

The DEEP End

Classic players. Vintage gear.

Bass über Alles The punk bass legacy of Dead Kennedys' Klaus Flouride

By Chris Gill

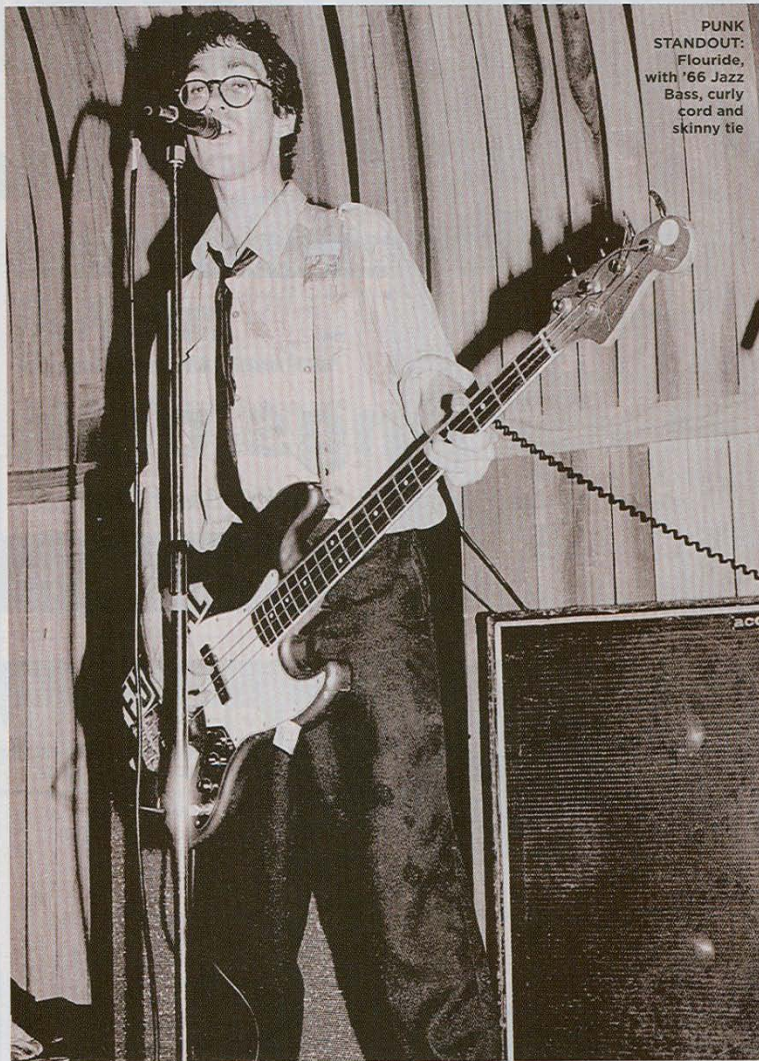
ALTHOUGH PLENTY of American punk bands preceded Dead Kennedys, these San Francisco-based punks—by virtue of their name alone—were the first U.S.-bred group to rival the Sex Pistols' shock appeal. Raising a stiff middle finger to increasingly defined notions of punk rock music, Dead Kennedys defied the status quo with their crude, raw production, fast, frantic playing and biting, satirical social commentary. Shortly after they started shaking up the punk scene in 1978, the term "hardcore" no longer remained the porno industry's exclusive property.

Whereas most early punk bands churned out three-chord rock or coopted heavy metal riffs, Dead Kennedys—singer Jello Biafra, guitarist East Bay Ray, bassist Klaus Flouride and drummer Ted—concocted a strange and unlikely combination of surf rock, pop and psychedelia on their 1980 debut album, *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*. Their songs exhibited a sophisticated sense of melody, employing tempo shifts, bridges and key changes.

Flouride's descending half steps against a root pedal note on the intro to "Holiday in Cambodia," his Phrygian-flavored lines on "California über Alles" and his manic riffing on "Too Drunk to Fuck" remain some of the most memorable and definitive hardcore punk bass parts.

"In a way it was pop logic, but melody and aggressive music don't necessarily have to be mutually exclusive," says Flouride (born Geoffrey Lyall). "The Dead Kennedys sounded unlike other punk bands because we all had extremely different influences. I had a collection of 78s—things like Thirties Duke Ellington—but I also liked Devo and the Ramones. Biafra brought in things like Hawkwind and experimental music. Ray was into more rootsy stuff, like rockabilly and blues."

Flouride played fast melodic lines that often provided a counterpoint to the trippy textures of East Bay Ray's heavily Echoplexed guitar. "I wanted my sound to really cut through," explains Flouride, who credits his background as a guitarist and clarinet player for his melodic approach. "I wasn't happy just holding down the bottom end. I wanted the bass to stand out on its own as an instrument. In retrospect, I was playing a lot of lead bass, and the parts were busy and complicated, although they weren't exactly Jaco Pastorius. I'm left-handed but play right-handed, so I can do a lot of things on the neck that are difficult for most players."



PUNK STANDOUT: Flouride, with '66 Jazz Bass, curly cord and skinny tie

Flouride still plays the '66 Fender Jazz Bass he's used since the beginning of Dead Kennedys, although these days he also uses a six-string Fender Bass VI. His DK amp was a Traynor Mono Block B, which he also still owns. "All of my controls, except for the volume, were flooded," he says. "Once in a while I'd use a booster pedal to make absolutely sure things cut through."

Dead Kennedys broke up in 1987 after successfully battling obscenity charges for

distributing a poster of H.R. Giger's illustration *Landscape #XX* with their 1985 album, *Frankenchrist*. Ironically, a drawn-out lawsuit filed against Biafra by

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Flouride, Ray and drummer D.H. Peligro for unpaid royalties recently brought the band together again (albeit sans Biafra). In January of this year, the band released *Live at the Deaf Club* (Manifesto), which features an entire live set from 1979, showcasing Dead Kennedys in all their raw and gritty glory. ■

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