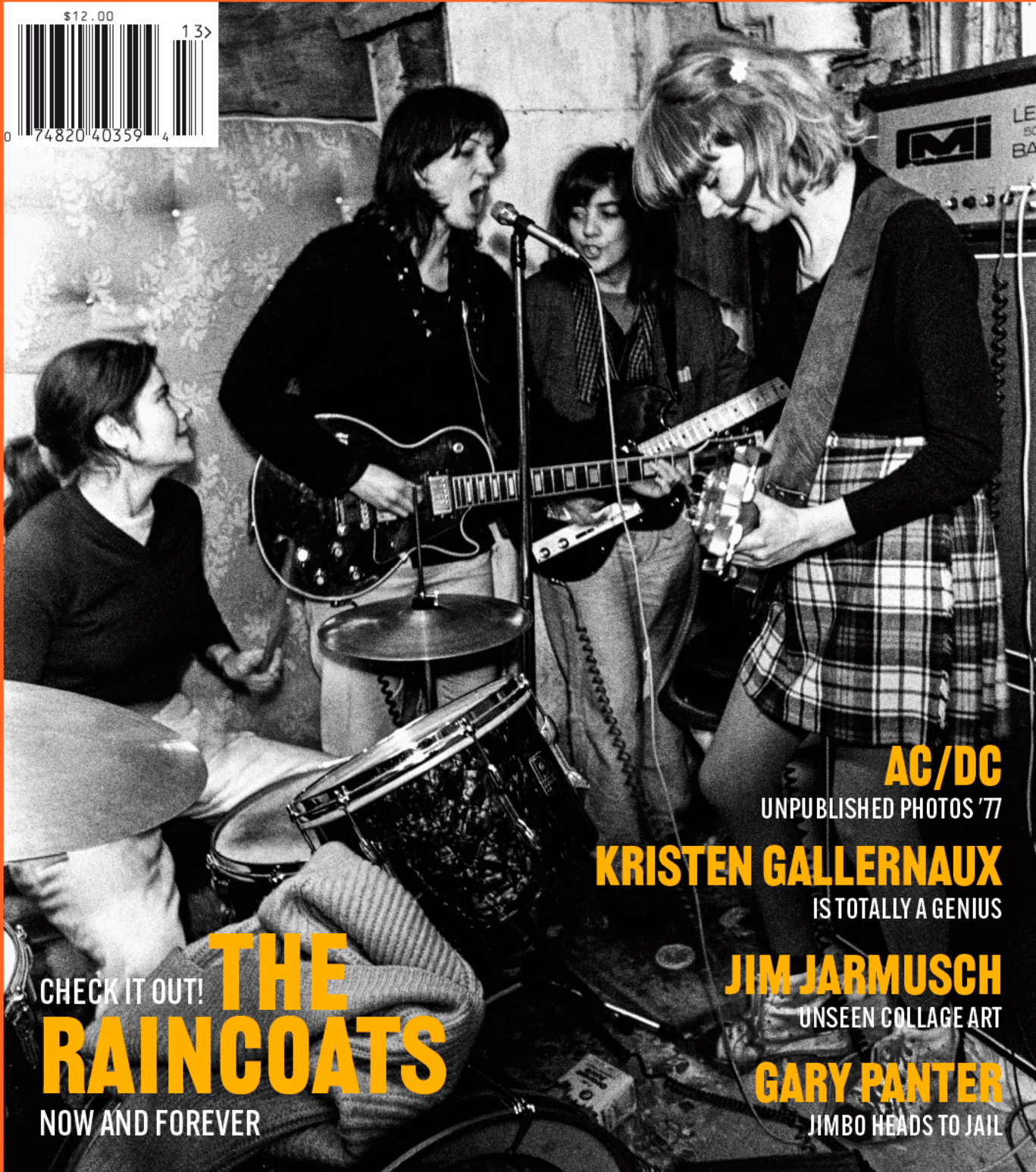


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# MAGGOT BRAIN

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Maggot Brain is printed four times a year by Johnson Press of America, Pontiac, IL on paper from sustainable forests, with ink from renewable sources.

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The Raincoats, 1978  
Photo by Jerzy Koznik

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# SHOUTING OUT LOUDER

Ana Da Silva and Gina Birch on  
the legacy and present works of  
fabulous feminist punk pioneers  
**THE RAINCOATS**

by David Buick



## IN WHAT I CONSIDER THE CRAZIEST TURN OF EVENTS

of 2021 thus far, I found myself chatting with founding members of The Raincoats Gina Birch and Ana Da Silva, along with longtime collaborator and manager Shirley O'Loughlin, while also working with Gina on a new 7". Pinch me. The Raincoats were born out of the endlessly inspiring scene that revolved around the Rough Trade Records Shop and label in London in the late 1970s and early 1980s and are, well, endlessly inspiring.

