

Siouxsie and the Banshees

Siouxsie and the Banshees were an English rock band formed in London in 1976 by vocalist Siouxsie Sioux and bass guitarist Steven Severin. Initially associated with the English punk rock scene, the band rapidly evolved to create "a form of post-punk discord full of daring rhythmic and sonic experimentation".^[1] *The Times* cited Siouxsie and the Banshees as "one of the most audacious and uncompromising musical adventurers of the post-punk era."

With the release of *Juju* in 1981, the group also became an important influence on the emerging gothic rock scene. They disbanded in 1996, with Siouxsie and drummer Budgie continuing to record music as The Creatures, a second band they had formed in the early 1980s. In 2004, Siouxsie began a solo career.

History

Formation (1976–1977)

Siouxsie Sioux and Steven Severin met at a Roxy Music concert in September 1975, at a time when glam rock had faded and there was nothing new coming through with which they could identify. From February 1976, Siouxsie, Severin and some friends began to follow an unsigned band, the Sex Pistols. Journalist Caroline Coon dubbed them the "Bromley Contingent", as most of them came from the Bromley region of Kent, a label Severin came to despise. "There was no such thing, it was just a bunch of people drawn together by the way they felt and they looked." They were all inspired by the Sex Pistols – from watching them, they realised that anyone could do it. When they learned that one of the bands scheduled to play the 100 Club Punk Festival, organised by Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren, pulled out from the bill at the last minute, Siouxsie suggested that she and Severin play, even though they had no band name or additional members. Two days later, the pair appeared at the festival held in London on 20 September 1976. With two borrowed musicians at their side, Marco Pirroni on guitars and John Simon Ritchie (already commonly known as Sid Vicious) on drums, their set consisted of a 20-minute improvisation based on "The Lord's Prayer".

While the band intended to split up after the gig, they were asked to play again. Two months later, Siouxsie and Severin recruited drummer Kenny Morris and guitarist Peter Fenton. After playing several gigs in early 1977, the band realised that Fenton did not fit in because he was "a real rock guitarist". John McKay finally took his place in July.

The Scream and Join Hands (1978–1979)

While the band sold out venues in London in early 1978,¹ they still had problems getting the right recording contract that could give them "complete artistic control".¹ Polydor finally offered this guarantee and signed them in June. Their first single, "Hong Kong Garden", featuring a xylophone motif, reached the Top Ten in the UK shortly after. In its review, the *NME* hailed it as "a bright, vivid narrative, something like snapshots from the window of a speeding Japanese train, power charged by the most original, intoxicating guitar playing I heard in a long, long time."

The band released their debut album, *The Scream*, in November 1978. Nick Kent of *NME* said of the record: "the band sounds like some unique hybrid of the Velvet Underground mated

with much of the ingenuity of *Tago Mago*-era Can, if any parallel can be drawn." At the end of the article, he added this remark: "Certainly, the traditional three-piece sound has never been used in a more unorthodox fashion with such stunning results."

The Banshees' second album, *Join Hands*, was released in 1979 and included a version of "The Lord's Prayer". In *Melody Maker*, Jon Savage described "Poppy Day" as "a short, powerful evocation of the Great War graveyards" and *Record Mirror* described the whole record as "a dangerous and volatile work". The Banshees embarked on a major tour to promote the album. A few dates into the tour in September, Morris and McKay left an in-store signing after an argument and quit the band. In need of replacements to fulfil tour dates, the Banshees' manager called drummer Budgie, formerly with The Slits, and asked him to audition. Budgie was hired, but Siouxsie and Severin had no success auditioning guitarists. Robert Smith of The Cure offered his services in case they couldn't find a guitarist (his group were already the support band on the tour), so the band held him to it after seeing too many "rock virtuosos". The tour resumed in September and after the last concert, Smith returned to The Cure.

