

PATTI SMITH

Tempo

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PATTI SMITH

America's Punk Rock Rhapsodist

Eric Wendell

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group,
Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannery Street, London SE11 4AB, United
Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wendell, Eric, 1984–.
Patti Smith : America's punk rock rhapsodist / Eric Wendell.
pages cm. — (Tempo : a Rowman & Littlefield music series on rock, pop, and culture)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8108-8690-2 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8108-8691-9 (ebook : alk. paper)
1. Smith, Patti. 2. Rock musicians—United States—Biography. I. Title.
ML420.S672W46 2015
782.42166092—dc23 [B]
2014023315

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of
American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper
for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

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“FREE MONEY”

1967–1974

New York City in the 1960s was a city in transition. Ginsberg had already howled; John Coltrane and Miles Davis had painted the town their shades of blue; and composers Philip Glass and Steve Reich sowed the seeds of a brand-new school of compositional thought. Sex and politics were at the forefront of the city’s consciousness, with the Stonewall riots demonstrating that oppression of sexual preference would not be tolerated, nor would the ignorance of a government that chose to persecute those of a different sexual preference. New York City represented a rebirth, a prime directive that inspires new arrivals to stand tall with chins up and make something of themselves. This was the call to action to which Patti Smith responded.

Smith’s opportunity to escape the confines of South Jersey almost didn’t happen. On Monday, July 3, 1967, Smith walked from her house to Woodbury, New Jersey, to catch the bus to Philadelphia, where she would make a connection to Port Authority. Smith’s plans soon hit a roadblock when she found out that the fare to New York had more than doubled from what she originally thought it was going to be. Not having enough money and feeling dejected, Smith went to a nearby phone booth and mulled over her options. As luck would have it—or, one might say, as destiny would have—there in the booth located on a shelf was a white purse containing \$32 in cash. Against her better judgment,

Smith took the money and purchased her ticket—her freedom to New York City.

Upon her arrival, Smith took the subway to Brooklyn in hopes that she would crash with a few friends who were studying at the nearby Pratt Institute. Unfortunately, they had changed their address, leaving Smith without a place to stay. Smith spent the next several weeks walking around the city, soaking in its glory and dreaming of her new life as it unfolded around her.

Not unlike the sentimental notion of the artists who would come before and after her, Smith's view of New York City was of the romantic location of which Fitzgerald and Whitman spoke. The hopeful place of wonder found its way into writer Dorothy Parker's world and composer George Gershwin's notes. Smith was all too aware of the duality that New York could offer to someone new to town. Speaking to Penny Green for *Interview* in 1973, Smith was quick to point out that although she found acceptance in New York—where her awkward appearance was acknowledged alongside her romantic views—she felt at the time that “New York is bad for me.” A mere two years later, Smith sang a different tune when she told *Mademoiselle* magazine, “When I came to New York, I learned that nothing is impossible. I love New York, ya know?”

While Smith was balancing the love that she felt for her new home, the United States was experiencing a social upheaval that continued to spread. In July 1967 alone, more than 159 race riots caused civil unrest in several cities, including Chicago, New York, Milwaukee, and Detroit, the last of which being known as the “12th Street Riot,” resulting in 43 deaths, 1,189 injured, more than 7,200 arrests, and more than 2,000 buildings destroyed.

Juxtaposed with the brutality of national race riots was the “Summer of Love” movement, which saw the youth culture of the United States build a social counterculture that sought to fight for gender equality and experiment with drugs and the nation's perception of the young adult population. Alongside this, music was experiencing several highs and lows, with John Coltrane passing away and Jimi Hendrix performing his now infamous set at the Monterey Pop Festival. Not unlike the United States into which Smith was born, people were experiencing the ups and downs of a modern society trying its best to expand on cultural mores . . . or trying to have as much fun as possible while it all burned.

It was also the summer that Smith found one of the true loves of her life, a young artist by the name of Mapplethorpe.

