

# Good Times®

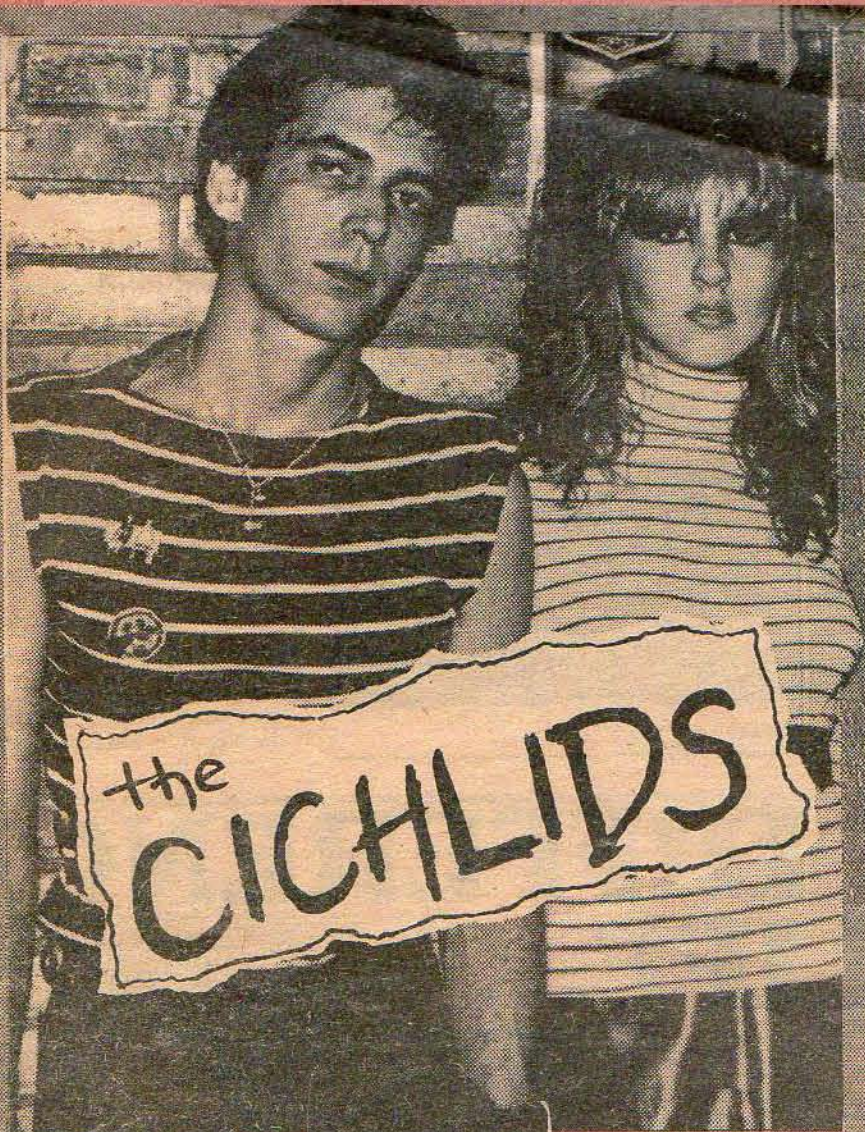
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the  
**CICHILIDS**

**Splashy  
Past And  
A Lot Of  
Future**

Page  
13





by John Robson

There's a very special way to see Miami  
the way the natives do  
See Miami like a native  
Do like the natives do  
See Miami like a native.