I asked Scarlett, my 13-year-old niece and one of my all-time favorite people, to help out. Scarlett spent a weekend listening to Raincoats records and watching YouTube videos, and came up with a few questions to ask. She is now a fan.

Gina and Ana are still collaborating, as well as working on their own musical and visual art projects. I can't wait to see what they have in store for us next.

Listen to The Raincoats. They are good for the world.

### Scarlett: Role models?

**Gina:** I'm not sure I had really inspirational role models growing up. When I was at art school, I was very taken with new ideas around art. At school, we learned about painting up until the Impressionists, so it was hugely eye opening to see what was happening in art schools...conceptual art, land art, film. And I threw myself into playing with land art and video art. Later, when Derek Jarman came to my degree course with his Super 8 films, I was completely entranced with the images he showed, and I bought a Super 8 camera as soon as could afford one. Then of course, punk was in its infancy when I arrived in London, and I lived in the middle of the mayhem. The Slits played their first gig, and at that point, it was something that I really, really wanted to do too.

**Ana:** I didn't really have specific role models. There have always been people I've liked and respected and, somehow, their input filters through without me even realising it. It's always really hard to know what influences you. Some things you know. Others are second hand, or hidden. Obviously, everyone is a fruit of their time and history, and it is within this framework that you move, choose paths, seek inspiration, and hopefully have something to give, something that in turn will make someone else's heart beat faster.

### When did you realize that you had talent and were passionate about music, and when did you realize you wanted to show the world your music/talent?

**Gina:** I never thought I had any talent. Punk was great for that. Success and aspiration weren't a part of it for me. It was the energy of the time that inspired me to give it a go. I played my first gig before I could play, in fact I played many many gigs before I could play. I had a talent for being crazy enough to learn in public.

**Ana:** I never thought much about whether I had talent. I believed I needed to study to find out. And with the music, I thought that I had to try and find out. The idea was more about "let's do it,"

than some big idea about talent or future or career, or showing anything to the world. It was much more about the experience of us creating a band and writing some songs. Both Gina and I have always been creative, and a band seemed like a fun idea. Then it all got more serious when we started recording, and realised that yes, we were a Band (with a capital B!).

### After 44 years of The Raincoats, what keeps you going?

**Gina:** After all these years, it is just what I do. I make films, write, play and perform songs. Lots of collaborations, like with The Gluts (Hayley Newman and Kaffe Matthews), and most recently and ardently, I paint: ginabirchpainting.com.

**Ana:** I started to listen more to electronic music and found I had a lot of pleasure in just listening to some of the sounds, especially synthesizer sounds. They can be so strong and pure, even when noisy. So, at the moment, I have a modular synth and have been making music with it for a few years. I recorded *Island*, in collaboration with Phew, which came out in September 2018, and we were recently commissioned to write a piece for issue Project Room, Brooklyn in October 2020. I also make drawings and paintings. I have some on my website: anadasilva.net.

### If you were to be able to give your younger self musical advice, what would it be?

**Gina:** Go for it. Don't be so shy. Talk to more people. They are very nice and friendly if you are open.

**Ana:** Without trying something that you would love to do, it's impossible to know if you're capable of doing it. If you're prepared to put in the work, and even struggle, there's no end to what you can achieve.

### Dave: What was your upbringing like? Did music and the arts have a part in your house?

**Gina:** Lower middle class. I was always singing and rocking back and forth. I had one great aunt who only visited us a few rare times. She lived far away, but she always encouraged me to dance for her, or talk to her about what I thought. No one else seemed too bothered about that, so it felt very strange but also quite strangely special. We didn't have a lot of money, so everything was carefully monitored. No one played an instrument. My Dad did try to do oil painting for a while, and painted a few flower paintings, but that didn't last too long. He bought a Bush record player, and as a family, we bought 4 singles a month. Each week, one person in the family could choose one. I don't remember how long that lasted. not too long either. My dad was a joker, and he teased us all the time.

