

Introduction

Like many historical narratives, the story of rock music is one organized around a succession of cycles. The music's production, reception, and mythology are typically situated as part of a constantly renewing periodic phenomenon, intimately tied to the ebb and flow of adolescent or youth generations. This periodization finds its most conspicuous form in the shape of rock "invasions" and "explosions." Such events are characterized by a flurry of musical activity, as a number of related new artists and bands coalesce and the recording and media industries recognize a new popular music movement. We tend to associate these cycles with the spectacle surrounding a significant iconic performer or group: Elvis Presley serves as a lightning rod for the emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s; the Beatles head a British Invasion in the mid-1960s; a decade later the Sex Pistols and punk rock shock mainstream society; in the early 1990s Nirvana articulates a grunge style that solidifies alternative rock's popularity. In the most basic sense, any of these four dynamic outbursts might rightfully be considered a *new wave* of popular music. It is mostly a matter of historical circumstance that the actual label of *new wave* should be associated with the third of the aforementioned movements: the mid-1970s punk explosion.

In the 1970s critics credited punk bands like the Sex Pistols and the Clash with startling the rock industry out of its moribund complacency. But punk's raw sound, fueled in part by an anarchic rereading of 1960s garage rock and in part by a subversive political bent fashioned out of art school experimentation, was perceived in the United States as too confrontational for mainstream radio. To the major labels, punk appeared to be

virtually unmarketable. In its stead, the music industry embraced new wave groups like the Talking Heads, Blondie, Devo, Elvis Costello and the Attractions, and Squeeze, all of whom shared punk's energy but tempered its vitriol with more accessible and novel songwriting sprinkled with liberal doses of humor, irreverence, and irony. Like their punk rock forebears, new wave musicians openly rejected the tired clichés of rock star abundance and bloated stadium extravaganzas that had come to dominate the 1970s. As Mark Kjeldsen of British new wave band the Sinceros put it: "We don't come on stage and pretend we're this immortal rock 'n' roll band full of sexist crap, and you're gonna partaaay, and do you feel like I do and everyone's gonna light candles and stick 'em up their arses."¹ Chris Stein of Blondie was decidedly more blunt: "Everything is bullshit in the '70s."²

One of new wave's most radical maneuvers was also one of its most simple: new wave groups returned to rock music a direct, danceable energy that had largely been abandoned. By the mid-1970s, a listener was hard pressed to find up-tempo dance rhythms, as rock and roll's exuberant energy had given way to slower, more contemplative singer-songwriter styles and more complex, deliberately paced progressive and hard rock structures. In America, popular groups like Led Zeppelin were characterized not as dance bands, but rather caricatured as "drinking-beer-in-the-high-school-parking-lot" bands.³ As Kate Pierson of the B-52's explained, "When we first started and first came to New York there wasn't [*sic*] any dance bands. It simply wasn't the thing to do at the time, everybody was leaning against the bar looking bored in a leather jacket."⁴ Bands like the B-52's jolted rock audiences back onto the dance floors by taking what would have been an exceptionally quick tempo for the mid-1970s, roughly 160 BPM (one of Led Zeppelin's fastest songs, "Rock and Roll," is 163 BPM), and making that the norm.⁵ As such, the dance beat became integral to new wave. From songs (the Go-Go's' "We Got the Beat," the Jam's "Beat Surrender," Squeeze's "Farfisa Beat," and Elvis Costello and the Attractions' "The Beat") to album titles (Blondie's *Eat to the Beat*) to band names (the Beat was a name claimed by both an American and a British new wave band), the discourse of dance suffused the new wave style.

