

= New York Dolls (album) =

New York Dolls is the debut studio album by American hard rock band the New York Dolls . It was released on July 27 , 1973 , by Mercury Records . The band formed in 1971 and developed a following while playing regularly in lower Manhattan . However , they were unappealing to record companies because of their onstage cross @-@ dressing and vulgarity , while most record producers were reluctant to work with them . For shock value , the band was photographed in exaggerated drag on the album cover .

After signing a two @-@ record deal with Mercury , the New York Dolls recorded their self @-@ titled first album at The Record Plant in New York City with producer Todd Rundgren , who was known for his sophisticated pop sound and held a lukewarm opinion of the band . They incorporated carefree rock and roll and Brill Building pop influences in the album 's hard rock songs , while the lyrics were written mostly by lead singer David Johansen and touched on themes such as urban youth , teen alienation , adolescent romance , and authenticity .

New York Dolls received widespread acclaim from critics when it was first released but sold poorly and had a divisive effect on listeners . The band toured the United States to promote the record , but they were difficult to market and developed a reputation for rock @-@ star excesses . Despite its commercial failure , the album was an influential precursor to the 1970s punk rock movement and has since been named in various publications as one of the greatest debut records in rock music and one of the greatest albums of all time .

= = Background = =

In 1971 , vocalist David Johansen formed the New York Dolls with guitarists Johnny Thunders and Rick Rivets , bassist Arthur Kane , and drummer Billy Murcia ; Rivets was replaced by Sylvain Sylvain in 1972 . The band was meant to be a temporary project for the members , who were club @-@ going youths that had gone to New York City with different career pursuits . As Sylvain recalled , " We just said ' Hey , maybe this will get us some chicks . ' That seemed like a good enough reason . " He and Murcia originally planned to work in the clothing business and opened a boutique on Lexington Avenue that was across the street from a toy repair shop called the New York Dolls Hospital , which gave them the idea for their name . The group soon began playing regularly in lower Manhattan and earned a cult following within a few months with their reckless style of rock music . Nonetheless , record companies were hesitant to sign them because of their onstage cross @-@ dressing and blatant vulgarity . In October 1972 , they garnered the interest of critics when they opened for English rock band the Faces at the Empire Pool in Wembley . However , on the New York Dolls ' first tour of England that year , Murcia died after consuming a lethal combination of alcohol and methaqualone . They enlisted Jerry Nolan as his replacement , while managers Marty Thau , Steve Leber , and David Krebs still struggled to find the band a record deal .

After returning to New York , the New York Dolls played to capacity crowds at venues such as Max 's Kansas City and the Mercer Arts Center in what Sylvain called a determined effort to " fake it until they could make it " : " We had to make ourselves feel famous before we could actually become famous . We acted like we were already rock stars . Arthur even called his bass ' Excalibur ' after King Arthur . It was crazy . " Their performance at the Mercer Arts Center was attended by journalist and Mercury Records publicity director Bud Scoppa , and Paul Nelson , an A & R executive for the label . Scoppa initially viewed them as an amusing but inferior version of the Rolling Stones : " I split after the first set . Paul stuck around for the second set , though , and after show he called me and said , ' You should have stayed . I think they 're really special . ' Then , after that , I fell in love with them anyway . " In March 1973 , the group signed a two @-@ album deal with a US \$ 25 @, @ 000 advance from Mercury . According to Sylvain , some of the members ' parents had to sign for them because they were not old enough to sign themselves .

For the New York Dolls ' debut album , Mercury wanted to find a record producer who could make the most out of the group 's sound and the hype they had received from critics and fans in New York . At the band 's first board meeting in Chicago , Johansen fell asleep in Mercury 's conference room

while record executives discussed potential producers . He awoke when they mentioned Todd Rundgren , a musician and producer who by 1972 had achieved unexpected rock stardom with his double album *Something / Anything ?* and its hit singles " I Saw the Light " and " Hello It 's Me " . Rundgren had socialized at venues such as Max 's Kansas City and first saw the New York Dolls when his girlfriend at the time , model Bebe Buell , brought him there to see them play .

Known for having refined pop tastes and technologically savvy productions , Rundgren had become increasingly interested in progressive rock sounds by the time he was enlisted to produce the New York Dolls ' debut album . Consequently , his initial impression of the group was that of a humorous live act who were technically competent only by the standards of other unsophisticated New York bands . " The Dolls weren 't out to expand any musical horizons " , said Rundgren , although he enjoyed Thunders ' " attitude " and Johansen 's charismatic antics onstage . Johansen referred to Rundgren as " an expert on second rate rock ' n ' roll " , but also said the band was " kind of persona non grata , at the time , with most producers . They were afraid of us , I don 't know why , but Todd wasn 't . We all liked him from Max 's ... Todd was cool and he was a producer . " Sylvain , on the other hand , felt the decision to enlist him was based on availability , time , and money : " It wasn 't a long list . Todd was in New York and seemed like he could handle the pace . " Upon being hired , Rundgren declared that " the only person who can produce a New York record is someone who lives in New York " .