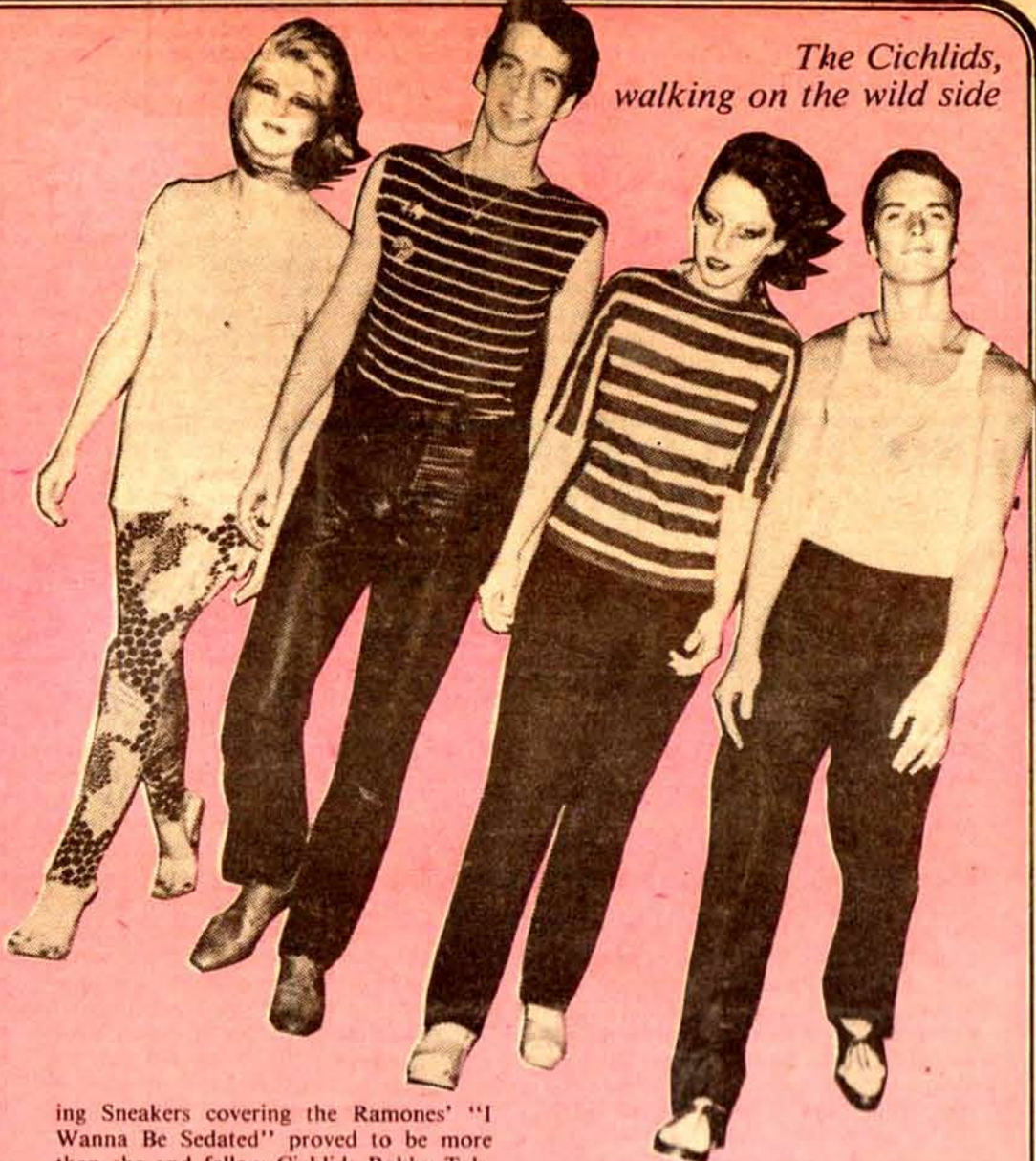
- Steve Karmen

That's right, suckers. Come on down and see Miami like a native. Bathe in your own funk in the glorious 90°, 90 percent weather. Take an exciting ride in the air-conditioned Colombian war wagon through the streets of Cuban town. Or best of all, slip into your Sears polyester leopard skin disco duds and beat it to the nearest all-night, guaranteed disco sin palace and be treated -- "Good God, Ethel, what the hell is going on around here?" -- to the sounds of a punk band singing "Tourists Are Pink."

Indeed! What is going on around here? South Florida appears to be entering a rock and roll renaissance, what with the recent opening of several new rock clubs, yet the only local band that's ever halfway hot finds that it gets its best reception in the dreaded land of the disco. That band would be the Cichlids and their story is worth the full treatment -- now! We certainly don't want *People* magazine to be the first place you read about this crew and if they're going anywhere, they'll be gone from the sunny South in a big hurry.

Ah yes, the Cichlids. A four-person punk unit. A band whose grisly history includes an amputee drummer, an exhibitionist former lead singer who can no longer cope, and a high energy manager who will let no obstacle stand in the way of the "greatest band in the world." Further, a band that claims to play "good feeling dance music" and opens its set with a little ditty called "Let's Go Menial" and segues that into a heartwarming "Somebody's Gonna Get Their Head Kicked in Tonight."

This is a band that's suited for the prevailing humors in the sweltering capitol of powder commerce where frenzied



The Cichlids,  
walking on the wild side

ing Sneakers covering the Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated" proved to be more than she and fellow Cichlids Bobby Tak, Allan Portman and Susan Robins could take sitting down. By the end of the first verse they had transformed the dance floor into a controlled war zone. Weaving and spinning through the tight know of relatively conventional dancers, bouncing off ran-

Basically, it was much ado about nothing, and "now she's up in Washington somewhere, trying to maintain," and may or may not be rounding up yet another crew of Cichlids.

