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The Hollywood Brats are the greatest band you've never heard of.

Recording one near-perfect punk album in 1974, they were tragically ahead of their time.

With only a guitar, a tatty copy of the Melody Maker and his template for the perfect band, Andrew Matheson set out, in 1971, to make musical history. His band, The Hollywood Brats, were pre-punk prophets – uncompromising, ultra-thin, wild, untameable and outrageous. But thrown into the crazy world of the 1970s London music scene, the Brats ultimately fell foul of the crooks and heavies that ran it and an industry that just wasn't ready for them.

Directly inspiring the London SS, the Clash, Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols, The Hollywood Brats imploded too soon to share the glory. Punk's answer to Withnail and I, Sick On You is a startling, funny and brilliantly entertaining period memoir about never quite achieving success, despite flying so close to greatness.

Sick On You: The Disastrous Story of Britain's Great Lost Punk Band Details

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From Reader Review Sick On You: The Disastrous Story of Britain's Great Lost Punk Band for online ebook

Steve Parcell says

I had a never heard of the band and amongst my wide circle of friends nor had they but this book intrigued me.

I am glad I read it though as the account of how they lurched from one disaster, fight, strange illness and affliction and madcap event was very funny.

I did feel genuinely sorry for them as well as they didn't seem to get the greatest of luck and then the management company who eventually showed them interest seemed to be linked to the Krays and the Mafia.

Very sad funny and entertaining.

Dr. Detroit says

I'm telling you, the things you can find on Amazon. No wonder their death march toward world domination continues unchallenged. Where else can you find discount socks, ab crunchers, Beer Nuts, and this book available at the click of a mouse?

The proto-glam Hollywood Brats were the music biz's answer to The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight, a mesmerizing crisis in hooker slap, a brash bunch of cross-dressing teenage troglodytes from the early 70's dripping with wrecked rock-star elegance who stripped rock 'n' roll of all hippie bullshit and then tried to ram it down the collective throat of a Great Britain banged to the gills on Yes, Jethro Tull, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, and facial hair (Christ save us all...). All great things begin with a dream.

Full disclosure. It's official. I want to be Andrew Matheson, aging hipster doofus but still the coolest guy in the room, armed with enough war stories to make your head swivel and enough Brit speak to leave you scrambling for a British-American translation reference.

"Sick On You" is damn near about the best music biz flashback I've ever come across and I've come across more than I'd care to admit. Matheson skips any lengthy backdrop about his family or childhood and hops right to 1971, pounding the pavement in search of the last real band in the world or absent that, one that can hoist a few pints down the pub and still remain upright on stage while swinging a 4/4 beat. And really, what else is there?

Along the way, the Hollywood Brats stare down an army of rats to a stalemate, nearly starve in a thousand and one dodgy flats and squats, get turfed out of bars, record companies, and one memorable Penthouse magazine bash, and take entirely too many lumps – both physical and verbal – from audiences, skinheads, and bikers. They used to call that "suffering for your art," but I've always had a problem with the whole concept of rock 'n' roll as art. I'm funny like that.

If this all sounds like a good time to you, here's the cherry on top:

"Just saw the Eagles. They are a California caricature. A band full of roadies, all hair, beards, and denim. The drummer's got a perm. They'll never get laid in London."

Cheers, Andrew.

Liz Estrada says

OK, this is the best bio I have ever read about the greatest band I've never heard of. Couldn't put it down and read it in 3 days. The Hollywood Brats might have made it big, but it seemed from the start that they were doomed to failure, not for lack of trying, but for many maligned events, inexperience and much naiveté on the part of the band, which put them in the arms of mob shysters who seemed to have taken full advantage of that fact.

Hilariously funny from the get go, Andrew Matheson, the wannabe lead singer of the Brats, seems to probably have more talent for the written word than the oral one. And for that reason alone I am almost happy they never made it, or this great "gonzo" book may never had seen the light of day either.

I was curious to hear the one album they managed to record and luckily found it on You Tube. A mix of early to mid 60's Stones with a bit of Kinks in the mix and a look and glam feel that could be compared to the New York Dolls (which they either hated or envied) gave them an interesting yet new sound. Were they the greatest band of all times? Definitely not, but definitely the greatest we never heard of. Either ahead of their time or always at the wrong place, with the wrong people at the wrong time.