= = Recording and production = =

Mercury booked the New York Dolls at The Record Plant in New York City , where they recorded their self @-@ titled debut album in April 1973 . Rundgren was originally concerned that they had taken " the worst sounding studio in the city at that time " because it was the only one available to them with the short time given to record and release the album . He later said that expectations for the band and the festive atmosphere of the recording sessions proved to be more of a problem : " The Dolls were critics ' darlings and the press had kind of adopted them . Plus , there were lots of extra people around , socializing , which made it hard to concentrate . " New York Dolls was recorded in eight days on a budget of only \$ 17 @,@ 000 . With a short amount of studio time and no concept in mind for the album , the band chose which songs to record based on how well they had been received at their live shows . In Johansen 's own words , " we went into a room and just recorded . It wasn 't like these people who conceptualize things . It was just a document of what was going on at the time . "

In the studio , the New York Dolls dressed in their usual flashy clothes . Rundgren , who did not approve of their raucous sound , at one point yelled at them during the sessions to " get the glitter out of your asses and play " . Sylvain recalled Rundgren inviting Buell and their Chihuahua to the studio and putting the latter atop an expensive mixing console , while Johansen acknowledged that his recollections of the sessions have since been distorted by what he has read about them : " It was like the 1920s , with palm tree décor and stuff . Well , that 's how I remember it , anyway . " He also said Rundgren directed the band from the control room with engineer Jack Douglas and hardly spoke to them while they recorded the album . According to Scopa , the group 's carefree lifestyle probably conflicted with Rundgren 's professional work ethic and schedule : " He doesn 't put up with bullshit . I mean , [the band] rarely started their live sets before midnight , so who knows ? Todd was very much in charge in the studio , however , and I got the impression that everybody was looking to him . "

Although Sylvain said Rundgren was not an interfering producer , he occasionally involved himself to improve a take . Sylvain recalled moments when Rundgren went into the isolation booth with Murcia when he struggled keeping a beat and drummed out beats on a cowbell for him to use as a click track . During another session , he stopped a take and walked out of the control room to plug in Kane 's bass cabinet . Scoppa , who paid afternoon visits to the studio , overheard Rundgren say , " Yeah , that 's all you needed . Okay , let 's try it again ! " , and ultimately found the exchange funny and indicative of Rundgren 's opinion of the band : " Todd was such a ' musician ' while they were just getting by on attitude and energy . But as disdainful as he appeared to be at some points he got

the job done really well . " Rundgren felt Johansen 's wild singing often sounded screamed or drunken but were eloquent in the sense that Johansen demonstrated a " propensity to incorporate certain cultural references into the music " , particularly on " Personality Crisis " . While recording the song , Johansen walked back into the control room and asked Rundgren if his vocals sounded " ludicrous enough " .

Because the New York Dolls had little money , Sylvain and Thunders played the austere designed and affordable Gibson Les Paul Junior guitars on the record . They jokingly referred to them as " automatic guitars " due to their limited sound shaping features . To amplify their guitars , they ran a Marshall Plexi standalone amplifier through the speaker cabinets of a Fender Dual Showman , and occasionally used a Fender Twin Reverb . Some songs were embellished with additional instruments , including Buddy Bowser 's brassy saxophone on " Lonely Planet Boy " . Johansen sang into distorted guitar pickups for additional vocals and overdubbed them into the song . He also played an Asian gong for " Vietnamese Baby " and harmonica on " Pills " . For " Personality Crisis " , Sylvain originally played on The Record Plant 's Yamaha grand piano before Rundgren added his own piano flourishes to both that song and " Private World " . Rundgren also contributed to the background vocals heard on " Trash " and played synthesizers on " Vietnamese Baby " and " Frankenstein (Orig .) " , which Sylvain recalled : " I remember him getting those weird sounds from this beautiful old Moog synthesizer he brought in . He said it was a model that only he and The Beatles had . "

