



Janette Beckman. LL Cool J NYC. 1985. Courtesy of the photographer.

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK PRESENTS *NEW YORK, NEW MUSIC: 1980-1986*
New Exhibition Examines the Seismic Creative Revolution of New York City in the 1980s

Featuring Moments with Madonna, MTV, Run DMC, Talking Heads, Keith Haring and DJ Larry Levan, Sonic Youth, Joey Arias, Funky 4+1, John Zorn, Liquid Liquid, Max Roach, Fort Apache Band, and more

Opens June 11th

Media Preview: June 9, 10AM-12PM

NEW YORK, NY (May 2021) -**Museum of the City of New York**, the city’s storyteller for almost 100 years, today shared details for ***New York, New Music: 1980-1986***, a new exhibition that revisits the music scene of early 1980s New York City. The exhibition examines this transformative era through the lens of emerging pivotal music genres and the influence they played on New York’s broader cultural landscape. **Opening on June 11**, in advance of **MTV’s 40th anniversary** in August, the exhibition highlights diverse musical artists—from **Run DMC** to the **Talking Heads**, from **Madonna** to **John Zorn**— to explore the broader music and cultural scene, including the innovative media outlets, venues, fashion, and visual arts centered in the city during that time.

“The early 1980s were a time of significant transition in New York, with the city facing crime, urban decay, and homelessness. And yet, despite those challenges, it was also a particularly fertile time for music and other creativity in New York City,” says **Whitney Donhauser**, Ronay Menschel Director and President, Museum of the City of New York. “The musical innovations of this time period are a great example of the resilience of the city and the importance of art and creativity as forces of transformation.”

New York, New Music: 1980-1986 is organized around a series of key “moments” and features more than 350 objects, including video footage, photography, artifacts, and ephemera. such as:

- Photographs by **Janette Beckman, Martha Cooper, Joe Conzo, William Coupon, Bob Gruen, Laura Levine, Ebet Roberts, Chris Stein** and others
- Flyers for **Beastie Boys; Bad Brains; Sonic Youth; Teenage Jesus; The Feelies;** and **Gray and DNA** at CBGB
- An **MTV Music Awards Moon Person Award Statue**
- Vinyl Records from **Madonna, Funky 4+1, Liquid Liquid,** and **Konk**
- A Zoot Suit and hat worn by **Kid Creole**
- A t-shirt and other ephemera from **Keith Haring and DJ Larry Levan’s “Party of Life”** event at Paradise Garage
- Guitars from **Tim Wright, Arto Lindsay,** and **Richard McGuire**
- “Merman” costume worn by **Joey Arias** in “Mermaids on Parade” at Danceteria
- Music videos and rare concert footage including **Grand Master Flash; Fort Apache Band; Lounge Lizards; Cyndi Lauper;** and more

“During the 80s, there was a community-driven musical renaissance in New York City. It was an era of creativity and genre-defying performance that, in my mind, stands as one of the most influential in musical and cultural history,” says **Sean Corcoran**, curator of prints and photography, Museum of the City of New York. “That wide range of music—from no wave to pop to hip-hop to salsa to jazz, mixed in a dynamic arts scene that stretched across clubs and bars, theaters, parks, and art spaces—provided fertile ground for a musical revolution — one that continues to influence pop culture to this day.”

Those performances and moments, some with long-lasting influence, others that brought together a confluence of performers and underscored the fluidity of the participants in the cultural scene, are highlighted in the main gallery of *New York, New Music*. Viewed together, these examples provide a sense of the innovation, energy, and cross-pollination of musical ideas that was happening across the city at the moment of openness and creativity.

The 14 featured moments (listed chronologically) include:

- **KID CREOLE and the COCONUTS @ DANCETERIA (1980)**

In 1980, Kid Creole and the Coconuts led a revue of nearly a dozen musicians to perform their danceable genre-bending music at Danceteria, appealing to the still-dancing disco denizens, die-hard New Wavers, and everyone in between.

- **DNA and GRAY @ CBGB (MARCH 22, 1980)**

The pairing of these two influential groups was emblematic of that pivotal moment in the downtown No Wave scene.

- **TALKING HEADS @ CENTRAL PARK (AUGUST 27, 1980)**

Five years after first taking the stage at CBGB (opening for the pioneering punk rock group the Ramones), the Talking Heads played a sold-out concert at Wollman Rink in Central Park. For the first time, the band expanded beyond the classic quartet of David Byrne, Chris Frantz, Jerry Harrison, and Tina Weymouth, bringing in an array of musicians.

