

GROUP PUSHES NONSEXIST ROCK

WICKIE STAMPS

"If I can't dance . . . I don't want to be a part of your revolution." Emma Goldman, 1869-1940.

Feminism is rocking and rolling in Boston. No, it's not a band. "Rock Against Sexism is a collective of antisexist, cultural activists," asserts Mary Ann Peacott, often called the "Grand Dame" of Rock Against Sexism (RAS).

Since its inception, RAS has had a heady agenda. Engaging in a frontal assault against the sexism, racism and homophobia that wails out of the rock and roll industry and its stars, RAS is also a vehicle for exposing the public to non-and-antisexist ideas, lyrics and music. "People can see that all rock and roll isn't sexist and homophobic . . ." asserts Tess DeCosta, RAS member. What's more, they have fun while they fight the patriarchy.

Rock Against Sexism has its fingers in many pots. In the past eight years, they've

organized multimedia performances, boycotted sexist record labels and bombarded racist, sexist and homophobic radio stations with letters and phone calls. Graffiti art is the strong suit of some members who hit the streets spray painting artful political messages that protest controversial rape cases, question authority or mock the Right. "Anyone can fight patriarchy, just do a little bit of graffiti art," quipped rocker Liz Nania.

Creating Access to Performance

Thanks to their "women only jams" women, traditionally shut out of mainstream rock and roll, no longer have to stand at home in front of a mirror pretending to be rock stars. With RAS, they can twang guitars at mega decibels, belt out raunchy, rowdy lyrics and, like many RASers, perhaps join a band. Crash courses, held periodically, open up the technological end of rock to women. "We are committed to creating access for women to music, performance . . . and technology," says Nania.

A monthly tea dance is a focus of RAS organizing. People are greeted at the door with flyers on upcoming political actions or handed an RAS playlist, which is a compilation of political/nonsexist rock and roll groups. Held at a local gay bar, the occasion draws people of varying race, class, age and sexual orientations. Patrons shake, rattle and roll—or slam dance—to hip, nonsexist groups with names like the Mydols, Toxic Shock or Bite Like a Kitty. Income from the dances fills the coffers of local rape crisis coalitions, gay rights initiatives or AIDS programs. While attendees gyrate, videos, such as "Warm Leatherettes," composed by RAS supporter Elizabeth Carney, (and full of RAS members) splash across the dance floor walls. At a recent RAS "Dry T Shirt Contest," that mocked "wet T shirt" competitions, RAS members peddled hand-made T shirts with icons from divergent arenas: Marilyn Monroe, Pattie Smith and Nelson Mandela.

RAS also publishes a "fanzine," a form of publication common to rockers. "The RAS fanzine is our written form of communication . . ." says Nania. A decoupage of graphics and graffiti, the contents are full of the heated controversies in rock and progressive movements, such as censorship or, as in the upcoming issues, the sexist antics of the rock group Guns and Roses.

Child of Punk

RAS is a child of the English 70s punk scene, a subset of rock and roll. The first meeting of RAS Boston was sparked when a woman, who was exposed to a similar group in England, wrote an article in Gay Community News, a Boston based paper. Mary Ann Peacott, one of the original RAS members, connected with this woman through the article. "In the article, she talked about being a lesbian feminist who was also into rock and roll and punk . . . although it was a dichotomy for her . . . this punk sound was political, brass and exciting . . . a 'do it yourself music' that

put her politics and her aesthetics together," says Peacott.

Anarchist Feminism

While many RASers dodge political labels, anarchistic chords reverberate throughout the collective. What's the connection? "Rock and roll has always been about rebellion . . . by its very nature it's anarchic . . . no rules, no tradition, anybody can do it. I also think anarchy, as a theory, has a lot of room in it for culture . . . unlike other groups, RAS takes culture, anarchy and anarchic tactics such as direct action, graffiti and street theater seriously . . ." mused RAS member Stuart. "Anarchy is also connected to punk . . . it was a big buzzword," says Katy.

RAS is fully dedicated to a feminist ethos. "There is a definite connection between RAS and the women's movement . . . a lot of the initial RAS members are feminist . . . RAS provides a cultural connection that other aspects of the women's movement don't always bridge," explains Peacott. She continues, "There is an anarchist-feminist analysis of culture behind RAS . . . a belief that popular culture shouldn't be elitist and that it has a responsibility to break stereotypes. Anarchy addresses non-hierarchical cooperation and assumes that people, left to their individual responsibilities, will make things work . . . if you add a feminist analysis to these anarchistic assumptions . . . that gender is the first dividing line between humans and that patriarchy is the dominant power . . . you get anarchist feminism."

RAS is a patchwork of politics, an outpost in the unlikely frontier of rock and roll. "We at RAS are more than any one thing. . . punk, anarchy, folk. . . or just a fun bunch of girls. . . we are unique. . . sort of like a musical polyglot." says Katy. What a way to have fun.

RAS is located in the basement of 464 Harrison Ave., Boston, MA.

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Naomi Rubin

ROCK AGAINST SEXISM