New York Dolls was mixed in less than half a day . Rundgren felt the band seemed distracted and disinterested at that point , so he tried unsuccessfully to ban them from the mixing session . For the final mix , he minimized the sound of Nolan 's drumming . In retrospect , Rundgren said the quality of the mix was poor because the band had hurried and questioned him while mixing the record : " It 's too easy for it to become a free @-@ for @-@ all , with every musician only hearing their own part and not the whole . They all had other places to be , so rather than split , they rushed the thing and if that wasn 't enough they took it to the crappy mastering lab that Mercury had put them in . " Thunders famously complained to a journalist that Rundgren " fucked up the mix " on New York Dolls , adding to stories that the two had clashed during the album 's recording . Both Johansen and Scoppa later said they did not see any conflict between the two and that Thunders ' typically foolish behavior was misinterpreted . Johansen later praised Rundgren for how he enhanced and equalized each instrument , giving listeners the impression that " [they 're] in a room and there 's a band playing " , while Sylvain said his mix accurately captured how the band sounded live .

= = Music and lyrics = =

New York Dolls features 10 original songs and 1 cover ? the 1963 Bo Diddley song " Pills " . Johansen described the album as " a little jewel of urban folk art " . Rundgren , on the other hand , said the band 's sensibilities were different from " the urban New York thing " because they had been raised outside Manhattan and drew on carefree rock and roll and Brill Building pop influences such as the Shangri @-@ Las : " Their songs , as punky as they were , usually had a lot to do with the same old boy @-@ girl thing but in a much more inebriated way . " Johansen quoted the lyric " you 'd best believe I 'm in love L @-@ U @-@ V " from the Shangri @-@ Las ' " Give Him a Great Big Kiss " (1964) when he opened " Looking for a Kiss " , which tells a story of adolescent romantic desire hampered by peers who use drugs . On " Subway Train " , he used lyrics from the American folk standard " Someone 's in the Kitchen with Dinah " . In the opinion of critic Stephen Thomas Erlewine , the album 's rowdy hard rock songs also revamped riffs from Chuck Berry and the Rolling Stones , resulting in music that sounded edgy and threatening in spite of the New York Dolls ' wittingly kitsch and camp sensibilities . " Personality Crisis " featured raunchy dual guitars , boogie @-@ woogie piano , and a histrionic pause , while " Trash " was a punky pop rock song with brassy singing .

Several songs on New York Dolls function as what Robert Hilburn deemed " colorful , if exaggerated , expressions of teen alienation " . Robert Christgau remarked that because many of Manhattan 's white youths were wealthy and somewhat artsy , only ill @-@ behaved young people

from the outer boroughs such as the band members could " capture the oppressive excitement Manhattan holds for a half @-@ formed human being " . " Private World " , an escapist plea for stability , was co @-@ written by Kane , who rarely contributed as a songwriter and felt overwhelmed as a young adult in the music business . Johansen , the band 's main lyricist , said " Frankenstein (Orig .) " was about " how kids come to Manhattan from all over , they 're kind of like whipped dogs , they 're very repressed . Their bodies and brains are disoriented from each other ... it 's a love song . " According to critic Frank Kogan , the titular monster in the song was the personification of New York City and its ethos ? " the ostentation and the terror , the dreams and the fear " ? while Johansen asking listeners if they " could make it with Frankenstein " involved more than sexual slang : " David was asking if you ? if I ? could make it with the monster of life , whether I could embrace life in all its pain and dreams and disaster . " Sylvain jokingly said " Frankenstein (Orig .) " was titled with a qualifier because rock musician Edgar Winter had released his 1973 song of the same name before the band could record their own : " Our song ' Frankenstein ' was a big hit in our live show ... Now , his thing didn 't sound at all like ours , but I 'm sure he stole our title . "

Although the New York Dolls exhibited tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek qualities , Gary Graff observed a streetwise realism in the album 's songs . In Christgau 's opinion , Johansen 's colloquial and morally superior lyrics were imbued with humor and a sense of human limits in songs whose fundamental theme was authenticity . This theme was explored in stories about lost youths , as on " Subway Train " , or in a study of a specific subject , such as the " schizy imagemonger " on " Personality Crisis " . He argued that beneath the band 's decadent and campy surface were lyrics about " the modern world ... one nuclear bomb could blow it all away . Pills and personality crises weren 't evils ? easy , necessary , or whatever . They were strategies and tropisms and positive pleasures " . According to journalist Steve Taylor , " Vietnamese Baby " dealt with the impact of the Vietnam War at the time on everyday activities for people , whose fun was undermined by thoughts of collective guilt .

