

## 15 Minutes Of Fame With 'We've Got A Fuzzbox And We're Gonna Use It'

By Michelle Duffy

Somewhere back in the early to mid Eighties, (no one exactly knows when) four dizzy school girls got together and decided to do something with their lives in Birmingham rather than be destined to grace the checkouts in their local Tesco's. Sisters Jo and Maggie Dunne (four years older) were eagerly learning to play lead guitar and bass respectively whilst Vickie Perks only had eyes for being a front lady with microphone in hand and petite, blonde Tina O'Neill, already had drumsticks in her tiny grip ready for her first lesson. Not really coming up with any great ideas for a band name, one of them came up with the idea of playing around with one of the instruments they were now rehearsing with. A 'Fuzzbox,' to describe it in its entirety, is a guitar pedal used to create a distorted sound. It was first used by Jimi Hendrix and was an essential item to create a surround sound of blurred or 'fuzzy' noises in rock music predominately. It also was and still is, a certain piece of equipment used by many punk groups around at the time to give the very essence to a punk rock sound. Thus 'We've Got A Fuzzbox And We're Gonna Use It' was born. Although with their brightly coloured rags and market off cuts image that was more Barbie than pure punk, they were appealing, but albeit out of date. Gracing the Indie charts was about as good as they could get in their early days. Too clean and well made up for anything along side The Slits, they took their place next to fellow extreme make up appliers, Strawberry Switchblade in the quest for pouts, powder, ribbons and vacant expressions. Now well equipped and fully all lessoned up on their respective instruments, they were ready to release their first single. Signing up for Vindaloo records (they were the first and the only label around willing to take a chance on the colour blind quartet) they released the AA sided record 'XX Sex/Rules And Regulations' in April 1986. It was Toni Basil's 'Mickey' all over again. It was racy, ever so girly and pumped up to the hilt with far too much bass, and certainly not enough glam to tame the record buying public. Their video promo was an embarrassing arrangement of flitty scenes of a derelict street and all the gravitating stunning shots of a kid brother on too much Tizer. The single itself, flopped at number 41 and failed to rise any higher, but it did take the number 1 spot in the Indie chart. With its squeaky chant 'There must be more to life' it seemed that Fuzzbox were going to have to pull something better out of the hat if they really wanted to keep away from the food isles. It is however, one of those tracks that since their readily acquired fame a couple of years later, that we sit back now and analysis for any deeper hidden meanings. 'XX Sex,' will just go down as a crap song. Their over usage of hollering and whooping screams certainly weren't going to put them down firmly in the punk hall of fame, but it seemed that for a brief moment, they managed to achieve something of a albeit, teddy boy retro feel with 'Rockin' With Rita.' Teaming up with mediocre 'where are they now,' fellow nerds from the same label, it's heavy Duane Eddy feel should certainly pull in the Seventies Teddy Boy ravers, even if they were all out of work Dads by now. Again, the timing was poor and yet again, it's a track that we look back on fondly and remember the days of fancying the bloke working the Dodgems at Blackpool. 'Love Is The Slug,' was actually their second charting single and took all the chic out of gurlies in white stilettos dancing around handbags reluctantly at some cheap disco on a Saturday night (probably in Kidderminster) It was pure Siouxi Sioux with its dull, draining vocals and lacked any real imagination. Yet it was typical of the time. It sounded dreary and almost to the point that the band were being held hostage whilst recording it. It wasn't until the bubble gum 'What's The Point,' that we felt a definite change in the way they were reflecting the music scene around them. Released in February 1987, it was time that punk image of on the way out and they made a point of starting to dull down their look without it being too much of a shock to the last remaining punk buyers. Strangely but this time, they were creating an alternative to the ever popular 'The Bangles', who were happily having a jolly good time in the middle of the road pop charts. Meanwhile, Fuzzbox were climbing the ranks through the Indie scene. Not an accomplishment by any all female set up until now. Surprisingly, this up beat, rockabilly track failed to do anything higher than number 51. Although they were Indie Queens, it was actually the commercial pop charts they were after. They knew by this time that it wasn't just their alternative, working class, struggling lyrics that would have to change. They couldn't sing about snogging at the disco, having a pint with the boys and doing the washing up anymore. The green netting had to go as well as the leggings and pink and blue hair. After coming to blows with the Vindaloo label, they switched to the U.K section of WEA for their next single, and 'International Rescue' was chart bound in February 1989 after a rather silent two year break. It was yet more apparent in this track that Fuzzbox had a definite humorous side. We had all be aware of their antics as their video performances up until now had always been a touch risqué and tongue in cheek. With this particular track, we see two of them dressed up as Thunderbirds along with villain played by Adrian Edmundson. All an incredible piss take but we wonder which is more the stronger, the pee out of Thunderbirds or themselves. Either way, the trick had worked, they had reached number 11 and were now well on their way to creating another angle to Eighties pop music. Already regulars on certain programmes such as The Tube on CH4 and (who could forget?) The Old Grey Whistle Test! They were certainly about to have their most explosive 15 minutes of fame. Still just as noisy, yet now all wearing the same colour, they appeared to be tamed somewhat, and only admitting to writhing about on the floor during video sessions and gigs. They were now even bigger, more glamorous and profession, miles away from their amateurish, badly styled yet energetic theme. The music was more rock now than Indie. It had edge, sex on legs and was beautifully aggressive. The Spice Girls were a bunch of cabbage patch kids in still in baby grows compared to Fuzzbox. These girls were certainly all for girl power. Instead of a cosy night in and perhaps a snog goodnight; Fuzzbox would have worn you out then chucked you out after ordering you to serve them breakfast in bed. 'Pink Sunshine,' followed and sat rather ecstatically at number 14 in May 1989. One thing that could be said for this band who were songwriters, producers and masters at their own mixing, they knew exactly how to control their market. Not throwing too many singles in all at once in a desperate attempt to win the crowd over, they would instead, sit back and observe carefully, delegating as to what to release first. This particular track, 'Pink Sunshine,' was, by their own personal standards a track that should be released during the summer. A track full of jollity and a real summer theme of bright sunshine and fun, they felt that it would have been a better hit if it had been released a month or two later. They were probably right, but we would never know. Perhaps their biggest track was their last noted single release although a couple more did follow. A swift, and also unaccredited solo by the legendary Brian May from Queen, 'Self,' was definitely Fuzzbox going out just as the album from whence this track came suggests, with a,