Robert Michael Mapplethorpe was born the third of six children on November 4, 1946, in Hollis, Queens. A few years later, Mapplethorpe’s family moved to Floral Park, Queens, a working-class neighborhood situated on the border of Nassau County. Similar to Smith, Mapplethorpe was raised Catholic, attending Christian doctrine classes as part of a well-rounded Catholic upbringing. In 1963, Mapplethorpe began his secondary education at the Pratt Institute, where he studied several art disciplines, including drawing, painting, and sculpture. Mapplethorpe finally found his true voice in photography, particularly when he acquired a Polaroid camera in 1970.

Smith met Mapplethorpe at what should have been her friend’s apartment near Pratt, as Mapplethorpe was one of the inhabitants. They met again at Brentano’s Bookstore, where Smith was working at the time selling jewelry (she sold him a Persian necklace). Their fates would be sealed one night while Smith was on a date with a patron she met at Brentano’s, a date she took only because it promised a hot meal. While strolling through Tompkins Square Park with her date, Smith spotted Mapplethorpe and asked him to pretend to be her boyfriend, to get her out of her date. After that night, the two were inseparable.

For a period of time, Mapplethorpe worked as an usher at the famed Fillmore East, which was a new concert venue in New York City. In March 1968, Mapplethorpe gave Smith a pass to see the Doors. Seeing Jim Morrison onstage provided Smith with a bit of fuel for her future career as a singer. In her memoir *Just Kids*, Smith mentions how she felt a certain kinship with Morrison: “I felt, watching Jim Morrison, that I could do that. I can’t say why I thought this. I had nothing in my experience to make me think that would ever be possible, yet I harbored that conceit.”

Shortly after, Smith saved enough money to fund a trip to Paris. Taking her sister Linda along for the trip, Smith saw the city that had come to inspire her role models. Smith began to find inspiration within the city while trying to explore its vast terrains, which until then were only figments of her imagination. The city also offered her a way of synthesizing her love for rock and roll with her love of poetry. While in Paris, Smith wished to attend a free concert that the Rolling Stones were throwing in Hyde Park for more than 250,000 attendees in honor

of the recent death of their guitarist Brian Jones. Feeling overwhelmed by the loss, Smith began to write poems in his honor in what she would call “for the first time expressing my love for rock and roll within my own work.” While small, this event marked a critical juncture in her work, as rock and roll was now a conscious device within her work.

The subsequent year of 1969 proved to be an important year in popular culture. The Woodstock Festival aimed to thread the idealist views of the 1960s counterculture with a three-day event in upstate New York where the world would watch a who’s who of popular music take the stage. Adversely, the West Coast equivalent—the Altamont Festival in California—tarnished this idealistic view, causing the youth of the time to become disenchanted and horrified as their generation sunk deeper into wartime malaise. This was an important time for Patti, as it was when she and Mapplethorpe moved into the Chelsea Hotel.

Located on the south side of West 23rd street between 8th and 9th Avenue, the hotel housed artists and thinkers alike. Everyone from Bob Dylan to Arthur Miller to Iggy Pop loitered the halls of the establishment during its heyday. Even composer George Kleinsinger, who wrote Smith’s childhood favorite “Tubby the Tuba,” had a room at the hotel, a room that he shared with a den of reptiles, including a turtle, a twelve-foot python, a pet alligator, and his twenty-something-year-old girlfriend.

The Chelsea proved to be a most inspiring place for Smith, who reveled in its rich history and colorful clientele. Although Smith and Mapplethorpe were both poor and living penny to penny, their time at the Chelsea proved to be crucial in Smith’s development as an artist. The halls of the hotel had been witness to many artists whom Smith held close, including Oscar Wilde, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. The artistic output of the hotel was so prolific that Smith once referred to it as “my new university.”