Kaleidoscope, Juju and A Kiss in the Dreamhouse (1980–1982)

Drummer Budgie became a permanent member and the band entered the studios to record the single "Happy House" with guitarist John McGeoch, formerly of Magazine. Their third album, *Kaleidoscope*, released in 1980, saw the Banshees exploring new musical territories with the use of other instruments like synthesizers, sitars and drum machines. The group initially had a concept of making each song sound completely different, without regard to whether or not the material could be performed in concert. *Melody Maker* described the result as "a kaleidoscope of sound and imagery, new forms, and content, flashing before our eyes." *Kaleidoscope* was a commercial success, peaking at number 5 in the UK album chart. This line-up, featuring McGeoch on guitar, toured the United States for the first time in support of the album, playing their first shows in New York City in November 1980.

Siouxsie and the Banshees in 1981, left to right: Budgie, Siouxsie, Steven Severin and John McGeoch

For *Juju* (1981), the band had a different approach and practised the songs in concert first before recording them. *Juju*, according to Severin, became an unintentional concept album that "drew on darker elements". *Sounds* hailed it as "intriguing, intense, brooding and powerfully atmospheric." The album later peaked at number 7 in the UK album charts and became one of their biggest sellers. McGeoch's guitars contribution on *Juju* would be later named and praised by Johnny Marr of The Smiths

During the 1981 accompanying tour, Siouxsie and Budgie secretly became a couple. At the same time, they also began a side project called The Creatures, releasing their first EP, *Wild Things*.

The Banshees followed in 1982 with *A Kiss in the Dreamhouse*. The record, featuring strings on several numbers, was an intentional contrast to their previous work, with Severin later describing it as a "sexy album". The British press greeted it enthusiastically.¹ Richard Cook in the *NME* finished his review with this sentence: "I promise...this music will take your breath away." At that time, McGeoch was struggling with alcohol problems, and was hospitalised on his return to a promotional trip from Madrid. The band fired him shortly thereafter. Severin

asked Robert Smith to take over guitarist duties again; Smith accepted and rejoined the group in November 1982.

Hyæna, Tinderbox and Through the Looking Glass (1983–1987)

During 1983, the band members worked on several side projects; Siouxsie and Budgie composed the first Creatures album, *Feast*, while Severin and Smith recorded as The Glove. Smith then insisted on documenting his time with the Banshees, so the group released a cover version of The Beatles' "Dear Prudence" in September 1983; it became their biggest hit, reaching number 3 on the UK Singles Chart. They also captured a live album, *Nocturne*, and completed their sixth studio album, *Hyæna*. Shortly before its release in May 1984, Smith left the group, citing health issues due to an overloaded schedule, being in two bands at once.

Ex-Clock DVA guitarist John Valentine Carruthers replaced him. The Banshees then reworked four numbers of their repertoire with a section of strings for their *The Thorn* EP. The *NME* praised the project at its release: "The power of a classical orchestra is the perfect foil for the band's grindingly insistent sounds." The new Banshees line-up spent much of 1985 working on their new record, *Tinderbox*. The group finished the song "Cities in Dust" before the album, so they rushed its release as a single prior to their longest tour of the US *Tinderbox* was finally released in April 1986. *Sounds* magazine noted: "*Tinderbox* is a refreshing slant on the Banshees' disturbing perspective and restores their vivid shades to pop's pale palette." Due to the length of time spent working on *Tinderbox*, the group desired spontaneity and decided to record an album of cover songs, *Through the Looking Glass*, in 1987. *Mojo* magazine later praised their version of "Strange Fruit".^{[42][43]} After the album's release, the band realised Carruthers was not fitting in any more and decided to work on new material as a trio.

Peepshow (1988–1990)

Following a lengthy break, the band recruited keyboard player Martin McCarrick and guitarist Jon Klein. The quintet recorded *Peepshow* in 1988, with non-traditional rock instrumentation including cello and accordion. *Q* magazine praised the album in its five-star review: "*Peepshow* takes place in some distorted fairground of the mind where weird and wonderful shapes loom." The first single, "Peek-a-Boo" was seen by critics as a "brave move" with horns and dance elements. *Sounds* wrote: "The snare gets slapped, Siouxsie's voice meanders all around your head and it all comes magically together". "Peek-a-Boo" was their first real breakthrough in the United States. After a tour to promote the album, the band decided to take a break, with Siouxsie and Budgie recording a new Creatures album, *Boomerang* and Severin and McCarrick working on material together.

