



Pere Ubu Biography

Pere Ubu was formed as a studio project that drew on a body of musicians who were involved in a Cleveland underground music scene that by August 1975 seemed to have run its course. The object was to document the work done and then go away. Within months, however, their first two self-produced singles were being snapped up in London, Paris, Manchester, New York and Minneapolis. Pere Ubu was about to change the face of rock music. For over 32 years they've defined the art of cult; refined the voice of the outsider; and influenced the likes of Joy Division, Pixies, Husker Du, Henry Rollins, REM, the Sisters of Mercy, Thomas Dolby, Bauhaus, Julian Cope and countless others.



Pere Ubu

Pere Ubu make a music that is a disorienting mix of midwestern groove rock, "found" sound, analog synthesizers, falling-apart song structures and careening vocals. It is a mix that has mesmerized critics, musicians and fans for decades.

Singer [David Thomas](#) named the band after the protagonist of Ubu Roi, a play by Frenchman Alfred Jarry. The single, "30 Seconds Over Tokyo" b/w "Heart of Darkness," released in 1975, was the first of four independent releases on [Hearpen](#) Records and, along with Television's "Little Johnny Jewel," signaled the beginning of the New Wave. In the early to mid-70s the musicians who were to form Pere Ubu were part of a fertile rock scene that also produced [15-60-75](#), Mirrors, The Electric Eels, [Rocket From The Tombs](#), Tin Huey, Styrene Money and Devo.

The group's first album, [The Modern Dance](#), sold only 15,000 copies initially but it was a startling work that influenced an entire generation of bands. Its follow-up, [Dub Housing](#), was the masterpiece, "an incomparable work of American genius." Pere Ubu toured Europe extensively in 1978, supported by the likes of The Pop Group, Nico, Human League, The Soft Boys and Red Crayola. Late in 1979 [Tom Herman](#) left and was replaced by Mayo Thompson, the guitarist from 60's Texas psychedelic-rock legends The Red Krayola. [The Art Of Walking](#) followed, a challenging stew of inside-out song structures. Anton Fier (The Feelies, Peter Laughner's Friction, The Golden Palominos) replaced Scott Krauss in the middle of 1981 and recorded [Song Of The Bailing Man](#). At the end of an American tour in December 1981, and after months of growing friction between two members of the group, the band was allowed to disintegrate as a functioning unit.

In 1981, Thomas recorded the first of two albums with British folk-rock guitarist Richard Thompson. Three more solo albums featured members of the dormant Ubu. The last of these, 1987's Ubu-like [Blame The Messenger](#) (by David Thomas and the Wooden Birds), led to the reanimation of the Pere Ubu projex. The line-up had been Thomas, Allen Ravenstine, Tony Maimone, [Chris Cutler](#) and [Jim Jones](#). Jones was a stalwart on the Cleveland scene and a member of nearly every good band to come from it, at one time or another. Cutler, drummer in English prog-rock outfits Henry Cow and Art Bears, was an early



advocate of Ubu and subsequently became a friend of the band. At a Wooden Birds appearance in Cleveland, Krauss sat in with the band. The two drummers line-up sounded good. Later, at the beginning of a European tour, in the lobby of a hotel in Ijmuiden, Holland, Pere Ubu was reactivated. Krauss was asked to join as a second drummer. The clattering [Tenement Year](#), recorded for a British label (Fontana) headed by Ubu fanatic Dave Bates, followed in March 1988.

Teamed with another Ubu fan, producer Stephen Hague (Pet Shop Boys, New Order), Ubu shifted gears for 1989's [Cloudland](#), an epic journey across the landscape of America. Tired of touring and the grind of it all, Ravenstine retired to take up a career as an airline pilot for Northwest Airlines. He was replaced by Eric Drew Feldman (Captain Beefheart, Snakefinger) who appeared on Stereo Review's Record of The Year, [Worlds In Collision](#), produced by Gil Norton (The Pixies). Cutler, unable to juggle all the demands of his many musical projects, had to leave. The Pixies invited Ubu to support them on an extensive tour of America in 1991. Feldman, subsequently, joined The Pixies as a sideman and worked on Frank Black's solo projects. When Feldman was unable to record with Ubu because of these commitments the band decided to record what would be the last Fontana album, [Story Of My Life](#) (January 1993), as a four-piece.

Garo Yellin, playing an electrified cello, and veteran of The Ordinaires and several of Thomas' solo projects, was recruited to fill the "synthesizer" slot. They Might Be Giants invited Ubu to support them on a tour of America in 1993. Subsequently, Maimone left to work in the They Might Be Giants band. He was replaced by [Michele Temple](#) who had previously replaced him in the Jones / Krauss 80s side project, [Home & Garden](#).