Opportunities to perform came not from music or poetry but from acting. The playwright Jackie Curtis invited Smith to be a member of the ensemble for her play *Femme Fatale*, where she played a role that was originated for actor John Christian, who refused it after getting addicted to heroin and becoming agoraphobic. The title of the play was taken from the Velvet Underground song of the same name from its debut album, *The Velvet Underground & Nico*. According to Smith’s costar Jayne-Wayne County, Smith played an Italian man who was a

member of the mafia. Part of the play included Smith grabbing a hold of her “penis” and stating in a faux Italian accent “Coma hea, mamma mia I wanna fucka you with my big ole dickaroo.” Additionally, her character shot up heroin onstage, which Smith did by laying a putty-like substance on her arm and putting a real needle into it. Smith found acting to be more of a pain than a pleasure, as she hated the idea of memorizing dialogue and wearing makeup.

Smith continued to write poetry even though Robert remarked that she should sing. Smith received a push of sorts one day while waiting for Robert in the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel. While working on a piece in her notebook, a stranger asked her what she was doing. She looked up and saw the face of none other than Bob Neuwirth, the musician and record producer who was closely associated with Bob Dylan. Neuwirth took a liking to Smith and invited her to the El Quijote, the bar adjacent to the hotel. While drinking at the bar, Neuwirth perused her notebook of poetry and asked, “Did you ever think of writing songs?” Neuwirth left their conversation by stating, “Next time I see you I want a song out of you.” Feeling inspired by this random event, Smith took his word and began to write one.

Smith’s early attempts at writing songs were at times awkward, as she was experiencing the growing pains of turning her poetry into lyrics, but Neuwirth continued to encourage her, seeing a talent in her that she did not see at the time. Smith was able to expand her ideas by putting them to music. To do so, she purchased a Martin acoustic guitar on layaway from a pawnshop on 8th Avenue. Smith taught herself a few chords from a Bob Dylan songbook, with her first song being “Fire of Unknown Origin.”

On June 5, 1970, Neuwirth took her to the Fillmore East to see Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Smith was especially taken by their song “Ohio,” which told the story of the Kent State riots, where four unarmed college students were killed by the Ohio National Guard while protesting the military operations that were happening in Cambodia at the time. The incident drove a wedge between generations and increased the dissent that was evident among popular discourses. On the positive side, Smith saw Young as more than just an entertainer but also as a soundboard for societal responsibility and change.

The same night, Neuwirth introduced Smith to musician/producer Todd Rundgren. After the concert, Neuwirth and Smith drove up to

Woodstock, New York, where Dylan's backing band, the Band, was recording its album *Stage Fright*, with Rundgren serving as the producer. Smith and Rundgren found that they had a lot in common and both had family from Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. The Rundgren association was not limited to just music. One night, Smith accompanied Rundgren to the Village Gate on Bleecker Street to see if there was any new talent that Rundgren could produce. Upon arriving, Smith and Rundgren saw the Holy Modal Rounders, a country/bluesy band that incorporated improvisational elements as well as psychedelic components. Smith could not keep her eyes off the drummer. Transfixed, Smith went backstage to meet him, who introduced himself as Slim Stewart.

The two struck a friendship where they would take walks during the evenings. One night, the two of them went to Max's Kansas City to get dinner. Jackie Curtis was there and immediately went to Smith and asked her, "What are you doing with Sam Shepard?" Smith unknowingly had struck a friendship with the famed playwright who at the time had won five Obie Awards and had a play being staged at Lincoln Center. By the time he was twenty-six, Shepard was already a prolific playwright, authoring close to twenty plays, including *La Turista* and *The Unseen Hand*. Smith was immediately smitten with Shepard, but he came with major baggage, including his wife O-Lan Johnson and a six-month-old son.