At its core, new wave signified the dissatisfaction that many musicians and fans felt with the rock status quo. Given this stance, it is not surprising that the movement quickly came to be characterized as "modern." Radio

stations that began featuring new wave artists heavily in their rotations labeled their programming as “modern music” to distinguish themselves from the routine rock sounds of the day.⁶ Record labels promoted their new wave titles as the products of progressive modern artists. “Ultravox is modern music at its most accessible and creative level,” declared the promotional blurb for their 1980 album *Vienna*. Two years later the advertisement for Duran Duran’s album *Rio* promised “Musical Adventures for the Modern Age.” In this colloquial sense, the modern label evoked a wide range of associations. To be modern is to be young. It is to be fashionable, to have a certain sense of visual style. To be modern is forward looking, futuristic. The modern is that which is contemporary, is now and therefore most relevant. To be modern is to stand out from the crowd in a novel way. To be modern is to be on the crest of a new wave.

This book explores the context within which new wave rose to prominence at the turn of the 1980s, when the music was conceived, promoted, and critiqued as a dynamic modern pop movement. While I detail how this transpired as part of a music industry easily swayed by the allure and marketability of the *new*, I also view the modern in new wave from a more historically and culturally situated vantage point. Modern, modernity, modernism—these are concepts that have a wide currency stretching across a variety of intellectual traditions and disciplinary perspectives.⁷ For social and political scientists, economists, and historians, the idea of modernity and the modern is tied to concrete sociohistorical conditions. Various, the rise of urban centers, the industrial revolution, new technologies, and an accelerated consumer culture have all signaled distinctly “modern” eras marked most of all by rapid change. For those in the humanities, modernity is often intimately linked to new art forms that reflect our sensory experience of the new modern environment. Crucially, the modern is also “relational,” rupturing with the immediate past and often turning to a more distant past as an inspiration of rebellion.⁸

As I argue, there are three modern historical eras that prove pivotal to understanding new wave’s meanings. Two of them are past modernities that shaped the new wave in ways both subtle and obvious: (1) the emergence of a modern metropolitan American culture stretching roughly from 1880 to 1930 and (2) the period traversing the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, when first America and then England experienced a new affluence and ris-

ing youth culture. The third era is the modernity in which new wave itself emerged at the turn of the 1980s, or what is often referred to as a late modernity marked by deindustrialization and the rise of globalization. Significantly, each of these periods is associated with profound technological advancements that provoked responses both celebratory and cautionary. Whether it be the early twentieth-century Fordism of standardization and mechanized labor, the midcentury's new consumer culture and accompanying spread of mass-produced synthetic products, or the impending approach of a computerized society at the turn of the 1980s, the "modern" promised a better life just as it encouraged critiques of societal dehumanization. All of these different modernities figured into the new wave in one fashion or another.

There are some who have suggested that through its at times ironic and detached relationship to these various past modernities, new wave reflected the dawning of a new postmodern music sensibility. Such pronouncements emerged most forcefully in the middle to late 1980s as new wave was on the wane and postmodernism as an intellectual and academic debate was on the ascent. For example, noted critical theorist Fredric Jameson claimed that the recent punk and new wave music of groups like the Clash and the Talking Heads represented a striking postmodernist departure from the comparatively high modernist stance of late 1960s rock groups like the Beatles and Rolling Stones.⁹ Others, like sociologist Jon Stratton, argued that the convergence of minimalist tendencies in both punk and new wave *and* the art music of composers like Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson represented a postmodern rupture of the distinctions between "low" and "high" culture.¹⁰ As appealing as such propositions seemed at the time, they tended to locate postmodernism predominantly within the narrow realms of aesthetics and style, and furthermore were applied selectively to only a handful of new wave artists. There was less sense of *how* exactly this turn of events indicated a corresponding postmodern societal or historical shift.¹¹ Indeed many have argued since then that the idea of postmodernity can more rightfully be considered a variation upon, rather than a break from, modernity's long historical reach.¹² Given these circumstances, I am reluctant to consider new wave as a postmodern musical movement. At the peak of its popularity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, new wave was over-

whelmingly recognized and labeled as a modern, *not* a postmodern, musical movement.