The trials and tribulations of these young kids are almost too much! Living in squalid-squatlike conditions in early 70's London, with barely any food or hygiene would make many go mad and give up....but not these guys. Playing both at The Marquee and The Speakeasy, you would think they might have been discovered if they had better equipment and had true managers who were not indebted to the mobsters. (Side note: Keith Moon did tell them he thought they WERE the greatest fu**ing band, but was, of course, high as a kite, as usual).

One thing they did have was a lot of drive, determination and perseverance until the end. They could have been contenders under different circumstances...perhaps...or perhaps not.

This book is masterfully written and just laugh out loud funny and brought back many memories of my early 20's living a crazy like lifestyle with friends who also seemed to have not a care in the world and almost just as decadent a posture and look on life. Long Live the Pizza Rat....sorry, I meant Long Live the Hollywood Brats!!!

Nestor Rychtycky says

The Hollywood Brats were just a blip on the moribund music scene in the UK during the mid-1970s. They (barely) released one album in Norway that sold a few hundred copies and had broken up by the time it had come out. Yet they managed to crack the door open and start England on its way to the punk explosion which followed several years later.

Andrew Matheson was the singer and driving force behind the Hollywood Brats and this is his story. It is both hilarious and a tutorial on how not to make it in the music industry. The Hollywood Brats knew exactly what they wanted to do and how they wanted to sound and they succeeded in that regard. Unfortunately, the

rest of the world was not ready for them as it wasn't ready for the New York Dolls.

The book is impossible to put down – Andrews's comments about London, music in the 1970s, creating a band and life as a young musician are brilliant. Rock celebrities, such as Freddy Mercury and Keith Moon, pop in and out as the Brats hone their style, get a recording contract and eventually record an album. Through no fault of their own, the record is shelved and the company goes under. It looks like the story is done, but the record does get released eventually and gets a small audience which happens to include Mick Jones and Malcolm McLaren. Andrew considers this new opportunity but decides he's done so the Clash and Sex Pistols go their own way.

It's a great book to read – you will stop and just laugh and some of these adventures and feel bad that nobody took a chance on them. The Hollywood Brats album has been re-released and is great – especially the title song "Sick on You!" which was punk before there was punk.

Pete says

A comedy of errors. This is my favourite book about music for a long while. Had me laughing out loud in places. If you have any remote interest in music I'd highly recommend. They lived fast, and the beautiful corpse never really happened. The UK's New York Dolls. They coulda been contenders.

Aaron says

Snotty, sassy, loud--Matheson's autobiographical prose matches his band to a T. I was unfamiliar with the Hollywood Brats before reading this, but I came in with a solid interest in the glam rock scene that predated and cohabitated alongside their short existence (David Bowie and Mott the Hoople both appear in brief passing). What was most interesting, and what the book continually hints at until making explicitly clear in the much later chapters, is the relation to the development of the punk scene, where the Hollywood Brats were eventually seen as minor heroes, serving as inspiration to the Clash and others. The substance of the book largely revolves around the band's struggles to stay as drunk as possible while attaining the fame they so strongly believe they deserve; Matheson's self-deprecating arrogance is consistently hilarious, and more than the travails of living in a rat-infested flat next door to a hash-dealer, the real reason to keep reading is to spend time with this ridiculous heel as he does everything in his power to undermine his band's success. Included within: fistfights with other, (much) more famous bands; all manner of petty crime, especially theft; frequent urination upon the property of others; ridiculous puns at every turn (Matheson can't help himself); British mobsters lurking around the edges of the music industry; constant slagging of the popular recording artists of the time, many of whom we've largely forgotten; and perhaps some of my favorite bits involved Matheson and his bandmate Casino Steel's obsession with other artists. At one point they suddenly realize that Elvis was not always fat and terrible, and it hits like a revelation; suddenly they're obsessed. At another point, Matheson watches Cabaret four times in a row, completely agog, inspired to capture the feel of the stage design and lighting with his own band's stage show. It's in these moments where Matheson's passion for music and art and even his confrontational streak all coalesce; his enthusiasm is infectious and the pages fly by. Recommended to anyone interested in British rock and roll, debauchery, glam rock, bad manners, or the pre-history of punk rock.

Brian Rothbart says

This was a great, fun read. If you like reading about the music industry and bands etc. then I highly recommend this book. I have never heard of The Hollywood Brats and after reading this book I now know why. This is a great read of their misadventures. It will have you laughing out loud as you read it.

Catherine says

A run of the mill Behind the Music type story about a band that didn't make it but went through the same trajectory of personnel strife, substance abuse, and industry difficulties. I'm not familiar with the band's music (and clearly neither are most people) so I don't even have the music to justify the self involved behavior and excesses. I'm really glad this guy didn't make it as he is an arrogant prick. If you enjoy someone going on and nauseum about drinking til they puke or describing scantily clad birds who will do anything you want, then have at it.