Smith continued to read her poetry to Mapplethorpe, who urged her to share her work with the public. Mapplethorpe made her promise to read her poems at a reading presented by the poet Jim Carroll. Smith continued to toil with her poetry, often finding that it was not physical enough, nor did it pack the punch of what she truly wanted to express. Mapplethorpe asked his friend Gerald Malanga if Smith could open for him at St. Mark's Church on February 10, 1971.

The event was put together by the Poetry Project, an organization dedicated to experimental poetry. Its programs featured a who's who of exciting poets, including Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, and Ted Berrigan, to name a few. Excited by the prospect of reading at one of their events, Smith immediately started work to stand out and make a name for herself. Smith said, "My goal was not simply to do well, or hold my own. It was to make a mark at St. Mark's."

This moment proved to be the most important moment in her young professional life. First, she wanted to craft a more aggressive, in-your-

face performance concept. Smith spoke of this design by declaring, “I wanted to infuse the written word with the immediacy and frontal attack of rock and roll.” To help her with her idea, Shepard suggested that she put her words to music. Perusing her brain about whom she could utilize for the event, Smith remembered guitarist Lenny Kaye, a fixture on the scene at that time whom she would visit at his job at the record store Village Oldies on Bleecker Street. Being straightforward with him, Smith asked if he could “play a car crash with an electric guitar.” Kaye accepted, and the two began to rehearse for the show.

The night of the show could not have been more kismet for the eager Smith. The evening drew an impressive crowd, including Mapplethorpe, Shepard, and Rundgren, as well as songwriter Lou Reed and artist Andy Warhol. Having Reed in the audience proved to be important for Smith, as the two would become musical compatriots. In Reed, Smith found a poetic colleague and likened him to noted New York poet Walt Whitman. While Smith found inspiration in jazz, which was a direct line to her improvisatory techniques, Reed provided her another way to improvise. Speaking to *Rolling Stone* in 2013, Smith stated, “One thing I got from Lou, that never went away, was the process of performing live over a beat, improvising poetry, how he moved over three chords for fourteen minutes. That was a revelation to me.”

The evening proved to be extra special for Smith, as it was taking place on what would have been the seventy-fifth birthday of noted poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, a most favorable sign for the evening. Poetry Project assistant director Anne Waldman introduced Smith, who was feeling a charge borne by the culmination of years of work along with the electricity of the room.

The reading served as an introduction of Patti Smith the performer. Dedicating the evening to “criminals from Cain to Genet,” Smith began her reading with a poem entitled “Oath,” with the opening line “Christ died for somebody’s sins, but not mine.” She continued with the poems “Fire of Unknown Origin,” “The Devil Has a Hangnail,” “Cry Me a River,” and “Picture Hanging Blues.” Smith ended her reading with “The Ballad of a Bad Boy,” with Kaye implementing heavy chords and feedback. Feeling exhilarated, Smith left soon after with Sam, not saying good-bye, not apologizing for blowing their minds.

The affects of her reading were almost immediate. *Creem* magazine agreed to publish a suite of her poems. She was offered readings in

London and Philadelphia, a chapbook of poems for Middle Earth Books, and a possible record contract with Blue Sky Records. Feeling overwhelmed by the response that she received, Smith eschewed many of the offers, deciding instead to continue working on her craft. The success of the reading perhaps spawned an overall creative flow to Smith that she had not experienced until then. One night while hanging out with Shepard, Smith and he collaborated on a play entitled *Cowboy Mouth*. The title was taken from the Dylan song “Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” from the landmark album *Blonde on Blonde*. For the production, Shepard played the part of “Slim,” a struggling artist trying to understand what art is and what it means to him. Smith played the part of “Cavale,” a woman that eventually takes Slim hostage in an effort to make him famous.

Smith stated that the work wasn’t so much a play but more akin to a “ritual” or a ceremony of sorts. The parts that Sam and Patti created for themselves involved a scene where the two characters have to spout improvised poetry at each other. Feeling hesitant, Smith did not know how to do this but was reassured by Shepard, who stated, “You can’t make a mistake when you improvise.” This one line set the stage for a skill that Smith would constantly fall back on throughout her professional career. The idea was that with creativity, she need not be afraid to try something new or fall on her face when doing so.

