

New Wave icons Plastics plan summer gigs

By FELICITY HUGHES

Special to The Japan Times

For artists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, New York was definitely where it was at and Japanese band the Plastics were among those who found themselves right at the heart of that heady scene.

Instrumental in shaping the distinctive New Wave sound of that era, they influenced bands such as Devo and The B-52's with their spiky, cartoonish sound and cutting-edge visual style. Thirty-five years since the band debuted, The Japan Times met up with guitarist and vocalist Hajime Tachibana in a fashionable Marunouchi coffee shop, prior to a string of live dates to celebrate that landmark.



Familiar feeling: Plastics vocalist and guitarist Hajime Tachibana says he appreciates bands that take from the past but create something new. FELICITY HUGHES PHOTO

"Our contemporaries on the scene were people like Basquiat, Blondie, James White and The Lounge Lizards. There were so many kinds of artists and Plastics was a part of that. We got to meet so many interesting people," says Tachibana, pausing to take a sip of lemonade while pondering his next phrase. In his 50s, Tachibana is still rake thin and dangerously hip, though he has shed the jangly nervous energy of his youth.

"There wasn't that kind of scene in Tokyo at that time, so Plastics went to New York. . . . After World War II, in Japan, to modernize meant to Westernize, Americanize. But that's changed a lot since the '80s. Before that with music, the genuine article was The Beatles or the Stones, Bob Dylan. The genuine article was foreign."

The Plastics wanted to lead trends and not follow them, and Tachibana feels that musicians today ought to attempt to do the same.

"The good point about the Plastics was that people could see we had a unique fashion style and sound. And from looking at us and listening to us, you could tell our way of thinking," he says. "For example, with bands like the Sex Pistols, if you only look at their fashion or listen to their music separately, you can't understand them. The Pistols have been going for around half a century and there are still bands around that resemble the Pistols but the bands that really understand the Pistols are making new punk music. It's the same with the Plastics, it's great if you like our music but if you just blindly copy our fashion or music style you won't really be able to understand our way of thinking."

Tachibana says he's proud of modern Japanese artists who are influenced by the Plastics sound and style, but break the mold, "Bands like Polysics and Pizzicato Five manage to keep going by embracing that way of thinking. Making their own new style: new fashion and new music."

The visual side of the band was as important to the Plastics as the music: While Tachibana wrote the songs, lyricist, vocalist and guitarist Toshio Nakanishi (TYCOON To\$h) and vocalist Chika Sato created the band's distinctive look. Sato is now a successful stylist but unfortunately, as she now lives in London, she is unable to perform at the reunion gig.

"We invited her, but she couldn't take part this time," says Tachibana who insists there is no ill feeling. "We split up because of a difference of opinion, but it was only because of musical differences. We've always been friends."

So what can fans expect from the live dates? Although the songs will be familiar, Tachibana promises more of a "hardcore feeling. . . . The New Wave sound of the Plastics has changed a bit into a rock show with a little bit of performance thrown in."

The band plans to release a live album in October or November from recordings made at the gigs. Anyone who is expecting a dull retread of the band's old hits is underestimating just how malleable the Plastics still are.

Plastics play Osaka Noon (noon-web.com) on May 9, tickets cost ¥3,500 (¥4,000 at the door); Daikanyama Unit (unit-tokyo.com) on May 15, tickets cost ¥4,000 (¥4,500 at the door). Plastics will play a number of live dates throughout the summer.

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