Bob Schnell says

The title was correct, I had never heard of the Hollywood Brats until this book was recommended (thank you GoodReads). Now I not only know of them but have also downloaded their album. I almost wish there could be a reunion show, but some bands are best left to their recorded legacy.

The author, and lead singer, has written a highly entertaining biography of a British band with an American name that could have achieved the same acclaim as the New York Dolls, Alice Cooper or the Stooges. Except the only record deal they could get was in Norway where 563 copies were sold. In 1971 they were about 5 years ahead of their time and couldn't keep the act together long enough for the times to catch up with them. The story has all the classic rock and roll stories of squalid apartments, massive egos, debauchery and danger, bad business deals and organized crime. What really sets "Sick on You" apart is Andrew Matheson's storytelling. No page is complete without a reference to a song lyric or well known music legend. Even the parts that usually bore me in other music books (songwriting sessions, equipment wonkery, recording studio set-up) are presented in hilarious detail that kept me reading every sentence. Unexpected cameo appearances by Keith Moon, David Bowie and Freddie Mercury also add to the story instead of detracting from it.

Whether or not you like pre-punk, cross-dressing bands you are sure to like the story of this one. The Hollywood Brats are dead. Long live the Hollywood Brats!

Marti says

I had never heard of The Hollywood Brats but it doesn't really matter. This is probably the best band bio you will ever read. In 1970, an eighteen-year-old Andrew Matheson emigrated back to England from a mining town in Canada with only one goal: to do something about all the horrible music currently on the charts (things like "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep"). His template was simple, "Two guitars, a bass, drums, and singer, that's it. Think the Beatles, Kinks, and Who for four, Stones for five....and no facial hair." I am sure I said the same thing verbatim when I was in high school. Thus, if you are intensely knowledgeable about all things British and 1960s -- including the writings of Andrew Loog Oldham, a guru of sorts -- you are going to love this book for the constant references and name checks.

Of course, the story of how they got the band together -- and how they managed to stay together -- is hilarious. As much as you wish your favorite rock bands actually lived together like The Monkees, they didn't (except the The Small Faces and the early Rolling Stones). In fact, this reminds me of the Stones' Edith Grove period in that the Brats had no money and were forced to literally scrounge for sustenance in the most squalid conditions.

The other thing I was constantly reminded of is the film *Withnail and I*, if it were about musicians and not actors (and they did get to stay in Cliff Richards' house in the country to "rejuvenate."). Having downloaded the Brats album via Freegal, I actually think they had the look, attitude, and sound to have achieved, if not super stardom, at least universal recognition. Part of the problem was their kind of act came along too early and most of the audiences didn't get it (although the Stooges and New York Dolls were also around). But what killed them was a total lack of self control. Everytime something potentially life-changing came their way (an open invitation to the the Speakeasy nightclub, or the Penthouse Magazine Christmas Party), they would completely go overboard with drink, cause a ruckus, and get thrown out.

By that time, they were signed to Worldwide Management which gave them petty cash, bought them first-class equipment, paid for a nice apartment (which they wrecked), and booked them to record at Olympic Studios (home of their idols, the Stones). The downside? Worldwide was owned by a scary looking thug named Wilf who began his career in the service of the Kray twins. Also, as they found out too late, they did not have an actual record deal with the company. It was the job of Ken, their agent, to find them a deal somewhere else. Though he tried valiantly (he was one of the people who actually believed in the music), no other label in all of London would touch The Hollywood Brats with "a barge-pole."

I'm not spoiling anything, because the suspense of this book lies not in finding out whether they make it or not (because you know from the outset that they don't). The fun of this book is the writing and the situations the author finds himself in, not to mention the whole milieu of early '70's London which is captured brilliantly. This would make a great "double feature" read with *The Longest Cocktail Party* (the story of Apple Records written by their "House Hippie").

Rob Twinem says

Do you remember the 70's? Did you wear the tight loon pants? Did you have a silver shirt, or an afghan coat? Did you shake your elbows to tiger feet (that's right that's right I really love your tiger feet!) Did you wear a t rex feather boa, or glare like the leader of the glitter band? I did all of those and just like Andrew Matheson I played in a group, as an 18 year old, in the stormy shores of Northern Ireland. I could tell you stories about our band being chased over the border when we refused to play the "southern national anthem" (we actually did not know it!) or the night our band (Run of the Mill....have you heard of us?) continued to play when a fight broke out amongst the 200 party goers in attendance at the local Portadown Orange hall, or the evening our van broke down, coming home from a gig, and we were taken to the local police station (Banbridge) where my poor mother had to collect us at 6.00am and tow the van home!