Superstition, The Rapture and break-up (1991–1999)

In 1991, Siouxsie and the Banshees returned with the single "Kiss Them for Me", mixing strings over a dance rhythm laced with exotica. The group collaborated with a yet-unknown Asian Tabla player Talvin Singh, who also sang during the bridge. The single received glowing reviews and later peaked in the *Billboard Hot 100* at number 23, allowing them to reach a new audience. The album *Superstition* followed shortly afterwards and the group toured the US as second headliners of the inaugural Lollapalooza tour. The following year, the Banshees were asked to compose "Face to Face" as a single for the film *Batman Returns*.^[50]

In 1993, the Banshees recorded new songs based on strings arrangements, but quickly stopped the sessions to play festivals abroad. On their return home, they hired former Velvet Underground member John Cale to produce the rest of the record. At its release, 1995's *The Rapture* was described by *Melody Maker* as "a fascinating, transcontinental journey through danger and exotica." A few weeks after its release, Polydor dropped the band from its roster and Klein was replaced on the band's last tour in 1995 by ex-Psychedelic Furs guitarist Knox Chandler. In April 1996, the band finally called it a day after 20 years spent together. Siouxsie and Budgie announced that they would carry on recording as The Creatures. In 1999, they released the album *Anima Animus* to critical acclaim.

2000s–present[edit]

In 2002, Universal Music inaugurated the band's remastered back catalogue by releasing *The Best of Siouxsie and the Banshees*. In April, Siouxsie, Severin, Budgie and Chandler reunited briefly for the Seven Year Itch tour, which spawned the *Seven Year Itch* live album and DVD in 2003.

The year after, *Downside Up*, a box-set that collected all of the band's B-sides and *The Thorn* EP, was released. *The Times* wrote in its review: "for here is a group that never filled B-sides with inferior, throwaway tracks. Rather they saw them as an outlet for some of their most radical and challenging work."

In 2006, the band's first four records were remastered and compiled with previously unreleased bonus tracks. Several recordings made for the John Peel radio show from 1978 to 1986 were also put together on *Voices on the Air: The Peel Sessions*. AllMusic described the first session as "a fiery statement of intent" and qualified the other performances as "excellent". The second batch of remasters, concerning the 1982–1986 era, came out in April 2009. It included four other re-issues (including their highly regarded *A Kiss in the Dreamhouse* from 1982). The *At the BBC* box set, containing a DVD with all of the band's UK live television performances and three CDs with in-concert recordings, was also released in June of the same year.

In April 2014, their debut single "Hong Kong Garden" was reissued on double seven-inch vinyl. It was announced that this would be part of a three-year plan with Universal. In late October, their last four studio albums, 1987's *Through the Looking Glass*, 1988's *Peepshow*, 1991's *Superstition*, and 1995's *The Rapture* were reissued in remastered versions with bonus tracks. The singer and her ex-bassist both conceived a cd called *It's a Wonderfull Life* for the monthly magazine *Mojo*, issued on 30 September with Siouxsie on the front cover. On this cd, the pair honoured several composers of film music and classical music that had inspired them.

In 2015, after releasing another compilation called *Spellbound: The Collection* including singles, album tracks and b-sides, the band reissued 1979's *Join Hands* on vinyl with a different artwork for Record Store Day.

Legacy and influence

Siouxsie and the Banshees have inspired many musicians of different genres.