On songs such as " Subway Train " and " Trash " , Johansen used ambiguity as a lyrical mode . In Kogan 's opinion , Johansen sang in an occasionally unintelligible manner and wrote in a perplexing , fictional style that was lazy yet ingenious , as it provided his lyrics an abundance of " emotional meaning " and interpretation : " David never provides an objective framework , he 's always jumping from voice to voice , so you 're hearing a character addressing another character , or the narrator addressing the character , or the character or the narrator addressing us , all jammed up together so you 're hearing bits of conversation and bits of subjective description in no kind of chronological order . But as someone says in ' Vietnamese Baby ' : ' Everything connects . ' " In " Trash " , Johansen undercut his vaguely pansexual beliefs with the possibility of going to " fairyland " if he took a " lover 's leap " with the song 's subject .

= = Release and reception = =

New York Dolls was released on July 27 , 1973 , in the United States and on October 19 in the United Kingdom . Its controversial cover featured the band dressed in exaggerated drag , including high wigs , messy make @-@ up , high heels , and garters . The photo was used for shock value , and on the back of the album , the band is photographed in their usual stage wear . To announce the album 's release , Mercury published an advertisement slogan that read " Introducing The New York Dolls : A Band You 're Gonna Like , Whether You Like It Or Not " , while other ads called them " The Band You Love to Hate " . Two double A @-@ sided , 7 " singles were released ? " Trash " / " Personality Crisis " in July and " Jet Boy " / " Vietnamese Baby " in November 1973 ? neither of which charted .

New York Dolls was not a success with consumers and only reached number 116 on the American Top LPs , while in the UK , it failed to chart altogether . The record sold over 100 @, @ 000 copies at the time and fell well short of expectations in the press . According to Rolling Stone in 2003 , it ultimately sold fewer than 500 @, @ 000 copies . Music journalist Phil Strongman said that its commercial failure could be attributed to the New York Dolls ' divisive effect on listeners , including writers from the same magazine . In a feature story on the band for Melody Maker , Mark Plummer

dismissed their playing as the poorest he had ever seen , while the magazine 's reporter Michael Watts viewed them as an encouraging , albeit momentary , presence in what he felt was a lifeless rock and roll scene at the time . In Creem magazine 's readers poll , the album earned the band awards in the categories of " Best New Group of the Year " and " Worst New Group of the Year " .

New York Dolls nonetheless received widespread acclaim from contemporary critics . In a rave review for NME , Nick Kent said the band 's raunchy style of rock and roll was vividly recorded by Rundgren on an album that , besides Iggy and the Stooges ' Raw Power (1973) , served as the only one " so far to fully define just exactly where 1970s rock should be coming from " . Trouser Press founder and editor Ira Robbins viewed New York Dolls as an innovative record and found the band 's music brilliantly chaotic and well produced by Rundgren . Ellen Willis , writing for The New Yorker , said it was by far the year 's most compelling hard rock album and that at least half of its songs were immediate classics , particularly " Personality Crisis " and " Trash " , which she called " transcendent " . In Newsday , Christgau hailed the New York Dolls as " the best hard rock band in the country and maybe the world right now " , writing that their " special genius " was combining the shrewd songwriting savvy of early @-@ 1960s popular music with the anarchic sound of late @-@ 1960s heavy metal . He believed the record 's frenzied approach , various emotions , and wild noise conveyed Manhattan 's harsh , deviant thrill better than the Velvet Underground . In a less enthusiastic review , Rolling Stone critic Tony Glover believed the band 's impressive live sound was mostly preserved on the album , but he was slightly critical of production flourishes and overdubs , feeling they made some lyrics incomprehensible and some choruses too sonorous . Although he was surprised Rundgren 's production worked well with the group 's raunchy sound on most of the songs , Glover ultimately asked whether or not " the record alone will impress as much as seeing them live (they 're a highly watchable group) . "

After the album 's release , the New York Dolls toured the US as a supporting act for English rock band Mott the Hoople . Reviews complimented their songwriting , Thunders and Sylvain 's guitar interplay , and noted their campy fashion and the resemblance of Johansen and Thunders to Mick Jagger and Keith Richards . However , some critics panned them as an unserious group of amateurs who could not play or sing . During their appearance on The Old Grey Whistle Test in England , the show 's host Bob Harris dismissed their music as " mock rock " in his on @-@ air comments . They also developed a reputation for rock @-@ star excesses , including drugs , groupies , trashed hotel rooms , and public disturbances , and according to Ben Edmonds of Creem , became " the most walked @-@ out @-@ on band in the history of show business " . Strongman wrote that the band and the album were difficult to market because of their kitschy style and how Murcia 's death had exacerbated their association with hard drugs , which " wasn 't altogether true in the early days " . Nonetheless , they remained the most popular band in New York City , where their Halloween night concert at the Waldorf Astoria in 1973 drew hundreds of young fans and local television coverage .