As an entryway into the connection between new wave and the modern, I would like to begin by briefly considering a representative song: “Video Killed the Radio Star.” Although the song was first a hit for the Buggles (two British studio musicians, Trevor Horn and Geoffrey Downes) in 1979, most people know it as the answer to the perennial trivia question: what was the first music video to air when Music Television (MTV) launched on August 1, 1981? At the time of its original release, on the cusp of the 1980s, the song described the dawning of a new modern technological era while lamenting the passing of an older modern time, the golden age of radio.¹³ Both these modern tropes emerge as an integral part of the song’s intricately arranged production.¹⁴ On the one hand, “Video” sparkles with a glossy modern and futuristic sheen thanks to the prominent use of synthesizers and processed filtering that transforms the acoustic drum hits in the song’s bridge to sound as if they are electronic percussion. On the other hand, Horn’s vocals are laden with heavy compression, an effect that suggests the timbral quality of a radio voice from the distant past. With the exception of a brief two-measure section following the song’s bridge, “Video” eschews the conventional rock sonorities and riffs of the electric guitar in favor of a variety of disco tropes that by the end of the 1970s had emerged as a virtual shorthand for the sound of modern, contemporary pop. “Four to the floor” bass drum hits, open hi-hat accents, syncopated bass riffs, and stratified textures: all these elements suggest a strong link between disco and new wave’s orientation as studio-based dance music.¹⁵ Just as importantly, new wave’s aesthetic alliance with disco also signified the music’s growing distance from its punk roots.

The famed video for “Video Killed the Radio Star” elaborates upon the song’s modern themes in numerous ways. It begins with a little girl seated in front of an archaic radio console; magically she awakens a glitter-haired woman clad in a leotard costume. Complete with a cape and belt, this science fiction heroine seems to have jetted out of a 1930s *Flash Gordon* serial, an obvious nostalgic nod both to her once glorious futuristic powers and her association with the vanishing radio medium. At the third verse, the video moves to a setting that appears to be a cross between a laboratory and

a recording studio, where we see Downes playing a keyboard. A few feet away the heroine is encased and floating in what seems to be some sort of transportation tube. Horn wanders the set singing the lyrics while dressed in a white Nehru jacket suggestive of a lab coat and wearing oversized glasses with an antenna attachment that obliquely hints at his modern, scientific stature (see fig. 1). In the laboratory/studio's background, a television set is playing that shows two women dressed in matching outfits, wigs, and white-rimmed sunglasses who provide the chorus's background vocals. With their rigid bodies, stiff hand gestures, and clonelike appearance, they appear to be little more than singing robots (see fig. 2). Taken as a whole, the video's bewildering collision of scientist/musicians, an outer space heroine, transparent portals, and robotic background vocalists unfolds with little concern for any narrative cohesion. Like many early MTV videos, it places a far greater emphasis on its striking modern imagery than any underlying story.

The video plays upon these modern themes in ways that extend beyond its inventive fashion and set designs. Many of the images, for example, are mediated. We constantly find ourselves viewing the musicians, the heroine, and the background singers through television screens. There is a hint of surveillance, as if the video's participants are constantly under watch in a futuristic Big Brother state. The television's replication also raises questions about the very nature of these images. Are they the "real" thing, or are they—to borrow the philosopher Jean Baudrillard's term—simply all simulacra. The video solves this dilemma at the climactic turn to the song's final fade chorus when the laboratory setting splits apart to reveal the band performing in front of a stationary film camera reminiscent of a studio television stage. Horn and Downes are augmented by a third member, a keyboardist engulfed by a towering modular synthesizer unit that serves to underscore the band's modern, technological aura. Stationed at their instruments, and playing along to the song, there can be no doubt that this is the authentic, "real" Buggles.

As contemporary as "Video" undoubtedly was in its time, on second glance what is so striking is how much of its modern visual and musical style is pilfered from a previous era's version of modernity. Downes and Horn, who are both pictured at their instruments wearing skinny ties and matching synthetic blazers, represent a direct throwback to the mid-1960s



Figure 1. Trevor Horn sings, with the space age heroine in the backdrop, in a shot from the Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star" (1979).