In January 1994, again without a major label, the band recorded demos for a projected album, *Songs From The Lost LP*, intended to be a tribute to Smile. Krauss left... again. Yellin, busy with his quartet in NYC, was replaced by [Robert Wheeler](#), organic farmer, Ravenstine-protégé, and president of the Thomas Alva Edison Birthplace Foundation. Thomas announced that he was now ready to become the producer for Pere Ubu and that was what he was going to do. [Raygun Suitcase](#), awarded CD Review's Editors' Choice Award for 1995, was recorded to a click track in the hope that Krauss would change his mind. When he didn't, Scott Benedict, the drummer in Temple's group, The Vivians, came in over a weekend, the last weekend of production, and recorded all the drum parts in one of the most magnificent displays of studio-craft the band had ever experienced. The next week he retired to take up landscape gardening. [Steve Mehlman](#), Benedict's replacement in The Vivians, replaced him in Ubu.

In August 1995 Jones retired from the road for health reasons. Herman rejoined the group for the Raygun Suitcase tours, and together with Jim Jones recorded 1998's [Pennsylvania](#), a highly acclaimed album nominated by one of America's preeminent rock critics, Greil Marcus, as the best of 1998. In 1999 the Rock n Roll Hall of Fame promoted a special event, "55 Years of Pain," honoring Pere Ubu and the grand-daddies of the Cleveland scene, 15-60-75. The event was repeated at the Royal Festival Hall in London later in the year, and at the "Fall of The Magnetic Empire Festival," curated by Thomas and staged at NYC's Knitting Factory, and during which Wayne Kramer of the MC5 joined the group as guitarist for one show.

In 2002 the release of [St Arkansas](#) was celebrated by The Mighty Road Tour. A "splinter" group within the band, referred to as The Pere Ubu Film Group, premiered a live underscore to a rare 3-D screening of Ray Bradbury's ["It Came From Outer Space"](#) at the Royal

Festival Hall, London, in October 2002. A highly successful 6-date tour of the UK followed in November 2004. The group premiered its underscore to Roger Corman's "[X, the Man With X-Ray Eyes](#)" at Celebrate Brooklyn in 2004.

Having spent the last decade perfecting his "hyper-naturalistic" recording methods Thomas produced one of the group's seminal releases, [Why I Hate Women](#), in 2006. It was recorded, for the most part, without microphones.

Press Center: <http://www.ubuprojex.net/resources>

Why I Hate Women: <http://www.ubuprojex.net/wihw.html>

PRESS QUOTES

Rock & Folk (France), Oct 2006, wrote concerning Why I Hate Women:

"A black and incandescent jewel and without question a peak of the ubuesque oeuvre. A wonder."

030 (Berlin), Sept 2006, wrote concerning Why I Hate Women:

"Still crafting songs that will last for another 30 years."

Tom Ridge, in The Wire, Oct 2006, wrote concerning Why I Hate Women:

"Why I Hate Women is a bold reclamation of the group's status as a rock band...It's an impressive re-statement of everything that made Pere Ubu important in the first place."

Andy Gill, in the New Musical Express, wrote,

Yet by 1978 they had achieved what no other group would even attempt, before or since, they had become the world's only expressionist Rock 'n' Roll band, harnessing a range of rock and musique concrete elements together in a sound which drew its power from, and worked on, levels of consciousness previously untouched by popular music. The music Ubu made in 1978 was heart and soul, body and mind, in one.

Ian Penman, also in the NME, wrote:

It is obvious that (the history of) Pere Ubu should not be thought of in terms of a linear development - reducing its entire operation and presence to an exclusive concern for 'working and succeeding in' rock and roll. Unfortunately, most criticism - of Pere Ubu, of many other folks - assumes that words have one meaning, that desires point in a single direction, that ideas are logical; it ignores the fact that the world of language, noise and desire is one of lack, insecurity, interruption, struggle, blundering, disguises, ploys, embarrassed grins.

Greil Marcus, in the 2000 edition of his book Mystery Train, wrote:

Pere Ubu boards a train that passes through a modern nation as if it were an ancient land, all ruin and portent, prophecy and decay. Thus the terrain makes the familiar terrain strange, unseen - new.

Robert Palmer, in the New York Times, wrote:

Pere Ubu was either ahead of its time or out of step altogether; the band's earliest music sounds as if it could have been recorded yesterday, and is likely to keep sounding that way for some time.

Joe Cushley, in Mojo, wrote:

Ubu are generally regarded as the missing link between the Velvets and punk. From the beginning they obviously understood the nuts and bolts of popular music, and then loosened them.

Edwin Pouncey, in The Wire, wrote:

They're the greatest out-rock 'n' roll group of this millennium, and probably the next.