- **FUNKY 4 + 1 @ SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE (FEBRUARY 14, 1981)**

Marking the very first time a hip-hop group performed live on national TV, Funky 4 + 1-- including hip hop’s first female MC, Sha Rock--was invited to perform on *SNL* by that evening’s host and musical guest, Debbie Harry of Blondie.

- **BEYOND WORDS @ MUDD CLUB (APRIL 9, 1981)**

This graffiti art exhibition and performance by DJ Afrika Bambaataa, the Cold Crush Brothers, and the Fantastic Five helped propel a new era in New York’s new music. Fred Brathwaite (aka Fab 5 Freddy) curated the show along with the artist Futura 2000.

- **NOISE FEST @ WHITE COLUMNS (JUNE 16–24, 1981)**

In the early 1980s, an expansive cohort of musicians was still exploring the possibilities of “noise.” Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore curated a lineup around the theme, and what was envisioned as a one-day program quickly snowballed into a nine-day watershed event.

- **KONK vs LIQUID LIQUID @ TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK (AUGUST 9, 1981)**

Liquid Liquid and Konk both formed in New York City in 1980, and they quickly developed reputations for their slightly off-kilter music, driven by groove-based, danceable funk rhythms. The friendly rivalry between the groups and the marketing genius around it turned this concert into a sensation.

- **MADONNA @ DANCETERIA (DECEMBER 16, 1982)**

An ambitious 24-year-old using just her first name took to the second-floor stage at Danceteria on December 16th, 1982 to publicly perform her own music for the first time. Madonna’s debut appearance, and the single for Sire Records, served as a springboard to fame; the release of her self-titled album quickly followed in 1983.

- **NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL @ BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC (1982–83)**

An important springboard for new music in the 1980s came from the venerable Brooklyn Academy of Music’s (BAM) second edition of its Next Wave series. The season-long festival featured an unprecedented number of artists, including Steve Reich, Glenn Branca; Laurie Anderson; Max Roach and the dance team of Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, a milestone of innovation and interdisciplinary performance.

- **KEITH HARING’S PARTY OF LIFE @ PARADISE GARAGE (MAY 16, 1984)**

Artist Keith Haring’s (with DJ Larry Levan) first Party of Life, a birthday celebration that was a rapturous convergence of art, music, and performance, featured a star-studded guest list with performances by Madonna and John Sex.

- **RUN-DMC and THE TREACHEROUS THREE @ GRAFFITI ROCK (JUNE 29, 1984)**

History was made in June of 1984 when the first syndicated hip-hop TV show was recorded on a soundstage in Midtown Manhattan. The show featured groundbreaking acts, including Run-DMC’s performance of their hit single, “Sucker MCs,” as well as Kool Moe Dee and Special K, two MCs from the veteran trio The Treacherous Three. The MCs provided the show’s introduction, breaking down the elements of hip hop, including breakin’, DJing, and the verbal stylings of MCs, all on a graffiti-laden set.

- **JOHN ZORN @ ROULETTE (OCTOBER 13, 1984)**

One of avant-garde composer John Zorn’s most influential “game pieces” --genre-defying musical compositions designed for controlled improvisation-- *Cobra* was presented at Roulette, the TriBeCa alternative art space.

- **FORT APACHE BAND @ MICKELL’S (DECEMBER 31, 1985)**

On New Year’s Eve 1985, the Bronx-based Fort Apache Band played multiple sets at Mikell’s, a jazz club on the corner of 97th Street and Columbus Avenue. The music that evening embodied the group’s animating project: to explore the creative intersection of Afro-Cuban and Puerto Rican musical traditions with jazz.

- **ARTHUR RUSSELL @ EXPERIMENTAL INTERMEDIA FOUNDATION (SEPTEMBER 22, 1985)**

A groundbreaking moment in the New York experimental music scene came in the fall of 1985, when Arthur Russell staged several performances at the Experimental Intermedia Foundation in SoHo.

As well, the show's main gallery incorporates three large screens in the gallery that includes live performances from **Charlie Ahearn's *Wild Style*** - with **Grand Master Flash, Cold Crush Brothers** and **The Fantastic Five**; **Michael Holman's** footage of **DJ Jazzy Jay** at Club Negril in 1981; rare live film of the **Bush Tetras, Lounge Lizards, The Raybeats, and Bad Brains** from the **GoNightclubbing Archive**; video of **James White and the Blacks** and **Defunkt** by **Charles Libin and Paul Cameron**; video of **Del Byzantines, Material, Sun Ra** and **ESG live** at Hurrah's by **Merrill Aldigheiri** and a performance of "Mermaids on Heroin" with **Joey Arias**, shot by **Courtney Harmel**.

