

Newsday

ON MUSIC

The Garage Sound Is Alive in the '80s

By Wayne Robins

NOSTALGIA for the 1960s seems most often to focus on that era's social and political activism and the gentle hallucinations of love, peace and flowers purveyed by the Beatles.

But there was another side to American rock culture in the '60s. It was the era of the garage band, an underappreciated phenomenon that continues to exert a major influence on the rock of the '80s. You can see for yourself tomorrow night when four contemporary exponents of so-called garage music appear at Irving Plaza, at Irving Place and 15th Street in Manhattan.

The bands are the Fuzztones, the Mosquitos, the Vipers and the Cheepskates, and all appear on the recently released "Garage Sale," on the cassette-only Reachout International (ROIR) label. The tape was released in conjunction with Goldmine magazine, which specializes in oldies and rock collectibles.

"Neil Cooper of ROIR wanted to do a tape with Goldmine," said Jeff Tamarkin, the tape's executive producer and the magazine's former editor. "I was thinking along the lines of doo-wop, rockabilly, or rare hits from the 1960s, something having to do with the magazine's collector's orientation."

Tamarkin heard an unreleased tape of a song by the Mosquitos, a Long Island group that often appears at Sparks in Huntington, played on WNYU-FM. He tracked down the band, and decided to make an album featuring the work of kindred groups devoted to exploring the innocent aggression of such 1960s garage group prototypes as the Seeds, the Shadows of Knight, the Count Five, Cannibal and the Headhunters and the Blues Magoos.

The name "garage bands" is probably derived from the rehearsal sites of many of these groups, whose creativity flowed freely as they rehearsed on cheap equipment in their parents' garages. Most of these groups idolized and tried to emulate English bands: Mick Jagger's snarl and the Yardbirds' guitar feedback were big influences.

But most garage bands lacked the competence to be good imitators. Instead, they came up with a mutant form. The sound was characterized by guitar feedback, dinky Farfisa organ chords, and hoarsely sung lyrics of suburban maladjustment. It later came to be seen as the cutting edge of psychedelic music — acid rock — and the precursor of punk rock.

Tamarkin, who grew up in Franklin Square, solicited tapes with ads in Goldmine and flyers distributed to 600 or so record stores around the country. He got more than 200 responses. "It had to be authentically '60s sounding," Tamarkin said. "If I heard anything with a synthesizer, a drum machine, a funk beat, or a reggae rhythm, it was out."

The 19 survivors on "Garage Sale" represent a worthwhile artistic and geographical cross-section. The Crickle, from Chicago, present the Beatle-derived side of garage rock with "Place in My Heart," "Paint Me in a Corner," by the Not Quite of Wethersfield, Conn., and "Spiders in My Sink," by the Fourgiven of Hollywood, touch upon the drug-induced paranoia that crept into many garage songs. In "Obnoxious Girls," the Addition, from Minneapolis, captures the contradictory impulses of desire and contempt for the opposite sex that typified the genre.

Three of the New York-area bands on the show and album — the Mosquitos, the Vipers, and the Fuzztones — represent the best of the garage sensibility. The Mosquitos seem to be the most poised. On "Darn Well," the Mosquitos' Vance Brescia main-



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tains a fine edge between sarcasm and disappointment, sustaining a skillful rasp as he emotes on a relationship gone sour.

The Fuzztones play with perhaps the same energy level. Their version of "Cinderella," a known nugget from the 1960s, pulls no punches: It sounds like a band from 1965 trying to imitate an uptempo Beatles song but turning it into a mess. "Nothing's From Today" is finely psychedelic depressiveness, while "Like Her" shows the influence of Ennio Morricone in both the droning harmonies and the snarl.

The Vipers recently released an album, "Outta the Nest" on the PVC label. Their version of "Borrowed Time" is true to the original: It sounds like a band from 1965 trying to imitate an uptempo Beatles song but turning it into a mess. "Nothing's From Today" is finely psychedelic depressiveness, while "Like Her" shows the influence of Ennio Morricone in both the droning harmonies and the snarl.

While the Vipers' "Who Dat?" show the most polished bands on the album, the most bizarre certainly has to be Brooklyn called Wildfang, the Ban Namee. A Hispanic family quartet, Wildfang's contribution is a song called "Like Ringo." The group's guitarist, Jorge Rivera, drummer and lead singer Benjamin Benjamin makes explicit the fantasy of garage and into the kind of ultimate drummer Ringo Starr and his cronies

During the first garage band era from 1965 to approximately 1969 — actually made it, or made it close. The band is heard on a new reissue called "Nu-

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