"mod" style of the British Invasion. Likewise, the background singers' costumes—an assemblage of sharp angles, tight belts, restrictive turtlenecks, and blonde wigs—are a decade past their prime. They could be *Star Trek* uniforms, or direct descendants of the futuristic "space age" fashion styles popularized by 1960s designers like André Courrèges. Many of the song's vocal hooks look back toward an earlier rock and pop era as well. The female singers' staccato "oh-a-oh" refrain recalls the quirky glottal stops and hiccups of Buddy Holly's late 1950s rockabilly style, while the octave leap and descent of the ending legato "operatic" vocal melody—"you are the radio star"—nostalgically hints at the descant of an older novelty hit, the Tokens' 1961 chart topper, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." Even the Buggles' name itself comes across as a willful misreading of the Beatles. For a band and song supposedly gazing toward the future technologies of the 1980s, surprisingly much of "Video Killed the Radio Star" is pasted together from var-



Figure 2. The Buggles' robotic background singers, in matching futuristic outfits, in a shot from "Video Killed the Radio Star" (1979)

ious pre-1970s musical and visual allusions, and sealed with the disco conventions of its present era.

But given the diverse backgrounds of the Buggles' two members, it should perhaps be expected that their vision of a modern age would emerge from so many different corners. Trevor Horn and Geoffrey Downes were both in their late twenties when they formed the Buggles in 1977, and by then had spent considerable time in the industry as studio musicians backing the British disco singer Tina Charles and penning songs for the likes of Dusty Springfield. Like many other experienced musicians who would become associated with the new wave—including groups such as the Police and Split Enz and artists like Joe Jackson and Marshall Crenshaw—it was mostly a matter of timing more than anything else that found them lumped in with the latest, most fashionable new rock movement. Horn and Downes had initially released "Video" in 1979 as a one-off single with only modest hopes of success. It was only after the song surprisingly

jetted to the top of the charts, first in England, then in sixteen other countries, that the two scrambled to put together a full album of material and turn the Buggles into a more fully conceptualized new wave band. Released symbolically on January 1, 1980, at the dawn of a new decade, the Buggles' debut record played upon the various modern themes that had propelled their hit single up the charts. The album title, *The Age of Plastic*, and songs like "I Love You (Miss Robot)" and "Astroboy," picture the arrival of the 1980s as a novelty era of playful futurism. At the same time, the evocation of plastic knowingly hearkens back to the 1960s, when "plastics" came to connote both the ultimate attainment of modern manufactured consumer comfort and depthless artifice. The album's cover, which features a digitally animated rendition of Trevor Horn's head, complete with oversized "space age" glasses, necktie and uniform, and a patch cord protruding from his neck, further suggests the group's mechanized, technological orientation. As an emblem of the new wave, *The Age of Plastic* portrays the dawning of the 1980s as a peculiarly modern age informed equally by the ghosts of past modernities and by visions of the future yet to come.

The Buggles' run at the charts would be short lived, however. *The Age of Plastic* failed to replicate the success of its celebrated single, and by March of 1980, merely months after "Video" had first appeared, Horn and Downes retired the Buggles to join the progressive rock group Yes, with whom they remained for a single album. Like many other artists, the Buggles' association with the new wave would come to represent only a fleeting, transient moment in their longer musical careers. For Horn, however, new wave's particular modern allure ultimately proved to be too much to resist. In 1982 he revived the Buggles moniker for one last album. Appropriately enough, it was titled *Adventures in Modern Recording*.

Making Sense of the New Wave

To the best of my knowledge, this book surprisingly is the very first, scholarly or otherwise, to tackle the topic of new wave since the music drifted off into the late 1980s sunset over two decades ago. For those familiar with new wave's tangled and conflicted historical relationship with punk, however, this may not come as much of a shock. New wave originally emerged