**Ana:** All my life I enjoyed listening to music, a lot. As a child, I heard Elvis and the Everly Brothers on my older cousins' 45s, and from then on, I developed a passion for music. I also sang in

Previous page photo by Janette Beckman  
Facing page photo by Maria Helena da Silva



## The other day, someone put a post on Instagram that their 10-year-old son had asked, “Mum, can I play The Raincoats album when I get home?”

—Ana Da Silva

a choir and had some piano lessons, which gave me a basis that is still helpful to my musicmaking today. In my late teenage years, I came to England for two months, heard The Beatles, saw The Rolling Stones and a few others, and bought a few magazines, 45s and albums by the above to take home and show my friends. I also bought a really precious piece of clothing: a black polo-neck sweater. That was cool (when cool was cool). A few years later, I went to Germany, and learnt a few guitar chords from an American girl. Eventually my sister bought me an acoustic guitar, and I played Bob Dylan songs, just like everybody else. This was an awakening time, as I realized then that so much could be said and expressed through music, and that it was such a powerful, rich, and easily available medium. It is poetry, movement, structure, and personal experience turned into a shared one. It's immediate, or it can take you into a complex journey. It's fun, introspective, and so varied — not only because of what's in there, as far as lyrics and composition go, but because of the variety of instruments that exist, and the advancement of technology that brings new ways and sounds to the pot.

**You met at Hornsey college of Art in London. What were each of you studying? What were the early days of the Gina and Ana friendship like? Did you become fast friends?**

**Gina:** Ana turned up late for the start of term. She had hair down to her waist and was suntanned. She was also a bit older. She came from Madeira. I was white as a sheet and skinny as a rake, hardly ever travelled anywhere. Pretty naïve. Somehow, we hit it off because we were both interested in what was happening in music. I was aware of punk because I had already seen the Sex Pistols' first gig, and there were also some others who were interested in what was happening. We started to hang out and go to gigs together, after I moved to a squat near where she lived. I began to find my feet. Being in a band is complicated. We led fairly separate lives, but we were friends. There were always arguments about music and ideas. Ana was very determined in her view of the way things should be. She was a bit older and a bit more in tune, with a pattern of history. I was more naïve and impulsive. We are very good friends now.

**Ana:** I met Gina at art school in 1976. And a couple of other things happened there that were really important for me/us. There was a female model, and also another student who played electric guitars during the lunch breaks. I was drawn to that and bought a Fender copy at the Portobello Market, and later a small amp.

This made me really happy. The other important thing was that at the college, there were two boys who knew the Sex Pistols' roadie and introduced me to punk. One of them asked me to cut his hair badly, which I did, and enjoyed doing so. Gina and I started to go to lots of gigs. Everybody was saying you didn't need to know how to play well to do something interesting and strong. Early in 1977, we were both sitting in a pub and decided to start a band.

**I know that seeing The Slits is what ultimately ignited the spark. How did you end up at The Slits gig? Was it just wonderful dumb luck that you were there? Do you recall the bill and the date?**

**Gina:** I lived next door to Palmolive's sister, and we hung out a lot. I knew about the band and was excited to see them. They exceeded all expectations! It was in a venue in Harlesden. Lots of bands played, but The Slits were so amazing I only really remember them that night.

**Ana:** I read an article written by Vivian Goldman about girlbands. I remember The Slits and Girlschool were two of them. I don't think The Slits had played yet, but Vivian knew about them. I didn't think women weren't capable of doing whatever, but the limitations were so engraved in the general psyche that something like that article had an impact on me. I also had a book about girl bands. So, to me, it wasn't a completely strange thing. What was encouraging at the time, was the idea that you could start from almost nothing. Just knowing 3 chords was enough to start something of value.

**Can you try and describe the experience?**

**Gina:** For me, it was as though the world fell into place. At least, I had a place in it. There were four young women: looking wild, singing about things I was familiar with, in a way that was magical to me. Mixed up, anarchic, chaotic, musical, lyrical, and totally crazy. I would have given anything to swap places with one of them! (Actually, I was far too shy and I couldn't play a note!)

**Ana:** They were truly irreverent, and that was beautiful to watch — more than to listen to, at that point, although they already had some great songs, mainly written by Palmolive, who had also started the band. I wasn't like them or aspired to be like them, but the fact that they were local, and Gina knew Palmolive's sister, made it look more possible to start a band. They were real people, as opposed to the people on the records I was familiar with.