The resulting work appeared at the American Place Theater and was rife with insecurity and unevenness. The production was performed only once, as Shepard abruptly left the production before the second performance and made his way to New England without telling a soul. However, the experience solidified the desire for Smith to continue to perform, just not as an actress. Although her desire to perform was well formed at this time, it did not occur to her that she should use this hybrid mix as a means to front a rock-and-roll band. This was suggested to her by Sandy Pearlman, a renaissance man most known as the producer and manager for the rock band Blue Oyster Cult.

Smith mulled this suggestion over and decided to explore songwriting, aided by the few songs that she and Shepard performed in *Cowboy Mouth*. Through Shepard, Smith met Lee Crabtree, a songwriter and keyboardist whom Shepard performed with while a member of the Holy Modal Rounders. Crabtree was an eccentric fellow who also lived in the Chelsea. The two began a working relationship, but both were

initially too shy around each other. Crabtree eventually confided in Smith that he was quite close to his grandfather, who left him a sizable inheritance and his home. Crabtree’s mom objected to the will and tried to have him committed. Crabtree brought Smith to his grandfather’s house, where he proceeded to break down and cry. This experience opened up their relationship such that they were free to explore their musical tastes and ideas.

Following this incident, the two of them collaborated on “Dylan’s Dog,” “Work Song,” and further work on “Fire of Unknown Origin.” However, tragedy soon struck their brief friendship. Crabtree showed up to her apartment one evening upset that his mother had blocked his grandfather’s will, resulting in his being denied his grandfather’s house. Smith gave him a T-shirt of a band that Sandy Pearlman was managing, as it was raining heavily outside. After failing to show up for practice one day, Smith asked around and found out that facing the loss of his inheritance and possible institutionalization, Crabtree leapt to his death from the roof of the Chelsea.

Stunned, Smith ventured forward with her writing. Pearlman introduced Smith to Allen Lanier, a keyboard player of the band he was managing. First called Soft White Underbelly and then the Stalk-Forrest Group, the band would eventually become the band Blue Oyster Cult. Pearlman introduced the two of them, and they began a musical and romantic relationship. Smith’s creative juices began to churn in many ways. Telegraph Books offered to publish an anthology of her poems. Titled *Seventh Heaven*, the book included twenty-two poems and off-putting black-and-white photography taken by Judy Linn.

On October 20, 1972, Smith decided to leave the apartment that she had been sharing with Mapplethorpe. Smith soon moved in with Lanier on East 10th Street, not too far away from the St. Mark’s Church. On New Year’s Eve 1972, Smith went to the church for its annual marathon reading. Combing through the poets that evening, Smith decided that a career in regular poetry might not be the right fit for her. She knew that 1973 had to be her year—her year to strike out and become the artist that she was meant to be. Although she understood that she was not going to be a poet in the traditional sense, she knew that she was going to get her brand of poetry heard one way or the other.

As it turned out, 1973 proved a promising year for Smith. Andy Brown from Gotham Book Mart offered to publish a book of her

poems. With Allen paying their rent, Smith began to craft her second book of poems, which she entitled *Witt*. With this, Smith for the first time in her life was truly able to make a living as an artist. Although not entirely interested in acting again, Smith was asked by director Tony Ingrassia to star in a one-act play called *Identity*. Not wanting to continue her work at the Strand, Smith agreed to be in the play. The play was about a lesbian who has a dialogue with another girl. After not convincing the director that she could be a lesbian, Smith decided that this would be her last gig as an actor.

