



Blondie headlines Rockin' at the Knox 2006

> By Buck Quigley

This year's Rockin' at the Knox fundraiser promises to be another memorable affair with several noted local musical acts playing at various settings in the gallery and on two outdoor stages from five to 11pm. Goo Goo Doll Robby Takac will continue his Music is Art affiliation with gallery director Louis Grachos by organizing an art installation in Clifton Hall, and the whole evening will climax with a performance by Blondie, New York new wave icons that are celebrating their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The original band was formed in 1974 by art student/guitarist Chris Stein and a striking waitress from Max's Kansas City—who also happened to possess a great set of pipes and a knack for writing songs—named Deborah Harry. Early on, the band displayed a great sense of style and an adventurous muse by dipping into a broad range of musical genres, from Beatlesque pop to disco to reggae to early rap, and delivering them all with provocative aplomb. They were staples—along with bands like the Ramones, Television and Talking Heads—on the fabled New York City punk/new wave scene that included CBGB's (the struggling punk Mecca that the band continues to help to this day), Mother's and the aforementioned Max's Kansas City.

Looking back at those early years, it's hard to imagine that Blondie was considered a bit shocking at the time—especially when compared with many of today's bands, who clearly can get by on sheer outrageousness alone. Blondie did have an edge, but it always seemed thoughtful—I mean, listen to “Call Me” from the Richard Gere movie *American Gigolo*. Harry's singing in French! How cool is that?

Perhaps one of the most interesting wrinkles in the Blondie story is that the band hit it really big in the late 1970s and early 1980s—Harry's great looks landed her on countless magazines and they were in extremely heavy rotation on early MTV—and then, after the 1982 album *The Hunter*, Stein became ill and the band broke up. It was puzzling for fans who'd come to depend on the band to put out clever, sexy songs to have them simply vanish. Truly a case of “here today, gone tomorrow.” But then, 16 years later, comes the album *No Exit* and the number one hit single



above: **Sleeping Kings of Iona**,
below: **Milk Fat** are other featured acts
in the Rockin' at the Knox series



“Maria.” Suddenly, Blondie is back on the scene—probably benefiting from their Gretha Garbo-like disappearance from the public spotlight—and they're just in time to cash in demographically. Is it coincidence that their energetic hit “One Way or Another” is now the soundtrack to a Swiffer commercial? Seems Harry, an ex-Playboy Bunny, is now the perfect voice for every hip mom's battle against dust bunnies.

And, on May 22 of this year Blondie was in-

Blondie performs Tuesday, June 20, 5-11pm. Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

\$40 in advance, \$45 at the door.

Tickets available at the Albright-Knox, New World Records and Ticketmaster. Standing room only.

ducted into Hollywood's RockWalk. The current band features original members Chris Stein on guitar, Deborah Harry on vocals, Clem Burke on drums and Jimmy Destri on keyboards. Additional members are guitarist Paul Carbonarra, bassist Leigh Foxx and Kevin Patrick on keyboards.

We can also expect Harry to sing a few bars of a new tune called “Dirty and Deep.” Written as the band was preparing for their current tour, the song is a tribute to imprisoned rapper Lil' Kim.

“So many of us love Lil' Kim and can't wait for her rebirth, re-entry, for her to get out of prison,” said Harry in a statement. “She shouldn't have been sent in, in the first place. ‘Dirty & Deep’ is a tribute, just a love song for Kim and a political comment on the injustice of justice, and a comment on the fragility of human nature.”

Other featured acts at Rockin' at the Knox include Sleeping Kings of Iona (who go by the first names Ray, Joe, Molly and Chris), a hometown outfit that's been earning favorable comparisons to Mercury Rev with its lush soundscapes and experimental bent. Indie/electronica/trip hop purveyors Vera Lena (Ryan Besch, Jay Mazzariello, Mike Sobieraj, Kristin Gilmet) will also be on hand, along with jazz-funk by BeArthur (Devlin Flynt, Kevin Urso, Rocco DellaNeve, Mark Marinaccio, Dave Jachimik, Justin Carere, Steve Galbo, Tim Martin, Brian Frazer) and Buffalo hip-hop collective Milk Fat (Reginoff, Johnross Fricano, DJ Yourmoms, Wild Style Kyle, Andy Ballroom).

Last year's event, headlined by Wilco, proved to be a big success for the gallery, an institution that has been benefiting in recent years by taking the stodginess out of its image—by setting up stages filled with amps. This time around should prove to be more of the same.



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