Photos (clockwise from top right):  
Gina, 1978, by Shirley O'Loughlin  
Shirley, 1978, by Ana da Silva  
Ana, 1978, by Shirley O'Loughlin





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**VIRGIN GANG OF 4 OFFER**



NYC 1980 by Andy Freeberg

### How quickly did the pieces fall into place for The Raincoats?

**Gina:** We didn't really have the conviction or confidence, at first, that it was something we could really do. It took some time. Ana had a guitar and could play a few chords. She got a little amp and an electric guitar. It took me longer, until one day I was in Soho at some art and politics event at lunch time. I had a couple of drinks, and plucked up the courage to walk into a guitar shop on my own, and ask for the cheapest bass guitar. I didn't dare tell them I had no idea how to play it. At the time, blokes who worked in guitar shops seemed like aliens from outer space to me, and I thought they would just laugh their heads off. Different times. I took it home and tried to learn how to play it. No internet, no way to learn except to plod around. Someone taught me how to tune it, and then I spent forever trying to copy the bass line in "Funky Kingston" by Toots and the Maytals. Ana had been at her family home in Madeira for the summer, and when she came back word went around that I had bought a bass guitar. We got together and within a very short time, my neighbour Richard Dudanski persuaded us to play a gig at the Tabernacle, supporting him and Tymon Dogg. We had maybe four songs, and then we played instrumental in E, just a noise in the key of E. Ana has a cassette somewhere.

**Ana:** The initial decision was, I think, purely for fun. Nothing came of it, to start with. Meanwhile, I had gone home for the

summer and started writing songs. "The Void," "Black and White," and I think one or two more. Gina bought a bass and started to learn while I was away. If rock music had not become simpler and more direct, we probably would have never found out that we could actually write songs and use our need to create in this way. When I got back, Gina told me she had been practicing. I already knew a drummer [Nick Turner] and my flat mate [Ross Crighton] also played guitar, so we got together just for the fun of it and started working on lyrics that Ross had written, and by the end, it felt amazing to have a song that sounded so complete. It really is an amazing, rewarding feeling. We then started to work on my songs also. I started singing them just because there was nobody else who wanted to sing. Eventually Gina also started writing lyrics. On 9th November 1977, we did our very first and hugely nerve-wracking gig. We played about 4 or 5 songs. One of them was a medley of "Hey, Hey, We're The Raincoats" (Ross wrote a verse describing each one of us, and yes it was an "adaptation" of The Monkees' song). An instrumental in E, then going into "Real Good Time Together" by Lou Reed. We did it because The Patti Smith Group had done it live. The gig went down quite well, and our friends were generous with their comments. We got the taste for it.

### What were the early Raincoats days like? How did the scene react?

**Gina:** Very mixed. Some loved us, many hated us. We weren't fun,

Punk was a good fit, and actually I do remember thinking, “I am so lucky to be alive at this moment in time.” Punk felt like a revolution, like we had a stake in the world. Things were gonna change for the better. Then, Margaret Thatcher came to power!

—Gina Birch

crazy, gorgeous like the Slits. We were shy, more introverted, and wore funny clothes! And as my friend Neal Brown said, we “had a look.” It just wasn’t a look that anyone was used to, especially with girls up on a stage

**Ana:** We never really sat down to make big decisions, and that included what sort of music we were going to play. Things always tended to evolve organically. So, musically and lyrically, each one of us was expressing herself in a particular way, depending on character, tastes, background, etc. It was the differences or mix of these four people that created the sort of music we played. But, of course, we lived in a particular time, and punk heavily informed this early body of work. Therefore, it sounded immediate and loud.

**The lineup changed a bit in the very early days, including both men and women, and even Kate Korus, who was a Slit and went on to form The Mo-Dettes. Finally, you landed on Vicky and Palmolive, who was also an ex Slit, the lineup that recorded the first single and LP. Was there a conscious decision made to become an all-female band, or to work with ex-members of The Slits?**

**Gina:** Oh, it was all just who was around. If someone was thrown out of a band that we liked and we needed someone, it just made sense. It all shook down eventually. We had mixed feelings about the all-female thing. We had men in the group, and then we didn’t, and then we did. It was interesting, being all female, as it gave us an opportunity to feel more uninhibited about our lack of knowledge or experience.

**Ana:** I remember feeling quite strongly that the ideal situation would be that people of both sexes should work together and strive for similar things. We went through some changes of personnel. Richard Dudanski joined us for a bit, until Palmolive left The Slits, and he suggested that she should work with us. So Palmolive did join us, which made Gina and I really happy. We couldn’t believe our luck. We loved the way she played and the joy she gave out. Until watching her, I had never understood drums or noticed them. They were just there, in the background. So, this was really an important step for us. Because she had been in an all-female band, The Slits, she was keen in continuing that with us too. She put an ad in a bookshop for a female keyboard or violin player, and Vicky Aspinall answered. This was the first time we were an all-female band. With this lineup, we developed the songs we already had and worked on new ones and, eventually, recorded the first ep and first album. At this time, Shirley started working

with us in the managerial side of things. So, from this point on, there were five of us working together.