But hold on I hear you say! this review is not about me!! Indeed you are correct but if you can understand and smile at the above then you will love "Sick on you" the story of the band "The Hollywood Brats" that should have made it before The Sex Pistols. The mid 70's musically was a time when the young were crying out for something radical to happen on the music scene. There were still many creative artists about; David Bowie, Alice Cooper, The Who etc but equally the charts were awash with forgettable trash....Puppy Love, (Donny Os)....Chirpy Chirpy Cheap Cheap (Middle of the Road) Me and you and a dog named boo (Lobo) and into this quagmire of unoriginality stepped The Sex Pistols a band that has been declared one of the most influential acts in the history of popular music having initiated the punk movement in the United Kingdom

and inspired many later punk and alternative rock musicians. Suddenly the young were dressing in torn clothes, spiked hair, inserting safety pins into body parts, and travelling to concerts where they could listen to a loud fast-moving and aggressive form of rock music. But this is nothing new I hear you say, teenagers have always rebelled...look at rockers and mods? That is certainly true but by the mid 70's a lethargic and somewhat inert music scene was presenting itself, and the time was ripe for anarchy and rebellion which The Sex Pistols, under the leadership of Malcolm McLaren, were more than happy to acknowledge and by doing so produced a generation of snaring, spitting, hostile youths openly welcoming such classics as "God save the Queen", "Anarchy in the UK" and "Pretty Vacant"and The Hollywood Brats missed it all....

So what went Wrong? Andrew Matheson does an excellent of recalling how his band originally named The Queen but had to change to The Brats when the other famous "Queen" threatened to sue if they did not relinquish the name..."up walks a guy with hair like black straw and teeth like a particularly alluring camel"....The Hollywood Brats were born and spent most of their time playing gigs trying to keep four musicians together whilst consuming copious amounts of alcohol and testing/sniffing the odd illegal substance. Unbelievably in the early days they were offered a record deal by Polydor but for reasons best known to themselves refused. I loved the way these four guys dressed in tight almost feminine attire and rarely were seen in public without full makeup (possibly some would say imitating The New York Dolls)...."but try doing it in a cocktail dress, platform soles and full makeup while sporting the odd swastika. See how far you get".... They certainly had writing and playing ability; if you listen to recent cd's released you will certainly feel the raw energy produced by such hypnotic titles as Tumble with Me, Sucking on Suzie and the unforgettably named Sick on You...."You and me are through I'm sick to death of everything you do And if I'm gonna have a puke you bet yer life I'll puke on you"

When they finally did successfully put together a record it was too little too late. The fact that it was released in Norway meant..."it went utterly unnoticed. There was no marketing budget. We didn't even know what marketing was. The record was never advertised. It was never reviewed in print. It was never played on the radio, It came and went, shyly, politely, anonymously, with a minimum of fuss".....

This was a really enjoyable read and what I particularly loved was that the author bore no malice to their lack of fame. Other groups such as The Damned The Sex Pistols and The Clash were knocking on the door pushing The Hollywood Brats into extinction until their present day emergence...and we the public can now appreciate the energy of a group and time long forgotten. In the words of the author...."I thought the Sex Pistols were sub-standard, derivative posers and I thought Malcolm McLaren was a weak-minded, possibly insane, Fantasist"....Wonderful stuff, read the book but more importantly listen to the music, the raw energy, audacity, no holds barred approach of a great 70's punk band...let's have a big hand for The Hollywood Brats!

Aja says

Words cannot explain how much I hated this book. Disclaimer, the white male entitlement is ripe for the taking. If there's one thing I can't stand it's dudes going on about everyone who wronged them ... but it's really atrocious coming from people with really questionable ethics. Like if you're a not nice person than all the ways you were wronged matter little to me. Like these dudes are assholes. Thieving. Disrespecting. Awful to women. Entitled. Smug. Holier-than-thou. Assholes. It is always a bad thing when you cheer when the protagonist gets their ass beat because most of the time, it was totally deserving. And also what the hell was the book editor doing? I mean I get the authenticity of the story but these days, we don't call asian people "oriental". Bad form. I mean I just really hated this book and found myself hate reading it after fifty pages. I can't believe I finished it but I believe I finished it just so I could say "I read that and I hated it". So yeah. Cannot not recommend enough. Upside: very funny story about stolen eels.