Smith wanted to continue the momentum, so she sought the professional advice of Jane Friedman, a PR executive who occasionally got Smith poetry-reading gigs at local bars. Many of those gigs were hostile, but Smith saw this as her paying her dues and a means of building her stage presence. Friedman booked Smith as an opening act for several bands, including the New York Dolls. Smith's act at this time was multi-dimensional to say the least. In addition to reading poetry, Smith fielded insults from the audience and sang songs accompanied by her cassette player. Most nights, Smith brought herself and the audience together by reciting a poem entitled "Piss Factory." The poem is about Smith's time working at a factory and how her moving to New York City represented her rebirth and renewal as a human being.

On Friday, July 13th, Smith gathered a reading at the loft of filmmaker Jack Smith. The reading was partly in tribute to Jim Morrison and was strongly attended. The success of the evening proved most intriguing to Friedman, who felt that Smith could be a new voice for a new generation. While Smith began to exercise her growing performance career, she began to contribute several pieces to notable periodicals of the era, including *Creem* and *Rock Scene*. Even with her journalistic endeavors, Smith carries herself as if she is amid one of her mid-song improvisations. In an October 1974 piece for *Rock Scene* about the band Television, Smith eschews the normal journalistic etiquette of introducing the band members and instead begins the piece with a long tirade about image and the presentation of the "image." It's not until the fourth paragraph that Smith even lets on that this piece is about a band when she finally declares, "A group called TELEVISION who refuse to be a latent image but the machine itself!"

Similarly in a piece for *CREEM* entitled "jukebox crucifix," Smith rants about being at a party where she describes the scene as listening

to the Doors’ “Riders of the Storm” and then hearing the DJ interrupt the broadcast to announce that Morrison had passed away. The piece plays out like a half-realized nightmare but is an indication of how her poetic stylings were beginning to take shape and turn into stories. For example, a line in the piece states “Johnny Ace was cool he came east from Texas to knock ‘just a dream’ off the charts with ‘pledging my love,’” which calls to mind a style that would make its way onto *Horses*, where it could have easily fit onto the album’s titular song.

With their sights on performing, Smith and Kaye were at a loss as to where to bring their hybrid form of performance. Their style did not quite fit any particular mold, but the duo knew that what they had to offer the New York performance community was authentic and exciting. After their initial performance together, Smith and Kaye decided to expand their repertoire, which included more of Smith’s poetry as well as covers such as “Speak Low,” written by Kurt Weill, and “Annie Had a Baby,” by Hank Ballard. On one occasion, Smith and Kaye performed at the West End Bar, a Beat poet establishment once frequented by Jack Kerouac and his literary compatriots. After the show, Jane gave them the great news that they were offered a six-day stint at Max’s Kansas City, with their first show being on New Year’s Eve. Their first performance saw the stars of the time in attendance: Ginsberg, Mapplethorpe, Shepard, and Rundgren, to name a few.

As a means of expanding the sonic qualities of their new group, Smith and Kaye decided to expand their instrumentation. They decided that a piano would be a good idea, seeing that the instrument possesses qualities both melodic and percussive. Smith and Kaye held an audition of sorts in a small room above the Victoria Theatre on 45th Street and Broadway. After several pianists were auditioned to unsatisfactory results, the last one to show up was Richard Sohl.

The nineteen-year-old Sohl possessed the qualities that Smith and Kaye were looking for in a pianist, having amassed a musical toolkit that could help them fulfill their musical vision. Soon after, the trio began to rehearse for their first gig at the West 13th Street hotspot Reno Sweeney’s. Perhaps as a way of breaking him in, Kaye gave Sohl the nickname DNV because he thought that Sohl resembled Tadzio, the Polish boy from Luchino Visconti’s *Death in Venice*. Slowly building their musical camaraderie, the trio decided to record their new sound to see if they could translate their live ferocity to tape.

With Kaye at the helm as producer and Mapplethorpe providing the funds, the trio recorded a single at Electric Lady Studios, founded by the late Jimi Hendrix. Smith had a short history with the studio but a history nonetheless, as she first visited the studio on its opening night while she was working as a journalist. Too shy to enter the party, Smith stood outside the steps of the studio and met Hendrix, who was leaving. Hendrix succumbed to drug-related asphyxia a mere month later.