Reconstructing the band led to some

## The Cichlids: White Punks on Disco

daytime nerves give way to uncontrolled stupors in the endless night. Stagger into the middle of a Cichlids set at 3 a.m. and there is a certain cohesion to the sight of a smoking Debbie Mascaro shrieking, "If you can't speak our language, don't say a goddamn thing." That comes in "Tourists Are Pink" or "Tourists Are Fuchsia" as they had it on their Independence Day Rollo's gig. Hey, that's just got to be big in the discos, where the Latinos will be able to chortle at the pink bozos from the Midwest who will be lured here by the "See it like a native" nonsense.

Let's not jump to any false conclusions, though. Debbie Mascaro is in fact a very sweet girl. A joy to talk to, calm and genuinely positive, she experiences something like a Jekyll-Hyde transformation when the band opens up. Bouncing, whirling, singing, then screaming, she becomes energy. So what if the lyrics tend to occasional hostility. The groupies don't seem to mind. And I don't mean the Punks. Sure, the Punks of Miami are starting to rally behind the Cichlids, but the groupies are those anonymous males who attach themselves to raging female performers. Debbie Harry has them by the score and now the same type is slowly filling in the corners at Cichlids gigs. They stare, they drink, they keep to themselves and the club managers love them.

Debbie's wildness is undeniably provocative. Fueled by the power of punk she can't limit her performance to Cichlids sets. At the Rollo's gig, the fever of the Scream-

dom bodies and lurching at high speed like pinballs on ibogain, they taught a whole new group of devotees the nature of true dance.

A week later at Tight Squeeze the stylings of a punk (nee dinosaur) band called The Eat kept them in their seats and we managed to get in a few words. There was a slight touch of bad karma in the air, something about the house sound man blowing the first set (really blowing it) but once that was taken care of we got down to business.

I was eager to learn about the sordid past that surrounds the band, while they, of course, were more concerned with the future. We compromised. "He wants to know about Kit," Debbie explained to bass player Susan, and then turned to me to address the first ticklish subject.

Kit Carson. The lead singer in the first incarnation of the Cichlids was one of those intelligent types who seem to get their springs wound too tightly. A sultry lass who won her place in the *Good Times* Hall of Fame by posing shirtless in the *Good Times* Florida office with a *Good Times* license plate as a necklace, Kit was given to erratic behavior. "She did it to cops, too," recalls Debbie. "One day we were stopped at a traffic light when a cop pulled up next to us. Kit leaned out the window, pulled up her shirt and screamed, 'Hey cop, look at these.'"

The problem with Kit Carson was that she thought she was the Cichlids. After the first breakup, she rounded up her own all-female crew and tried to co-opt the name.

strange turns on the home front as well. Manager Robert Mascaro (some relation to Debbie) produced a refugee from a disco band to handle the drumming. "He didn't even tell me she didn't have any legs," Debbie now says. "After the first rehearsal we were all sitting around drinking and she kept pacing back and forth. Finally I told her she ought to stay down before her legs fall off. I died when I found out."

Ultimately, though, the new drummer had to go back to disco. "Our beat was too intense for her. Her stumps would get really sore and tender and she just couldn't keep it up," Debbie sums up.

It was a good thing, too, for current drummer Bobby Tak serves as a solid anchor for the band. Announcing most of the Cichlids tunes, Tak is full of witticisms and euphemisms, all delivered in a tough-punk monotone. A Monkees tune is announced as "one by the Gorillas." "the Cichlids sell out" is the excuse for "Yummy, Yummy, Yummy" and somewhere in the show is a tune he credits to the Hullabalooos. The fact that he also kicks it out on drums and contributes well modulated backing vocals helps too.

The other male in this Equal Opportunity foursome is guitarist Allan Portman. Trading lead guitar duties with Debbie and singing occasional lead vocals, Portman adds a lot of range to the group. He's definitely not British, but close your eyes when he sings "Motorboat" and you'd swear that friend Peter Patrick of Z-Cars

Continued on page 19



## Cichlids

Continued from page 13

fame had joined the band for one song. He remains somewhat of a sleeper on stage, though. He just doesn't need to compete for the spotlight with Debbie and Suzy offering supremely attractive alternatives. Call it quiet competence in a punk band.

Susan, on the other hand, is a quiet dazzler. Where Debbie rocks and rolls and acts obscenely, Suzy poses. Garbed in leopard and prints and solids, nice tight things and loose flowing things, with slits and peekaboos and whatnot, she straps on a bass, puts on a defiant visage, sticks out one foot and plays. Sometimes motionless, save for her hands, through an entire song, she is the perfect counterpart to the totally animated Debbie. She's no slouch on bass, well worth looking at, and a holy terror on the dance floor when somebody else grabs the stage.