**Was this when you started recording and getting out of London?**

**Gina:** Once Palmolive joined, we definitely felt excited and kind of complete. I don’t remember exactly how it happened. I think Rough Trade had a studio booked that wasn’t being used. Stiff Little Fingers finished early, and we were asked if we wanted to use the time. Or maybe that was before, when we did a demo with Patrick Keiller on guitar. Mayo Thompson had been asked to come to our rehearsal to work with us on the sound for the 3-track single. He helped us push ourselves further out there and that was good.

**Ana:** In 1979, we had just come back from touring England, after releasing our first single, and we went into the studio to record our first album, *Th Raincoats*. The recording was very much like a live performance with hardly any overdubs. We felt that anything was possible. We didn’t want to follow any rules of how to structure our music or how to present it. We were always exploring and risking ideas, instead of learning other people’s songs, and then we would use that knowledge to write our own music. I think this approach made our songs sound different to each other, and each album very different from the one before it.

**What were the early out of town gigs like?**

**Gina:** Out of London was different in that we stayed in boarding houses and cheap hotels. I was a provincial girl after all. The gigs were always very well-attended. By then, the word of punk had spread. I hated the tour, because every night, I was trying to play and perform things that I was still trying to get a handle on. We weren’t wild, we were just kind of exposed! I didn’t know if this was what I wanted from life after all!

**Ana:** We played mainly in clubs, but also colleges, big venues, festivals, radio, and television. I must add that I love playing live.

**How did you get involved with Rough Trade and Geoff and Mayo? Was it as magical as it seemed?**

**Gina:** Ana knew Geoff through her cousin Manuel, who had a stall on Portobello and sold records, amongst other things. Geoff introduced us to Mayo. It was all quite magical, actually. It is funny though, because when you are living it as a young person, all new experiences are just what happens to you! One step in front of the

Some things you know. Others are second hand, or hidden. Obviously, everyone is a fruit of their time and history, and it is within this framework that you move, choose paths, seek inspiration, and hopefully have something to give, something that in turn will make someone else's heart beat faster.

—Ana Da Silva

other, and you keep your eyes and ears open to things that seem to be where you might belong. Punk was a good fit, and actually I do remember thinking, "I am so lucky to be alive at this moment in time." Punk kind of felt like a revolution to me, like we had a stake in the world. Things were gonna change for the better. Then, Margaret Thatcher came to power!

**Ana:** I felt very honoured that Geoff asked me to work in the shop. I was so happy. A lot of people hung out there, especially on Saturdays. We sold fanzines and badges too. People formed bands in there. Punk was more than just music. It really was about pushing boundaries in many aspects of life, like self-expression and politics. The music was its core, but there were other things, like fanzines, where people could say what they wanted, and reflect ideas about music, art, graphic design, and fashion, and show new ways of presenting all this on paper. All these aspects were changing, and record shops, labels, etc. were being created.

**Mayo Thompson produced the first 7" and LP and Gina, you ended up playing in Red Crayola. What was it like working with him?**

**Gina:** I knew nothing about Mayo or Red Crayola at the time. I did become very familiar with all their records. Soldier Talk had just come out, and I listened to that endlessly. Over and over again. When we were recording our first single, I picked up a guitar in the studio, and so did Mayo, and we just started playing together. It felt really good. Mayo was always funny, great to hang out with, pushed us further, encouraged us. In Red Crayola, he took us to places we wouldn't have gone, and interesting art events. Art Basel, for example, and art festivals in many different countries, and, funnily enough now — even the first McDonalds in the UK! It was great being in Red Crayola with Epic and Lora, and later Jesse Chamberlain, and all sorts of different people over the years. We learned a lot. We also worked at Connie Plank's studio, which was great fun. It was amazing to hang out with Connie, and his place was amazing. Unfortunately, there was this idea it should be pop, and we just weren't. We should not have veered anywhere near that.