Malcolm Frawley says

I don't believe I have ever heard a Hollywood Brats track. But I saw a review of this book in Shindig magazine & it certainly looked like my type of read. It was. The 'true' adventures of a teenage Andrew Matheson & his partners in (music) crimes it illustrates how vital elements such as timing & luck are in the construction of a career in performing arts. Written with an acerbic sense of humour & a healthy dose of self-awareness Sick On You carries us through dingy, rat-infested, squats, recording studios ranging from threadbare to opulent, the revolving door through which bass players appear & disappear, how success is far from guaranteed when your album has only been released in Norway, & the rude awakening Matheson must undergo when he discovers the management contract he signed was with the Kray brothers who are still running their empire from inside Lewes Prison. By turns hilarious, shocking, disgusting, exhilarating & frustrating, Matheson's life (from the ages of 18-23) is told with a rollicking style that perfectly reflects what these aspiring young musicians must have gone through as they froze off their bollocks in London in the early 70s. One minor quibble, the jacket describes the Brats as "the greatest punk band you've never heard of". As previously stated I have never heard their music so they might well have sounded punk but the visuals were entirely glam. For any rock music fan, especially if you lived through, or revere (& the 2 are not mutually exclusive), the 1970s.

Marla says

My copy I got from First to Read website quit working so the first half that I read I found very interesting. I like learning the behind the scenes of the music world.

Nigeyb says

“Drummer wanted. Young, slim, must look, act & think like a star. No beards, no chrome-domes, no fatties”

..being an example of the regular adverts placed in Melody Maker by Andrew Matheson as members of The Hollywood Brats came and went.

The Hollywood Brats, as you may know, are a footnote of a footnote. Akin to an English version of the New York Dolls only with even less success and, let's face it, The Dolls were hardly breaking sales records during their all too brief lifespan.

The Hollywood Brats formed in the early 1970s and split up in 1974. Sick On You: The Disastrous Story of Britain's Great Lost Punk Band is singer Andrew Matheson's highly amusing account of their misadventures.

The popular narrative, with hindsight, is that the Brats were to influence the London punk scene of a few years hence, and that the world wasn't ready for their flamboyance and aggressive musical approach. I'm not so convinced however I am sure that, on their night, they were a lot of fun, and the song "Sick on You" is a bonafide proto-punk classic (and which Brats keyboard player Casino Steel took with him to his subsequent punk inspired band The Boys).

The book "Sick On You: The Disastrous Story of Britain's Great Lost Punk Band" contains many a puerile tale of teenage idiocy but most are also very amusing with Andrew often the butt of a lot of the incidents he relates.

Slade, the Sex Pistols, Chuck Berry, and many other fine artists get roundly slagged by Mr Matheson. It's hard to tell how serious he's being - probably not very, either that or his record collection is minuscule. I think it's probably all one big pose. Either way, he can pen an amusing anecdote, and these are frequently accompanied by a witty turn of phrase.

Curiously, one person who emerges rather well from this tale is Cliff Richard who, somewhat improbably, took pity on the band, having heard Andrew's description of their sordid lifestyle, and invited them to rehearse and take a break at his country house in Essex. Cliff was not around when they visited but was happy to give them free food and drink for a few days. This was the first time Andrew had ever encountered a duvet. Heady days. "I will really miss that duvet" he ruefully reflects at the conclusion to their stay.

The band's somewhat predictable failure makes for a riotously entertaining story - what happens when delusions of grandeur come face-to-face with public indifference. I have the impression Andrew Matheson has honed these tales over many years of telling them.

I devoured this book and could be heard chuckling regularly whilst agog at his complete idiocy and the appalling lifestyle he and his impoverished bandmates endured whilst trying to make headway in the early 1970s music business. The inability of The Hollywood Brats to get their debut album released anywhere but Norway, where it only sold around 500 copies, was enough to put Andrew Matheson off persisting with a career in music, and this despite, in 1975, Malcolm McLaren offering to manage him, and Mick Jones (later of The Clash) and Tony James (later of Generation X) also being desperate to form a band with him.

So, whilst the tale does not contain a happy ending, it makes for a funny, well written and engaging book about majestic failure and it's one that embraces gangsterism, the Krays, Bongo Herbert, bikers, teds, Keith Moon, Malcolm McLaren, the Speakeasy, and much more. It's a helluva ride.

4/5