Perhaps in tribute to Hendrix, the trio recorded his single “Hey Joe.” Smith wanted to expand the melodic expression of what they were trying to capture by featuring another instrument. Smith invited Television guitarist Tom Verlaine to the session to satisfy the melodic requirements that she was looking for. Recording in Studio B, Smith, Kaye, and Sohl recorded the basic tracks. Afterward, Verlaine recorded two solo electric guitar tracks on top of the basic tracks.

Musically speaking, the song is an early example of Smith’s use of adding to her original material to preexisting material. The opening features a spoken-word section where she deconstructs who Joe is by comparing Joe to Patty Hearst, the socialite and granddaughter of publishing luminary William Randolph Hearst. In 1974, Patty Hearst was kidnapped by, and later joined, the Symbionese Liberation Army, ultimately serving a two-year jail term for armed robbery. In Smith’s rendition, Joe comes to represent the counterculture’s disdain for corporate affluence, much in the way that the media spun Hearst’s story. One could argue that in Hearst, Smith sees a spiritual sister or, at the very least, a fellow woman who refuses to settle for the patriarchal and corporate domination of their lives.

At the end of recording “Hey Joe,” the group found itself with a few extra minutes of time. Smith and company decided to attempt a recording of “Piss Factory,” with Kaye improvising over Sohl’s performance and Smith riffing on the lyrics. What is most striking about the track and with the Smith/Kaye/Sohl permutation of the group is the sonic influence of jazz. Sohl vamps on a harmonic foundation that calls to mind pianist McCoy Tyner’s performance on the seminal track “My Favorite Things,” from John Coltrane’s 1961 album of the same name, or pianist Red Garland’s performance on the track “Milestones,” from Miles Davis’s 1958 album of the same name. All three songs are harmonically loose, particularly “Piss Factory,” where Smith’s lyrical execution

sounds more like the bell of a saxophone than the sound of a human voice.

The mere instrumentation of the piece calls upon a political triumph in and of itself. With Sohl providing a clear harmonic background, Smith delivering a spoken-word fury, and Kaye providing an improvisational flair, the work proves to be the ultimate political dialogue, with Smith and Kaye representing two separate but powerful devices and Sohl setting the stage. Smith and Kaye’s performances act like a musical debate, with Sohl moderating their exchanges.

While Smith would later employ her lyrics to metaphorically tell stories or heartfelt meanderings of the theme at hand, “Piss Factory” is explicit in its imagery of a blue-collar life without hopes and dreams. The narrative arc of the song is about free will—that no matter how grave the circumstances, we all have the right to live our lives as we see fit. In Smith’s case, she would rather move to New York City and “never return, to burn out in this piss factory,” with the “piss factory” in question being any situation where an individual may burn out and lose her hope.

With a physical representation of their sound ready to be heard, Kaye and Smith formed a record label entitled Mer and pressed fifteen hundred copies of their record at a small plant in Philadelphia. The record ultimately made its way to the jukebox at Max’s Kansas City, where “Piss Factory,” their improvised song, was played more often than their more fleshed-out rendition of “Hey Joe.” Taking this as a positive sign, the group decided to continue to work on original material.

Finding new venues in which perform became a full-time gig for Smith. One evening, Smith and Kaye attended the New York premiere of the movie *Ladies and Gentlemen, the Rolling Stones* at the Ziegfeld Theatre on West 54th Street. Afterward, Smith and Kaye ventured downtown to the Bowery to see the band Television perform at CBGB. Founded by Hilly Kristal, the space was a dive bar to say the least but was open to most music. Standing for “country, bluegrass, blues,” the only requirement that Kristal had was that the performers who graced the stage had to be new. In Kristal, Smith and company found a kindred spirit. Smith stated, “In NYC in the early ’70s, there was no real place in NY for the new garde to experiment, but in 1973, Hilly Krystal opened the doors to CBGB so poets and musicians finally had a room of their

own. Hilly was the good shepherd and William Burroughs was our guardian angel.”