**Ana:** When we were working for the singles "Fairytale in the Supermarket," "In Love," and "Adventures Close to Home," Mayo, who was going to produce it, came to rehearsal and helped us turn the violin into a more Velvet Underground sound. That was

a band we really loved. I would still have their first album as one of my all-time favorite five. That's as near as we got to striving for a particular sound, but it was a really important step, because the violin became such a strong element in our sound: piercing and dangerous, as opposed to pleasant and decorative. It's what you do with an instrument that matters.

**How did the typical lunk head punks react to this infiltration in to their Boys' Club? Do you have any dirt on who resisted and who welcomed you?**

**Gina:** Not really. Rough Trade and Geoff Travis were particularly supportive of women, in both bands and all sorts of roles within the label. There was no nail polished, coiffured receptionist at Rough Trade, unlike in other major labels. The male bands at Rough Trade were also very welcoming, supportive, and fans of the female bands. There were issues of course, at times, with different people. But: water under the bridge. Ha!

**Ana:** As far as the press goes, you try not to get dispirited by bad reviews. Lots of times, their negative comments are based on really silly premises, and so a bad review ends up being a good one. If it's intelligent criticism, you can choose to take it on board or not, be it negative or positive. People are paid to listen to something carefully and comment on it, so they also have a responsibility to be conscientious in what they do and should think carefully before they write a critique. They are supposed to be guiding the buying public to choose amongst the enormous amount of work available, so that profession shouldn't be taken up lightly, as it can be of great influence. The only time I was offended by any journalists was if they targeted a group of people and made sexist or ageist or sexist comments that were purely based on the fact that we were either too old for their taste, or didn't fit in their received view of women. I was not offended personally, but as a human being, for the group of people in question. I think that on the whole, writers gave us good reviews, and made our records singles or albums of the week in their paper or magazine.

**Was there any particular band or artist that you felt a special alliance with? Or a rivalry?**

**Gina:** We always got on well with Swell Maps, Scritti Politti, Kleenex, and probably loads of others. I know Viv Albertine didn't like the idea of us hearing what the Slits were doing. Of course, I was interested, but it wasn't something that bothered

me. It seems quite funny now! The Mo-dettes thought we were a bit boring, I think. There was an idea that we should try to endear ourselves a bit more to the audience. I'm glad, now, that we didn't! When Helen Reddington wrote her book *The Lost Women of Rock*, Caroline Coonthrow a launch party for it, and so many women from punk and post punk bands were invited. So, years later, all the experience, and all the things we had in common were very bonding. We were all somehow strengthened and changed by what had happened to us in those bands.

**Ana:** I felt really close to Kleenex, Scritti Politti, Young Marble Giants, Go-Betweens, but mainly to Swell Maps — almost like family. Epic stayed in my flat for about a month. He was a very nice person. All of them: great people. We did a few gigs together, and occasionally played in each other's bands. Epic and Nikki also worked at the Rough Trade shop sometimes.

**When did you first come over to the states? What were those early US shows like?**

**Gina:** I think you should ask someone who was there. Hilary Jaeger of Tier 3, or Amy Rigby. It all seemed pretty damn exciting

to me. New York felt cool. The exchange rate was amazing, and you could walk everywhere in Manhattan. Food was incredible. I remember eating home fries and eggs over easy (who knew?) in the Polish cafes for breakfast, and at the other end of the scale we had tahini and alfalfa sprouts for the first time, and all sorts of other new culinary experiences. Manhattan was deliciously run-down in the parts we were in. London was very run-down then too, but in a very different way. In London we could live cheaply in squats, and we also had some kind of state benefits, which subsidised our artistic endeavours.

**Ana:** Going to New York had a big impact on me. After that, a lot of my dreams were happening in New York, even if it didn't look like it. I had seen so many films that happened there, so I thought it looked like a film setting. The USA is so different from the UK and from Portugal, where I come from. So, these trips were part of my adventure. People seem to like us in the USA and have been very welcoming. A few years ago, we went to the East Coast for the first time, which was amazing too, as we had so many emotional and musical connections with some people there, and friends. Being in a band takes you to so many new places and provides so many amazing connections and friendships.



THE RED CRAYOLA WITH ART & LANGUAGE: (l to r) Michael Baldwin (seated), Allen Ravenstine, Mayo Thompson, Lora Logic, Gina Birch, Epic Soundtracks, Ben Annesley and Mel Ramsden.

**How aware were you of what was happening in the States at that time?**

**Gina:** I was so naive. I just took it one day at a time. Meeting who I met. The people I met were much less stand-offish than in London, really friendly, so it was easy to hang out with people. There was definitely a lot of heroin about, but I met many interesting people. It felt as though you could hang out and talk to anyone there. So different from the picky scene in London. Maybe it's just about not being on your own turf. You feel more liberated. I don't really know.

