

Juha

"I'm no spring chicken, now I'm full-grown cock."

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Nina Hagen, Holy Mother of Punk



[Punk Planet](#) is always gonna be on my list of favorite magazines; it broke barriers, it refused to bow to either mainstream trends or more-anarcho-punk-than-thou scene snobbery, and tackled global human rights issues with frank and genuine depth while remaining cool and funny. But when they botched my interview with Nina Hagen, they did it spectacularly. “Remember the singer of ‘99 Luftballons’? Well, she’s back....” they wrote, replacing the intro I’d written (that in retrospect I can see was kinda lengthy). The thing is, Nina Hagen doesn’t sing “99 Luftballons” or its hit translation, “99 Red Balloons.” That was Nena, a pop/new wave artist – though also from Germany (and ironically born in the town of Hagen, but Punk Planet didn’t know that). Granted, Nina and Nena are similar-sounding names. Punk Planet immediately gave a great apology in print after a slew of folks wrote in to complain about the error (“We’ve written it on the chalkboard 100 times, we swear!”) Still, my name was on the article in an edition that reached thousands, so I wasn’t too anxious to face Nina afterwards.

This interview – reprinted here as it was originally intended – was conducted in 2004. Since then, Nina’s Mother of Punk clothing line has folded, she’s converted to Christianity, released a devotional album called [Personal Jesus](#) (- featuring “All You Fascists Bound To Lose,” it’s her second devotional album; the first, Om Namah Shivay, was a collection of Hindu chants) – and manages to be as much a live wire as ever.

HOLY MOTHER OF PUNK!

Nina Hagen interviewed by Juha 2004

“I’m only a 49 year old child who is happy... NOW!”

Nina Hagen, born and then banned in East Berlin. Her outrageousness is talked about as much as her music is.

There was the time Nina was asked on an Austrian talk show about what was wrong with the youth of today; she replied by [demonstrating masturbation techniques for women](#) that she felt were sorely needed. There was Nina on MTV in its early days, talking to a UFO through her shoe. Sporting a new ‘do, she explained hair extensions (“hot glue”) to David Letterman, assuring him that he too could look like Boy George. Her shifting physical image stood out even by punk standards, to the point that when she briefly dropped the war-paint, hair-dye, and zany clothes to reveal a woman of stunning beauty underneath... that was probably the look that shocked her audiences most.

The seeming whackiness of her behavior is part of what makes her brilliant, but it can also eclipse the Nina Hagen that needs to be taken seriously in the public eye: animal rights activist, spiritual seeker, and master vocalist and songwriter.



1978 was the year that the Nina Hagen Band album dropped, hugely impacting all of Germany and ushering in its first generation of punk rockers. Hailed as “The Mother of Punk” – maybe by some fans, but especially by her own self – Nina became both an icon of German punk culture and one of its few international successes, gaining masses of fans throughout Europe and South America. Nunsexmonkrock was her first English-language record, and is today considered an underground classic. Her assertion that punk is a spirit rather than simply a sound is evidenced by her “[African Reggae](#)” (a blend of reggae, opera, and yodeling) and the opera-punk disco hit “[New York New York](#)” (through which she became ingrained at least as much in the U.S. electro-hip hop scene as in its punk circles). From there, she effortlessly moved from sound to sound, with the Slits, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Afrika Bambaataa, [Adamski](#), and [Apocalyptica](#) among her collaborators. By 1991’s house-influenced Street, it was as natural for her to be

singing about “flowers for the fly girls” as it was to resurrect old German chestnuts.

Most importantly, there is her voice. Though she hit all the notes that an opera diva dreams of hitting, Nina was never content to be just an amazing singer. Her voice box was also a toy box; she'd pull out any sound from it that suited her musical moment, be it the deep roar of a storming demon, cartoon chipmunk chatter, a hoarse punk cackle, or a Philly soul harmony.