as a term that was synonymous with the subversive sounds of the 1976–77 American and British punk rock explosions. But this relationship had changed by 1978 and 1979, when new wave was drafted out of its existing context and reclaimed as a safe harbor for those punk-related artists whose music derived from punk’s caustic energy, but was rendered more stylish and accessible. New wave’s commercial success came with a price. As Ira Robbins, the former editor of the new wave-oriented magazine *Trouser Press*, noted, after its split from punk, new wave became for many “a designation for watered-down bands who managed a hip style but were presentable enough for radio.”¹⁶ New wave’s compromised reputation is perhaps most concisely summarized in the title of a retrospective CD compilation, *Punky but Chic*. Portrayed as a mollified, less dangerous version of punk’s politicized confrontational rage, new wave’s “posed” rebellion came to be seen by fans and critics alike as a more trendy and packaged rip-off of punk’s supposedly “authentic” anger. Meanwhile, a virtual cottage industry of academic writings began to spring up around punk. Over the past three decades, scholarly books on punk have viewed the music through the lenses of subcultural theory, the avant-garde theatrics of Dada and the Situationist International, gender performance, left-wing and grassroots activism, and the identity politics of the straightedge wing.¹⁷ Commentary on new wave, on the other hand, has largely been tucked away in the back corners of music video studies and the occasional article on pop artists of the 1980s.¹⁸

Part of the problem with new wave is that unlike punk, there has always been some confusion about precisely what artists and music the label actually encompasses. In principle, new wave’s main unifying theme was its modern freshness and daring, and its separation from rock’s conventions. But such blanket descriptions were not held together by any one specific sound or fan formation; the label of new wave accordingly could be thrown across a wide swath of quite disparate musical styles and practices. Thus one finds in the various new wave discographies, artist registers, and surveys that appeared throughout the early 1980s, a concession that the music was best thought of as a heterogeneous stylistic conglomeration. The cover of 1983’s *The Trouser Press Record Guide to New Wave Records*, for example, advertises its new wave contents through a handful of divergent labels: power pop, technopop, rockabilly, electrofunk, art rock, two-tone,

and others.¹⁹ Likewise, 1981's *The New Music* divides its featured artists into trends such as power pop, rockabilly, synthesizer/electronic, ska/bluebeat, and mod.²⁰ This exercise in new wave classification reaches its dizzying zenith in David Bianco's sprawling 1985 discography *Who's New Wave in Music*, which separates its artist entries into over 130 discrete categories.²¹ Many of these categories are relatively mundane, but there are also idiosyncratic head-scratchers like "percussion-oriented new wave disco," "non-rock progressive synthesizer," and "microtonal dance music." Clearly, new wave had a devoted connoisseurist following.

Like similar wide-ranging "new" music categories, such as alternative and indie, that have followed in its footsteps, the new wave label suffered the consequences of its seemingly inexhaustible stylistic breadth. Various described as an "umbrella" or a "catchall" term, trapped between the idealized rebellious purity of punk and the compromised artifice of pop, new wave has been repeatedly branded as a label bereft of any concrete meaning. The *New Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock*, for example, defines new wave as a "virtually meaningless, highly flexible form that arose shortly after punk in the late Seventies."²² As a label that in the words of the *All Music Guide* website eventually came to describe "nearly every new pop/rock artist" of the early 1980s, new wave has seemed like an inviting topic, but one without a readily identifiable common thread.²³

New wave, then, has been doubly disadvantaged. On the one hand it has been portrayed as a mild cousin to punk, an inferior substitute for some genuine sense of rebellion. On the other hand it has been cast aside as a "meaningless" label, a casualty of the far too numerous and disparate sounds gathered around its collective beacon. There is a memorable moment in Penelope Spheeris's 1980 documentary of the Los Angeles punk movement, *The Decline of Western Civilization*, where Claude Bessy, the editor of the punk fanzine *Slash* and singer for Catholic Discipline, summarizes in blunt terms the problems haunting new wave. Describing the riches of the then current new music explosion, Bessy leaves no doubt about new wave's apparent condition: its all too ubiquitous nature paradoxically ensures its very absence.

