Music Business passed $2 Billion in early 1970s
Rock from 1950s was becoming tamed.
Barry Manilow produced 25 top 40 singles; platinum albums were becoming routine.

1976—“Frampton Comes Alive” at top of charts.
Fleetwood Mac—more adult version of the same rock tendencies.

Elton John added spice to the mainstream due to his being gay; known as the Liberace of rock.
Steely Dan named for a dildo in “Naked Lunch.”

Mid-70s through the 80s showed many groups following tried and true business practices to produce guaranteed sales, paving the way for the success of mediocre groups. Innovation became less prevalent.

Disco was smooth, sleek, sensual. Punk was dense, discordant, defiant.
Disco depended on technological sophistication and studio production. Punk used three basic chords and could be played by almost anyone.

Disco fit in with other black dance music styles. Punk sought to deconstruct rock and roll, removing black rhythmic influence.

Punk and disco were shunned by radio (at first) and inspired active audience participation.
Firth: “Punk’s musical simplicity is a political statement.”

Disco made no political statements, and eventually spawned a multi-billion dollar subindustry. Disco also brought people together racially, as well as in terms of class and sexual preference.

Sex Pistols never made a top 40 hit. Drugs and alcohol were very problematic for the group. In punk, the myth was more important than the reality.

1973-74—Country Bluegrass and Blues (club in NY) owner Hilly Kristal begins booking underground rock acts, setting the stage for groups like Patti Smith, Blondie, the Ramones, and the Talking Heads.

Velvet Underground, Iggy Pop, and Andy Warhol.
Punk: “Whatever is popular, do the opposite.”

By 1977, punk was being called New Wave.

Patti Smith—first punk album of note, broke into top 50.

The Ramones—short songs, few lyrics, couldn’t really play their instruments, wrote very negative songs. Played only original material.

Blondie—British group that eventually made it big in the US.

The Talking Heads—the art rock side of punk, could play their instruments, embraced rhythm and blues.

Punk had a bigger response in the UK than in the US; unemployment was high, there was a huge recession, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister; political and social institutions were disassembling; movement of youth violence and unrest that punk (Sex Pistols) connected to.

Sex Pistols mostly played college venues at first, then began playing larger events in 1976 (Anarchy in the UK.)

The Clash – name came from class and race tensions in the UK; took social realism to political and artistic limits. They gave the same message as the Sex Pistols, but with clarity. Were the Sex Pistols’ biggest competition.

Sex Pistols – nihilism; The Clash – social commentary.

The Damned – 1st UK punk group to land a record contract; first to score a top 30 hit.


Siouxsie and the Banshees – assembled at the last minute for the Festival. Originally included Sid Vicious (Sex Pistols) and Marco Pironi (Adam Ant.) Billy Idol was slated to perform with Siouxsie, but didn’t show.

Festival was a mess – technical difficulties, professional rivalries, political differences, violence and arrests; all led to making it a roaring success, and led to the Sex Pistols signing with EMI.

Grundy appearance: Sex Pistols create scandal and controversy, leading to free publicity and massive record sales.

1977 – The Roxy; the CBGB of London.


“God Save the Queen”, by the Sex Pistols – made rock and roll dangerous again.

Punk symbols – Ron Asheton pioneered the use of swastika, iron cross, and jackboots. Use of these were often more in the spirit of confrontational art, rather than an endorsement of fascism.


Much of the subject matter was actually satirical, but too many critics and fans did not understand the satire due to the political climate of the time.

New Order, Joy Division.
Rock against Racism – successful marriage of music and politics?
Included reggae, integrated bands, reaching across lines of gender and sexual orientation.


Disco was all about dancing. From the French word, “discotheque.”
Borrowed light shows from the psychedelic era.
Appealed to blacks, Hispanics, and homosexuals.

Was influenced by funk, latin rhythms, Afro-Cuban music, black rhythm and blues.
Earth, Wind, and Fire – platinum, top ten selling albums.
George Clinton – the Glam of funk.

Saturday Night Fever! Hair!

“The Hustle” – became the most significant dance craze since the Twist.

At first, little disco was played on the airwaves, with the exception of radio station WBLS. Instead, songs were played on the dance floor, generating hundreds of thousands of sales.

The Village People – gay novelty act. Worldwide sales of over 10 million albums.

Broadway and Hollywood/TV embraced the disco sound.

Studio 54.

Bee Gees, Barry White, Donna Summer,
George Clinton, Rick James, Quincy Jones, Stevie Wonder, Isaac Hayes, Sly and the Family Stone, Kool and the Gang...