'Big Bang.' Angrily hogging number 24 in August 1989 it was the summer when all girls learned how to sneer successfully. It was meaningful as well as mean. We hated everything that moved whilst listening to this track. Men cowered in fear at a thousand young teenagers growling with the strength of a hundred PMT's. It was an awakening for both listeners and Fuzzbox themselves, but bitter resentments and disagreements between the label and the band members, meant that any further work was going to be limited. Notably the most poignantly titled, 'Walking On Thin Ice,' which was originally by Yoko Ono, was released somewhere around 1990 whilst the band went off on an epic tour of the far East. It was a desperate track not just in it's theme but it flopped dramatically and the bitterness became too much. The band decided to cut their losses and continue with the tour, despite an awareness that Vickie was hankering after a break to peruse a solo career. Something, even today, she is still trying to find. They returned home, recharged and fairly flat in their sense of the band's now iffy direction. Work on a new album was meant to take place, but reconciliations between the band and the label proved to be not worth it. From the unfinished 'Out Of This World,' album, a final single was released just at the point hat the band decided to split up. The significantly titled, 'Your Loss, My Gain,' heralded the second line of '..and you know things will never be the same again' seemed to be the band's swansong. It was time to jack the whole thing in and follow more personal plans. The enigma of Fuzzbox had come to a sad ending and quite literally, all four went their separate ways. Tina is now an Art teacher whilst sisters Mags and Jo have gone on to write for other artists as well as DJ ing on the underground scene. (Must be ever so tight manoeuvring turntables around on those escalators)

===== Looking back on this band, we wonder if it could have been possible for this band to have kept going. Leaving the scene on such a creative high, it always seems such a shame that band's depart company when to appears that they could have had so much more to say. We had watched Fuzzbox grow and we grew with them, from their messy, embarrassing and over coloured take on punk (almost an insult to true punk rockers) they were, only briefly mind, to punk what the Cheeky Girls were to pop music; petty much an insult, but they broke away, rather glamorously from all that and became the most sort after girly group in the late Eighties, if only for a couple of years - hence the idea that they had literally, 15 minutes of fame. With no real tuneful notes in their heads, they certainly had learnt to play their instruments well considering they couldn't play a note at first. They were so bad, it was genius. They looked awful, they couldn't sing and their arrangements were about as professional as the Mini Pops yet they still stick in our heads and the world of Indie pop is a very dull and uninteresting place without them even today. It has been 16 years since they had us reaching for either the remote for the volume button to go up or reaching for the kettle in the kitchen. An attempt to make a come back did appear once somewhere in 1998, but quickly fizzled out the same year. It was time to put the sequins and hairspray away and go back to listening to some dire 'Best Of 2006,' album instead. Somehow it doesn't have the same feel. Fuzzbox were and will always remain so as; Vickie Perks - vocals Tina O'Neill - drums Jo Dunne - lead guitar Maggie Dunne - bass guitar Albums to run out and elbow old ladies for; 'Big Bang,' 1989 'BBC Sessions,' 2002 'Look At The Hits On That!' 2004 [www.fuzzbox.tv](http://www.fuzzbox.tv). Vindaloo/WEA record labels ©Michelle Duffy (sam1942 on ciao and dooyoo) 2006

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Michelle is a freelance writer in the South of England and owner of the websites, <http://www.generationsounds.co.uk>, <http://nevermindthebloggers.bravehost.com> and their successful sister, 'Never Mind The Bloggers' at <http://paperback-writer29.tripod.com>. She has been writing over the two years, for five major consumer websites across the world and is one of the only two music category advisors for one website in the U.K. Her websites promote young, amateur and professional bands/artists/musicians and their fan clubs whilst also reviewing them for local and world wide promotion. She has also launched the blogs; 'The Ramblings Of An Old Rocker,' 'Bohemian Waffle,' 'The Rhythm Rock And Blues Machine,' 'The Moped's Musings,' 'Generation Sound Suite' and 'Rock Cocoon.' She is currently working on two shops selling her music styled artwork on cafepress.com. Article Source: [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Michelle\\_Duffy](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Michelle_Duffy)

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