**Ana:** There were quite a few bands that I really loved and that inspired me, like The Patti Smith Group, Television, Talking Heads, Richard Hell and the Voidoids, etc., but I didn't think about meeting them. I was just happy to go and see them. I also listened to their records constantly.

***Odyssey* was even more experimental than the S/T release. Were you trying to go in a different direction for any specific reason, or was this a natural progression?**

**Gina:** *Odyssey* was a natural progression. I think if Ingrid had stayed it might have been less different, but after she left and we didn't have a drummer, the songs were written very strangely, weaving odd timings and leaning on each other in odd ways. And so it goes.

**Ana:** *Odyshape* was a lot more spacious, and we used lots of acoustic instruments and noises — no acoustic guitars, though — and some people thought it was a bit folksy. Others found it experimental. These shows we didn't really fit, or wanted to fit, in a particular style or genre. Things evolved quite simply. For instance, when we went to play on the East Coast of the USA, we bought a kalimba, a shruti box, and a balaphone. They are as far from punk as you can get, but we didn't think in those terms. We liked their sound, and we used them mixed up with more edgy sounds on "Only Loved at Night," "Shouting Out Loud," and "And Then It's OK," respectively. We just always tried what came to our heads.



**You took a break after *Moving* came out. Were there always plans to come back or was the future of the band up in the air?**

**Gina:** After *Moving*, I think we had all had enough. When we stopped, we all wanted different things: making films, doing soundtracks, hanging out. It was so much later, when riot grrl happened, that we got really excited again. I think the atmosphere, the zeitgeist has a lot to do with us wanting to play together again. Of course, the advent of CDs meant the records were being re-released, so that was a catalyst for playing maybe one or two shows,

and we felt comfortable together again, for a while at least! I did lots of different things in the years just after *Moving*. Red Krayola, of course. Worked at Rough Trade for a short while, worked on some film shoots, formed Dorothy with Vicky Aspinall, and released some music on Blue Guitar/Chrysalis. I made films and started directing music videos too. I made a lot for Rough Trade bands, and that was really exciting and fun. I also spent a couple of years at the Royal College of Art studying film. I can't really remember it all. Just doing stuff, all the time.

**Ana:** It wasn't just a break. It was a breakup! The most important collaboration I did during that time was with Gaby Agis. She is a British dancer and choreographer. I did music for some of her work, including a commissioned film by Channel 4 (UK) and two theatre pieces. I found this very interesting, because it was a very different project to what I was used to. A very different way of working. It was a two-way collaboration. She would tell me her ideas for the choreography, then I would do music, and we'd fine tune. It was great to see her working with the other dancers to my music. The dancing took it to a different place.

**How did it feel to all of a sudden read Kurt Cobain, dropping your name in interviews as one of his biggest influences? And of course, Sonic Youth — Kim writing liners, and Steve releasing new music and playing in the group. What part did that type of support play in the legacy of The Raincoats?**

**Gina:** All brilliant. Yes, who would have guessed. We were kind of low profile, keeping our heads below the parapet! So it was all a bit of a crazy dream.

**Ana:** Although our music had been appreciated, everything was a bit quiet after we disbanded in 1984. The records stopped being available for a while. We were doing other things. In the early '90s, though, we started thinking we should re-release them on CD. Meanwhile, we realized that some people were mentioning us as an influence, and so it seemed even more appropriate to do so. I'm not completely sure why they liked us. Some people do think we were and still are ahead of our time, especially with *Odyshape*. I wouldn't really know, because of my close relationship with it. I think we are still popular due in great part to the fact that a lot of people got to know about us through Kurt Cobain. He was a fan and talked about the band on the liner notes to *Incesticide*. We also asked him to write something for the liner notes of the re-issue of our first album, which he did. That meant so much to us.

**Shirley, you have been the band's manager and a constant contributor since before the first 7". How did you become involved?**

**Shirley:** I first met Ana and Gina in 1977, as I knew Nick Turner, the band's first drummer, and went along to a few rehearsals and saw their first gig. In October 1978, I began working at Rough Trade Records, in production and, a bit later on, I began Rough Trade Booking with a fantastic roster of artists. Rough Trade was the only place I wanted to be — everyone I knew was forming bands! In 1979, with fire in my soul, I became involved in the organization of The Raincoats, with their first single/ep, and then



Facing page: Ana.  
This page: Gina.  
by Janette Beckman

I became more involved, as a collaborator after the first UK tour, arranging shows in Europe and the USA. I had been to art school myself, and The Raincoats were about art. We were women proud to speak our minds — striving for equality, opportunities, and change together. I felt part of the band — negotiating with both the business and all aspects of the artistic decision making and production.