The Return of the Mother album – and its haunting single “[Der Wind](#)” – was Nina's first musical offering of the new millennium. In an about-face that is typical of Nina, she entered 2004 with Big Band Explosion, Hagen-ized versions of jazz and pop standards. Now, Nina is starring as the Wicked Queen in a German film version of Snow White alongside her daughter, the actor Cosma Shiva Hagen. She's also got a clothing line – Mother of Punk – all up and ready to go, and that's where our conversation begins.

Nina, your new fashion line is called Mother of Punk. Being amidst a crowd of rockers at a punk gig usually means being in a sea of leather jackets, but because of your commitment to animal liberation, it's a guarantee that no animals were harmed in the creation of your clothing. Why do you think so many designers are still clinging to fur and animal skin?

They lack the ethics, vision, and humanity! They are money-hungry monsters who don't give a shit. People like Naomi Campbell have first fought for the cause of treating animals ethically, and then changed their mind. They represent the dinosaur fashion era. Those people are evolutionary abortions. The glamour world is great fun, but we need to evolve. The whole of creation is in extreme danger.

As the name of your line indicates, punk is your main legacy. But you've also crossed more genres than any other artist I know of. What made you nod to your punk past in naming your line?

In my heart and soul, I am both a punk and a mother. I found so much love, creativity, solidarity, and freedom in the punk movement of the late 70's. Punk is not limited. Punk embraces everything but rejects ignorance. Punk grows like a tree. Punk is universal. Punk is fun, humor, rebellion and individualism. It's like a child: free, honest and sweet and sometimes very loud and even angry, silly, and ridiculous.

On Big Band Explosion you referred to songs you remade as “sacred butterflies, each of them telling, singing, swinging a healing story...” Now you're working on a second big band album, this time including some German classics...



These are all my favorite songs – I love them! I love to sing them! They are so special and I am nuts about them.

And Big Band Explosion was released independently after years of your being on major labels.... What are your plans for this one?

I am just a musician. I love making music – love singing, writing, producing, creating. Independent label or not, it's what it is. I prefer to work, produce, and finance my albums myself, and when production is finished, then we find the right company. Major companies tended to be too involved in my artistic territories. Too many cooks cooking in one pot. Now – all is great. Let's make good music! Let's dance, let's be inspired!

Much of your music addresses spiritual matters. You also work with a lot of gay men creatively and have a huge gay following, and seem as appreciative of this audience as they are of you. An overwhelming number of spiritual groups – from Christians to Krishnas to Kabbalists, even peace leaders like the Dalai Lama – either condemn or frown upon homosexuality. I wonder what you think about this.



Oh God – one must listen to one’s own heart, for a start. Love, religion, spirituality, and sexuality go hand in hand. One must be happy about his or her love and sexuality. Guilt is death. Never feel guilty about yourself and your choices. When will people learn to embrace each other’s personal choices in a civilized way, and with the heart and soul of a loving mother? Of course there is also the perverted side of sexuality, the disgusting criminal element. And sex is great, but one must not focus on sex too much, otherwise one might come back as a dog. Seriously: just be happy, please.

Do you follow astrology? For a Pisces, you’re persona is extremely fiery....

Yes, yes. I can be fiery but also deep and serious like the sea. I also feel like the Native American Indian Puma and Chinese Goat [Nina neighs like a goat here]. I love being a fish. And in the Vedic-Astrology from Mother India I am a lion. So let’s say I am everything. We all are. The Native American astrology called the Medicine Wheel teaches that.

You seem to embrace the whole world and want to lead it to a greater love. You also project remarkable positivism in everything you do, from your music to interviews. Do you ever get discouraged by the state of the world, or are you filled with so much faith in humanity that you never get too down about it?

The state of the world is our lesson in karma. The state of the world starts within each of us. Let’s all find and treasure the source, the immortal true self: ourselves. We cannot love the world if we don’t love ourselves. Therefore we must fight the good fight. With truth, love, and force, because we have to force ourselves out of lethargy. We must force ourselves to be happy and healthy, true and great.

Okay! And is there anything else you’d like to add?

I add some vinegar and cumin, some salt and some pepper, plus: No woman, No cry! True sisterhood-brotherhood-essence! Save the ancient forests! Save, save! Safe, safe!