Visitors will also have the opportunity enjoy some of the quintessential moments in a retro-feeling suburban rec room inspired space, developed in collaboration with video artists **Pat Ivers** and **Emily Armstrong** (the **GoNightclubbing Archive**) — the team behind the original Video Lounge for **Danceteria** in the early 1980s. This incarnation of the installation features a mix of found footage, video art, and their own archival film of downtown musicians like the **Dead Boys, Heartbreakers, and Bush Tetras**; along with rare early **MTV** interviews with New York-based artists such as **David Johansen, Madonna, and RUN DMC**; footage of **Vernon Reid** and **Willoughby Sharp** from the **Willoughby Sharp Downtown Cable Show**; and **The Scott and Gary Show**, a Brooklyn-based public access program, including early performances by **Beastie Boys** and **R Stevie Moore**.

New York, New Music: 1980-1986 wraps up by highlighting the shifting trajectory of NYC's music scene in the mid-80s, which was impacted by the surging economy, struggles of club owners to remain open in the face of tightening restrictions and rising rents, and the HIV/AIDS crisis and crack cocaine epidemic which both ripped through the communities where artists lived and worked.

Social: @MuseumofCityNY #80sMusicNYC

The exhibition will be accompanied by public, education, and family programs including:

2021 Spring Gala: Music of the '80s

Wednesday, June 9, 6:30PM-10PM

In-person and virtual presentation

Tix: <https://www.mcny.org/event/2021-spring-gala-music-80s>

Timed to the opening of *New York, New Music: 1980-1986*, the **Museum of the City of New York** hosts a reimagined 2021 Spring Gala, safely created as an intimate outdoor event with dinner, performances, and a preview of the exhibition. Evening honorees include GRAMMY award-winning rapper, actor, CEO & founder of Rock The Bells **LL COOL J**; mother, activist, award-winning songwriter and artist **Cyndi Lauper**; and CEO and co-founder of 300 Entertainment (and former president of Def Jam Records), **Kevin Liles**

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Moonlight & Movies: After Hours

In person

[Thursday, June 17, 7:30pm](#)

Tickets: General Admission \$15

In **[After Hours](#)** (1985, 98 minutes), a now-classic directed by Martin Scorsese, Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne) suffers through a night of misadventures in Soho after a date with Mary Franklin (Rosanna Arquette) goes wrong. From a murderous bar owner, a flighty waitress, a pyromaniac, and other colorful characters, the film

offers a window into '80s NYC and those who inhabited the downtown scene. This is the first in the 2021 *Moonlight and Movies* film series at the Museum.

Moonlight & Movies: *Krush Groove*

In person

[Thursday, July 15, 7:30pm](#)

Tickets: General Admission \$15

Run DMC, LL Cool J, Sheila E., and the Beastie Boys are just a few among the musically star-studded cast of *Krush Groove* (Michael Shultz, 1985, 97 min.), which tells the tale of a fictional upstart record label helmed by Russell Walker (Blair Underwood), based on the beginnings of the legendary hip-hop label, Def Jam Records. This is the second in the 2021 *Moonlight and Movies* film series at the Museum.

Moonlight & Movies is made possible in part by **Sophia and Peter J. Volandes**.

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[Your Hometown Virtual Conversation with Suzanne Vega](#)

Tuesday, June 22, 2021, 7:00pm

Tickets: Free, with registration. Donation Suggested.

In the latest edition of our Your Hometown virtual series, celebrated singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega talks to host Kevin Burke about her role as a leading figure of the folk-music revival of the early 1980s in NYC and her unique career as masterful storyteller who “observes the world with a clinically poetic eye” (New York Times). This is a virtual event which will take place via Zoom. Registrants will receive a link in advance of the event.

For more information about the *Your Hometown* series of virtual conversations, click [here](#).

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Special thanks to **Emily Armstrong** and **Pat Ivers** for their input and access to the **Go Nightclubbing** archives, as well as the *New York, New Music: 1980-1986* advisory board members **Vince Aletti**, writer and critic; **Steven Bernstein**, musician; **Christina Clarke**, journalist and marketing consultant; **Michael Holman**, hip hop pioneer; **Tim Lawrence**, author; **Prime Minister Pete Nice**, author and musician; **Alison Stewart**, radio host and journalist; and **Tontxi Vazquez**, producer/curator; and honorary committee members **Richard Barone** (of The Bongos); **Richard McGuire** (of Liquid Liquid); and **Darryl “DMC” McDaniels** (of Run DMC).

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About the Museum of the City of New York

The Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. It engages visitors by celebrating, documenting, and interpreting the city's past, present, and future. To connect with the Museum on social media, follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumofCityNY and visit our Facebook page at Facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY. For more information, please visit www.mcny.org.

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