= = Legacy and influence = =

New York Dolls has since been often cited as one of the greatest debut albums in rock music , one of the genre 's most popular cult records , and a foundational work for the late 1970s punk rock movement . It was a pivotal influence on many of the rock and roll , punk , and glam rock groups that followed , including the Ramones , Kiss , the Sex Pistols , The Damned , and Guns N ' Roses . According to The Mojo Collection (2007) , the record ignited punk rock and could still inspire more movements because of the music 's abundant attitude and passion , while Encyclopedia of Popular Music writer Colin Larkin deemed it " a major landmark in rock history , oozing attitude , vitality and controversy from every note " . Chuck Eddy named it one of the records crucial to the evolution of rock music . In 101 Albums That Changed Popular Music (2009) , Chris Smith wrote that the New York Dolls pioneered punk 's aesthetic of amateurish musicianship on the album , which undermined the musical sophistication that had developed over the past decade in popular music and had been perfected months earlier on Pink Floyd 's The Dark Side of the Moon (1973) . In The Guardian 's list of " 1000 albums to hear before you die " , the newspaper credited the record for serving as " an

efficacious antidote to the excesses of prog rock " .

In a retrospective review for AllMusic , Erlewine ? the website 's senior editor ? claimed that New York Dolls was a more quintessential proto @-@ punk album than any of the Stooges ' releases because of how it " plunders history while celebrating it , creating a sleazy urban mythology along the way " . David Fricke argued that it was a more definitive glam rock album than David Bowie 's Ziggy Stardust (1972) or anything by Marc Bolan because of how the band " captured both the glory and sorrow of glam , the high jinx and wasted youth , with electric photorealism " . In The Rolling Stone Album Guide (2004) , Joe Gross called it an " absolutely essential " record and " epic sleaze , the sound of five young men shaping the big city in their own scuzzy image " . Sylvain attributed its influence on punk rock to how Rundgren recorded his guitar through the left speaker and Thunders ' guitar on the right side , an orientation which he said younger bands such as the Ramones and the Sex Pistols adopted . Rundgren was amused by how the record became considered a precursor to the punk movement : " The irony is that I wound up producing the seminal punk album , but I was never really thought of as a punk producer , and I never got called by punk acts . They probably thought I was too expensive for what they were going for . But the Dolls didn 't really consider themselves punk . "

New York Dolls has frequently been named one of the greatest albums of all @-@ time ; according to Acclaimed Music , it is the 155th most ranked record on critics ' all @-@ time lists . In 1978 , it was ranked as the 199th greatest record ever in Paul Gambaccini 's book Rock Critics ' Choice : The Top 200 Albums , which polled a number of leading music journalists and record collectors . Christgau , one of the critics polled , named it the 15th best album of the 1970s in The Village Voice the following year . New York Dolls was included in Neil Strauss 's 1996 list of the 100 most influential alternative records , and the Spin Alternative Record Guide (1995) named it the 70th best alternative album . In 2002 , it was included on a list published by Q of the 100 best punk records , while Mojo named it both the 13th greatest punk album and the 49th greatest album of all time . In 2003 , Rolling Stone placed the record at number 213 on its 500 greatest albums list and " Personality Crisis " at number 271 on its 500 greatest songs list . In 2007 , Mojo polled a panel of prominent recording artists and songwriters for the magazine 's list of " 100 Records That Changed the World " , in which New York Dolls was voted the 39th most influential and inspirational record ever . English singer Morrissey named it his favorite album in a list for The Quietus in 2010 . According to Paul Myers , the record " struck such a chord with Morrissey that he was not only moved to form his own influential group , The Smiths ... but would eventually convince the surviving Dolls to reunite [in 2004] " . In 2013 , New York Dolls was placed at number 355 on NME 's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time .

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = = New York Dolls = = =

David Johansen ? gong , harmonica , vocals

Arthur " Killer " Kane ? bass guitar

Jerry Nolan ? drums

Sylvain Sylvain ? piano , rhythm guitar , vocals

Johnny Thunders ? lead guitar , vocals

= = = Additional personnel = = =

Buddy Bowser ? saxophone

Jack Douglas ? engineering
David Krebs ? executive production
Steve Leber ? executive production
Paul Nelson ? executive production
Dave O 'Grady ? makeup
Todd Rundgren ? additional piano , Moog synthesizer , production
Ed Sprigg ? engineer
Alex Spyropoulos ? piano
Marty Thau ? executive production
Toshi ? photography

= = Release history = =

Information is adapted from Nina Antonia 's Too Much Too Soon : The New York Dolls (2006) .