I have excellent news for the world. There is no such thing as new wave. It does not exist. . . . There never was any such thing as new wave. It was the

polite thing to say when you are trying to explain you are not into the boring old rock and roll, but you didn't dare to say punk because you were afraid to get kicked out of the fucking party and they wouldn't give you coke anymore. There's new music, there's new underground sound, there's noise, there's punk, there's power pop, there's ska, there's rockabilly, but new wave doesn't mean shit.²⁴

For all of Bessy's vitriolic polemics, his point is well taken. New wave seems to be nothing more than a container whose contents—such as power pop, ska, and rockabilly—are more substantive than the label of new wave itself. The more styles we add to the mix, such as art rock, technopop, or electrofunk, the more new wave becomes a mystifying assemblage that reads like a random and meaningless mess. By what logic can we group together rockabilly with technopop? How do art rock and electrofunk fit together? On the surface there appears to be no principle that unifies these styles. This book offers a corrective reading of the new wave era, one that proposes that for all its heterogeneity, the music was indeed unified by an overarching trope: simply put, new wave was seen as a *modern* pop music movement. On the surface, the concept of the modern is as potentially unwieldy and far-reaching as new wave itself, a jumble of contradictions and contested meanings. It is, like new wave, an impossibly large umbrella category. I propose then, in the chapters that follow, several lenses through which to view the modern in more specific and historically grounded contexts, each of which sheds light on a particular aspect of the new wave.

Taken collectively, the first two chapters provide a narrative that charts new wave's various modern guises vis-à-vis the music industry from the time that it emerged in the late 1970s to when it eventually faded away, or "died" by the mid-1980s. The two chapters are split along a historical divide that has long proven to be one of the most complicated aspects of defining the new wave. Chapter 1 deals with the initial new wave that emerged most prominently in the American music industry from 1978 to roughly 1981. Chapter 2 looks at the second new wave that emerged in 1981 through a series of "new" movements—the New Romantics, New Pop, and New Music—all of which corresponded with trends and developments in the United Kingdom and their trickled-over effect in the United States. Each chapter situates new wave's modern identity as part of a discourse that emerged

through the interaction of musicians, record labels, radio, magazines, and critics, while also explaining the basic music stylistic dimensions that distinguished new wave from other contemporaneous genres.

The remaining chapters view new wave through a variety of sociohistorical and music-analytical vantage points, placing the movement within the context of different historical modernities. Chapter 3 examines in detail a specific musical and emotional quality that came to be seen as one of the new wave's most representative modern characteristics, that of *nervousness*. Associated with front men like David Byrne of the Talking Heads and Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo, nervousness in new wave can be traced back to the prominence of neurasthenia or "nerve weakness," a symptomatically modern disease associated with the rise of metropolitan society between 1880 and 1930. As this chapter argues, new wave's modern nervousness functioned not simply as a marker of modernity, but also served to reinforce the middle-class whiteness of the movement's performers and largest audience formation.

Chapters 4 and 5 both examine the new wave's fascination with the modern popular culture and music of the late 1950s to mid-1960s. To many, new wave's relationship with this period often appears to be distanced and heavily ironic. Chapter 4 considers this angle, focusing specifically on the B-52's and the ironic aesthetics of trash, kitsch, and camp, which in themselves were viewed as modern glosses on the debris of past modernities. Chapter 5, on the other hand, looks at those new wave groups who viewed the modern pop music of the mid-1960s, specifically the British Invasion, more reverentially. This nostalgia cohered most forcefully in a "power pop" genre exemplified by the phenomenal success of the Knack. In both of these chapters I show how the supposed purity of these respective attitudes—irreverent irony and nostalgic appreciation—were made problematic by the bands themselves, who wished to position their stances and motivations as more neutral or complex.

Chapter 6 offers a close look at the synthesizer, the musical instrument that came to represent above all new wave's status as a modern genre within the context of its own modernity, that of the late 1970s and early 1980s. I approach the topic by showing how new wave synthesizer players transformed the instrument's symbolic domain in ways that de-emphasized its status as a virtuosic solo instrument, while highlighting its proper-

ties of mechanization and artifice, and the blurred line between “man” and “machine.” The chapter focuses much of its analysis on the new wave’s first synthesizer star, Gary Numan.