**You started We Three Records to release and reissue Raincoats records. Are there any plans to record and release any new Raincoats music? Any old Raincoats music that hasn't been heard?**

**Shirley:** In 2009, the 30th anniversary of *Th Raincoats* was approaching, and I had the idea to re-release the album ourselves by creating We Three, our own label. The contracts for all four studio albums on Rough Trade were all made individually for five years, so that rights would return to us. Also, we are immersed in a history of DIY and self-published culture, and so had the experience to make this happen, working together with a brilliant distributor, Cargo, and licensing to Kill Rock Stars in the USA. We also re-released *Odyshape* and a limited edition of the first EP. Currently, we still have a few very special signed 40th anniversary edition copies, with prints by Ana and Gina available in our online shop: [theraincoats.net](http://theraincoats.net).

**I am so excited that we are releasing the first-ever solo Gina Birch single, "Feminist Song," and the fact that Ana contributes makes this an absolutely amazing dream for me! I love that the two of you work on each other's**

**projects, even if it is not an official Raincoats release. Did you have any idea when you first started making noise together that you would still be working with each other so many years later?**

**Gina:** I'm so happy "Feminist Song" is coming out on Third Man. It's very exciting and thrilling for me. It's a song I'm really proud of. We have played it in The Raincoats live sets sometimes, but we don't plan to make any new Raincoats recordings, and it has always been planned to be a solo record. In answer to the other part of the question: no, I thought it would last for a few months, and then it became pretty full time. I remember one point, quite early on, going to rehearsal and saying, "I'm leaving the band, I don't want to do this anymore." Then, later, I burst into tears and decided to stay! Drama queen moment!

**Ana:** I had no idea or a big plan about the future. Things have always happened quite organically. We've played gigs together up until February 2020, just as the pandemic was spreading and before lockdowns. We started 44 years ago! I think that the Feminist Song is really important and relevant and, hopefully, it will have some impact in moving things along towards justice for women. So, I'm very happy to have my Korg Monotron part in the song.

**Did you have any idea that you were making music that would leave such a lasting impression on so many different generations of musicians and artists, and folks who generally want to lead an honest and positive and individual life?**



Le Guess Who festival, Utrecht. August 11, 2019  
by Anne-Marie van Rijn

**Gina:** Of course I didn't think it would happen like that, but we did try to make things/sounds/songs of our own, in our own way, so I suppose in retrospect, it all makes sense. We were doing something original. Although at the time, many people thought it was just weird.

**Ana:** We were one of Rough Trade's best-selling bands in that period. So, we always had people who enjoyed what we did. You can't please everybody. Had we been men, maybe the reaction would have been different and we would have been considered geniuses. It was all too quirky for easy assimilation. Some people manage to challenge and be widely accepted, but their challenge is often limited.

**Do you think that something like what happened around Rough Trade and that early London scene could happen again in this day and age?**

**Gina:** It would of course be very different, but it could have similarities. People do need connection, both online and in-person. People love to know that others are interested in what they are doing, and to offer support and friendship. So much these days seems to be about money. That started to shift and change in the '80s, and it hasn't really gone away. Artists need the freedom not to be motivated by money, and to manage to survive when they are poor! It's much harder these days than it was all those years ago. We don't just want to be poor, but we have to know we can cope and not give up. If you give up, that's it. You just stop. I am

painting now, and sometimes I think: what am I doing, piling up canvases? But I'm not going to stop!

**Ana:** There is always a need for renewal, a need for creativity and mirroring what's going on. So maybe something is brewing that we don't know about yet. Could it be because of the pandemic?

**How do you feel about the artists that are carrying the torch that you passed to them?**

**Gina:** I hope so. People need to take risks and be inventive, try to be truthful, observant. If they do, then I think things are good.

**Ana:** It's the most rewarding thing to feel that what we did is still inspiring other artists. People contact us through social media, and we have been quite touched by the comments, messages, and friend requests that we've received. This makes us aware that people from all over the world have taken something from us, even from countries where our albums were not released. Another amazing thing is that very young also people like our music. The other day, someone put a post on Instagram that their 10-year-old son had asked, "Mum, can I play The Raincoats album when I get home?"