The group have been cited by their peers. Morrissey said that "Siouxsie and the Banshees were excellent". "They were one of the great groups of the late 70s, early 80s". He also said in 1994, "If you study modern groups, those who gain press coverage and chart action, none of

them are as good as Siouxsie and the Banshees at full pelt. That's not dusty nostalgia, that's fact." Another ex-member of The Smiths, Johnny Marr, mentioned his liking for Banshees guitarist John McGeoch and his composition on "Spellbound". Marr qualified it as "clever" with "really good picky thing going on which is very un-rock'n'roll." U2 cited Siouxsie and the Banshees as a major influence and selected "Christine" for a *Mojo* compilation. The Edge was the presenter of an award given to Siouxsie at the *Mojo* ceremony in 2005.^{[68][69]} The Cure leader Robert Smith declared in 2003: "Siouxsie and the Banshees and Wire were the two bands I really admired. They meant something." He also pinpointed what the 1979 *Join Hands* tour brought him musically. "On stage that first night with the Banshees, I was blown away by how powerful I felt playing that kind of music. It was so different to what we were doing with The Cure. Before that, I'd wanted us to be like the Buzzcocks or Elvis Costello, the punk Beatles. Being a Banshee really changed my attitude to what I was doing." Dave Gahan of Depeche Mode hailed the single "Candyman" at its release: "This is a great Banshees record[...], I like their sound". Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth cited "Hong Kong Garden" in his top 25 all time favourite songs, and Kevin Shields of My Bloody Valentine also mentioned them in his early influences. Dave Navarro of Jane's Addiction once made a parallel between his band and the Banshees: "There are so many similar threads: melody, use of sound, attitude, sex-appeal. I always saw Jane's Addiction as the masculine Siouxsie and the Banshees."

The Banshees have been hailed by other acts. Radiohead cited John McGeoch-era Siouxsie records when mentioning the recording of the song "There There". Jim Reid of The Jesus and Mary Chain selected "Jigsaw Feeling" from *The Scream* amongst his favourite songs. Jeff Buckley, who took inspiration in several female voices, covered "Killing Time" on various occasions. Suede's singer Brett Anderson named *Juju* as one of his favourite records in 2011 and also cited three other albums by the band on his website, *The Scream*, *Kaleidoscope* and *Tinderbox*. Red Hot Chili Peppers performed "Christine" in concert and their guitarist John Frusciante cited the Banshees in interviews. Garbage singer Shirley Manson wrote in the foreword to Paytress' Banshees biography, "I learned how to sing listening to *The Scream* and *Kaleidoscope*. Today, I can see and hear the Banshees' influence all over the place." Siouxsie has also been praised by various female singers including PJ Harvey and Ana Matronic of Scissor Sisters. PJ Harvey selected Siouxsie's album *Anima Animus* in her top ten albums of year 1999. The band had a strong effect on two main trip hop acts. Tricky covered "Tattoo" to open his second album, *Nearly God*; the 1983's proto trip-hop version of that song helped Tricky in the creation of his style. Another group of Bristol, Massive Attack, sampled "Metal Postcard" on the song "Superpredators", recorded prior to their *Mezzanine* album.

The Banshees continue to influence younger musicians. Singer James Murphy was marked by certain Banshees albums during his childhood. His band LCD Soundsystem covered "Slowdive" as a B-side to the single "Disco Infiltrator". The Beta Band sampled "Painted Bird" on their track "Liquid Bird" from the *Heroes to Zeros* album. TV on the Radio said they have always tried to make a song that begins like "Kiss Them for Me" where all of a sudden, there's an "element of surprise" with "a giant drum coming in". Electronica singer Santigold based one of her songs on the music of "Red Light". "My Superman' is an interpolation of 'Red Light,'" she explained. Lo-fi songwriter Jeremy Jay covered "Lunar Camel" on his *Airwalker* EP and he cited the band amongst his main influence. Indie folk group DeVotchKa covered the ballad "The Last Beat of My Heart" on the suggestion of Arcade Fire singer Win Butler; it was released on the *Curse Your Little Heart* EP. Gossip named the Banshees as one of their major influences during the promotion of their single "Heavy Cross". British indie band Bloc Party took inspiration from "Peek-a-Boo" and their singer Kele Okereke stated about that Banshees' single: "it sounded like nothing else on this planet. This is just a pop

song that they put out in the middle of their career that nobody knows about, but to me it sounded like the most current but most futuristic bit of guitar-pop music I've heard." The Weeknd sampled different parts of "Happy House" for his song "House of Balloons", and also used the chorus of the initial version