Chapter 7 situates new wave on the precipice of a global modernity, specifically in regards to issues of globalization and cultural crossover that would come to dominate the 1980s. I look at one of the most hotly debated musical iterations of this globalization: the emergence of “world beat,” a new genre whose name implied a blurring of races, ethnicities, and global boundaries. This chapter takes an extensive look into the formation and reception history of two new wave albums released in 1980 that act as compelling world beat case studies: Adam and the Ants’ *Kings of the Wild Frontier* and the Talking Heads’ *Remain in Light*, both of which deliberately announced their authentic borrowings of African music and culture. As I show through an examination of the recording techniques and critical discourses surrounding both albums, this imagined authenticity easily collapses back into new wave’s overriding aesthetic of modern artifice.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue that examines new wave *after* new wave, specifically as the movement has enjoyed a considerable renaissance since the early years of the twenty-first century. Revivals as such are crucial to historians and scholars of popular music, for these moments reveal the ways in which genres accrue certain symbolic associations over time. Judging from the influx of *new* new wave bands, from the Killers to La Roux, the new wave of the past circulates most frequently these days as part of a retro-futurist fascination with the once modern technologies and pop culture styles of the 1980s.

Having laid out what this book hopes to accomplish, I should also mention what it will not. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s the new wave was a truly international phenomenon. From the “Neue Deutsche Welle” in Germany to the Russian “Novaya Volna,” and bands like Japan’s Plastics, the new wave could be found all across the globe. To tackle a history of new wave from an international perspective unfortunately lies far beyond the purview of what a single book can accomplish. For that reason I am confining my observations to the new wave as it occurred and was experienced in English-speaking countries, specifically the United States, and to a lesser extent England. Readers will also notice that I have opted not for a broad survey of all the movement’s main artists, but rather for close

analyses of a select few. My concern in writing this book is not to ensure that new wave's many notable artists and bands all receive equal attention, but rather to consider in depth the trends, styles, developments, and controversies that came to dominate the new wave, as exemplified by a handful of its most intriguing musical practitioners.

Last, I will conclude with a word or two about my own background, and how it bears on this book. My scholarly approach in writing this book is most of all informed by a multiplicity of methodologies and interests. This reflects, most of all, my long-standing participation in popular music studies, an interdisciplinary field where musicology, media studies, sociology, cultural studies, American studies, and numerous other areas meet and mingle freely. While I draw on many of these disciplines in my book, at its core this is a musicological study. I have therefore attempted throughout this book to address new wave along two folds. First, I have tried to sketch the music as a distinct historical formation, fleshing out the context through a variety of primary sources ranging from contemporary rock criticism magazines like *Trouser Press*, *Creem*, and *Melody Maker* to practicing musician magazines like *Keyboard* and *Musician*. Second, I have approached new wave through its most recognizable musical styles, as a subject worthy of close scrutiny and analysis, one whose musical details reveal illuminating elements about the movement as a whole.

This interest in new wave's musical stylistic dimensions stems not only from my training as a musicologist, but also from my background as a rock musician, having played in various bands, and in a variety of styles ranging from heavy metal to indie rock, from the 1980s through the early 2000s. Given this experience, I have a deep interest in performance practice and the means by which musicians approach their creative activities. One of my most driving curiosities in tackling the subject of new wave was to engage the question of *how* and *why* these musicians made the music that they did. How did their musical practices share similarities with, yet differ from, the prevailing trends of rock music-making that had become concretized by the end of the 1970s? How did they view their endeavors as part of, or separate from, a continuum of rock history? While one of this book's main goals is to illuminate the general social history and cultural formations under which the new wave arose at the turn of the 1980s as a "mod-

ern" style, my greatest hope is that dedicated new wave fans and curious initiates alike will be inspired to *listen* to this music. For it is the music itself—its rhythms, its arrangements, its tone, its often inventive songwriting strategies—that drew me to the topic of new wave in the first place. In the end, I am a subjective fan as much as an objective observer—one hopes—of this particular era of popular music history.