That's the onstage line-up, but there's a fifth Cichlid who seems to be the key to the whole charade. Manager Robert Mascaro is the perpetual man-in-motion, the type of man meant to succeed in either rock and roll or politics. His milieu is rock and roll, yet he reminds one strongly of Frank Mankiewicz, the wizard who masterminded McGovern's sweep to the Democratic nomination in 1972. Like Mankiewicz, Mascaro treats the eventual success of his band as a non-negotiable certainty. A brooding, intense individual, his most frequent question is "What's in it for the Cichlids?" Seemingly alone as far as management of South Florida bands go, he knows that things either happen fast or they don't happen at all. Claiming "all the kinks are already worked out, the band is ready," he refuses to suffer the constraints usually imposed on local talent.

"The Cichlids play only two sets a night. The sets are short, no more than thirty-five to forty minutes. The only cover tunes are ones we choose. The Cichlids can repeat songs in both sets. No more than two nights at any one

club in a row."

His strictures are rigid and most area groups would rather voluntarily go hungry than play hungry, but I have the feeling he's absolutely right. Take grief once and you'll take it forever. Club owners who want cover bands wind up with deadly boring morons on stage and whatever the Cichlids are, boring they aren't.

This aggressive posture has been communicated to the band. They refer to long-haired rock and rollers as "dinosaurs playing Led Zeppelin songs with different words" and insist they'll be leaving South Florida soon. Says Bobby Tak, "We've just gotta get out of here fast."

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

"British authorities announced they were compiling a mug list of known thugs and circulating to discos around the country."

- Zeta-4 News Broadcast, 1:45 a.m.

July 28, 1979

The news that the Bobbies are going after the hard-core disco killers - 24 disco murders in the last 18 months - explains in a sort of convoluted fashion why the Cichlids feel their market is lurking in the discos of America. Ignore for a moment the inanity of the music and excessive use of synthesized superficiality. The disco is the ultimate evolution of the Me Decade. Climbing into the night's costume and consuming yeoman qualities of the right drugs, the disco tripper is out to be his own star for the night. Such a person has no need for a dinosaur rock and roll band, but uh; the Cichlids are another thing entirely.

Thus the mad Mascaro plotted to send his charges out to capture the enemy. The first campaign was launched at PB's in Palm Beach. "It was two different worlds discovering each other," Debbie explains. "The people came thinking they knew what they were going to see. They were dressed in really expensive clothes that they had torn up and then put back together with safety pins. When they saw what we really looked like they didn't know how to react."

At least at first they didn't know what to do. "By the end of the night they were on their backs on the dance floor, just going crazy," chips in Bobby. Of course, there is only one factor that determines a group's success in a club. "They sold a lot of liquor," he adds, "so they want us back next week."

That's it. Get 'em loaded and they'll keep coming back for more. In fact, getting 'em loaded may be all that's necessary these days. The Cichlids' material is full of the kind of things you drink to forget. There's "Everybody's Going Red," "Planned Obsolescence," "Jewish Girls," and "Follow the Trend." There's always a market for a band that constantly reminds us what assholes we really are, and the Cichlids hurl indictments with the best of them.

For a band that's cranking out new material at the rate of about one song a week, the Cichlids shine on their bizarre collection of cover tunes. They bring a fine frenzy to Carole King's "Pleasant Valley Sunday," and get the laughs with "Yummy, Yummy, Yummy." Far and away their finest moment, though, comes on everybody's favorite Nancy Sinatra tune, the immortal "These Boots Are Made for Walking." Debbie discards her guitar for this one and completely cuts loose with a rendering Frank's daughter couldn't touch on her best day. The result is pure punk for now people. Even more surprising, and gratifying, is the fact that they aren't above covering a Fleetwood Mac tune. Of course, "Somebody's Gonna Get Their Head Kicked in Tonight" is not your average Fleetwood song, but the gesture is nice.

This idea is carefully chosen cover tunes says a lot about the Cichlids. Punks, especially those at the critical age of 21, as are all the Cichlids (Susan, 20, excepted), aren't supposed to have a sense of history, yet this band reaches all the way back to 1954 and Warren Smith for their killer closer, "Ubangi

Stomp." They aren't supposed to be especially witty either, but the inclusion of "Yummy, Yummy, Yummy" is a stroke of genius - it is a song that one automatically is supposed to hate, if only you could stop laughing. They are very simply a well thought-out, creative, fun band. Now that doesn't automatically guarantee success but it certainly helps. Add to that musical competence, aggressive management, and a new generation of clubs that aren't scared of bands playing their own material and things begin to look downright promising. Put the disco droids on top of that and, damn; call up E.F. Hutton and buy all the shares of Cichlids stock you can get your hands on.