Not long after, the group began a several-week residency at Max’s Kansas City, sharing the bill with Television. This stretch of time proved to be detrimental in the group’s forming an eternal dialogue with one another. A few weeks later, the group performed at the Whiskey a Go Go in Los Angeles, at Rather Ripped Records in Berkeley, and at an audition night at the Fillmore West in San Francisco, with singer-songwriter Jonathan Richman accompanying the trio on drums. During the group’s trip, it became clear to everyone that the band needed to expand its sound. The group decided that upon returning to New York, it would hold auditions for a second guitarist.

Placing an advertisement in the *Village Voice*, Smith and company auditioned several guitarists and settled on Czechoslovakian-born Ivan Kral. Smith enjoyed his raw style and stated, “He was energetic and open-minded, ready to magnify our swiftly developing concept of what rock and roll could be.” Kral was already performing with several groups before joining the band, including CBGB scenesters Blondie. Kral was familiar with Smith’s work, having already attended her poetry readings. With Kral joining the band, the group began to rehearse as well as perform at CBGB to further develop its sound.

The scene at CBGB slowly developed into a vital part of the New York City music community. The bands and performers at the club were of a wide variety and didn’t exactly fit any particular mold. In addition to Smith and Television, groups such as the Ramones, with its simplistic two-minute anthems, and Blondie, with its synth-tinged tunes, began to perform. On one particular evening at CBGB, Arista Records president Clive Davis was in the crowd. In May of that year, Smith signed to Arista Records.

Davis’s first encounter with Smith happened through a private showcase set up by Friedman. Along with Davis was A&R executive Bob Fieden, both of whom were interested in the group and the early buzz that it was receiving. The group performed a set of songs that left the two of them in chills. As Davis would later say, “when people ask me what are the most memorable performances I’ve ever seen, the ones that I’ll never forget, definitely they would include Patti’s.” The relationship between Smith and Davis took the form of mutual admiration, with Davis having the utmost confidence in his newest signing. Davis

later stated, “That was the core of our relationship: She presented her work; I gave her a frank assessment of which elements might prove to be bumps in the road.”

On May 28, 1975, the group performed at a church on the Upper East Side to benefit local radio station WBAI. The group ended its set with a version of “Gloria,” a hybrid song of sorts, merging Smith’s poem “Oath” with the song “Gloria,” written by Van Morrison for his band THEM. The band slowly began to build the song, where it reached new, exciting heights. By the end of the set, the group realized that all it was missing on its quest for rock-and-roll glory was a drummer. It found its drummer in Jay Dee Daugherty, a California transplant who ran the sound at CBGB.

The band’s first performance with Daugherty was at the Bitter End, a club in Greenwich Village on Bleecker Street, right around the corner from where Patti lived at the time. The atmosphere was charged to say the least, with Davis being in the crowd and with the air of anticipation surrounding the band. On top of this, Bob Dylan was present, adding to the weight of the evening. However, history would prove that Smith had nothing to fear, as Davis was already impressed and smitten by Smith. In Smith, Davis saw an ambitious young woman who had the components needed to have a long-standing career in the music industry.

In April 1975, Smith was offered a seven-album recording contract with Arista for the tune of \$750,000. What made the recording contract unique at the time was that Smith demanded complete creative control of her material—a rarity, especially among new artists such as Patti. Furthermore, Smith had final say over advertising campaigns and authority over the production of her albums. Arista’s signing the group was a clear indication that Smith was on the verge of something new, and it shined a bright spotlight on the CBGB community.

A shift within the expectations of female-fronted groups was about to happen . . . with Patti at the helm.