

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN HARRISON

"People find it very difficult to deal with subject matter that crosses over from one pigeonhole into another," says Christopherson. "Here was top-shelf material being presented down the road from Buckingham Palace. That hadn't happened before."

"We were vilified by the Daily Mirror and Spare Rib," adds Cosey, who was in Greece doing a shoot for Men Only when the hysteria reached its height. "To have a woman present herself in sex magazines as art was seen as an insult to feminism. Then the people at the porn magazines got very upset, and they blacklisted me as well. The only person who came out to speak publicly in my defence was [Daily Sport editor] David Sullivan - he's an odd person to have as your patron, but he was very supportive."

The band followed their ICA performance with a guest slot at the Winchester Hat Fair. One can only imagine what the provincial audience made of Throbbing Gristle's blend of noise, horror and bodily fluids. "I do remember a line of 10-year-old girls at the front of the audience," says Cosey. "That was when we were inspired to write our song We Hate You (Little Girls)."

Even more memorable was a gig at the frightfully traditional Oundle public school, booked by a naughty schoolboy on the excuse that Throbbing Gristle were like John Cage. The band spent the day at school and had lunch at the refectory before tearing into a performance of questionable educational value. A handful of the boys jumped on stage and screamed into the microphone before carrying P-Orridge around the school on their shoulders.

"They went crazy," says P-Orridge, who remembers the Oundle concert as one of the highlights of the band's career. "At one point they all spontaneously started singing Jerusalem. The little ones from prep school were there, and because they had no preconceptions and just felt the energy of the sound, they loved it. I think some of the teachers were a little confused."

The fourth member of Throbbing Gristle is Chris Carter, an unassuming electronics expert who built many of the band's instruments. Carter shared with the rest of the band an interest in the "cut-up" techniques of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, in which text is reassembled at random to reveal new patterns of information.

"Something we learnt from Burroughs and Gysin was that we could cut up culture and reassemble it, and in doing so see what it really says," says P-Orridge. "You reveal structures and symbols that have been



Reunited for one last spasm... Chris Carter, Genesis P-Orridge, Peter Christopherson and Cosey Fanni Tutti

DIRTY FREAKY THINGS

They caused outrage by using tampons, blood and strippers on stage. But 30 years on, have Throbbing Gristle grown up? **Will Hodgkinson** finds out

In the second half of the 1970s, Throbbing Gristle waged war on British society. With songs about the Moors murders and the Manson killings, and riotous concerts that garnered front-page headlines and sparked debates in the House of Commons, the band did, as guitarist Cosey Fanni Tutti puts it, "disrupt things a little". The MP Nicholas Fairbairn called them wreckers of civilisation - shortly before he was arrested for indecent exposure. But even wreckers of civilisation, like prostitutes and politicians, get respectable with time. The four members of Throbbing Gristle are together again to prepare for a festival that is being organised in their honour.

It is hard to equate the polite, middle-aged people before me in the offices of the Mute record company with the infamous performance-art deviants of past years. Even if one of them is currently turning into a man/woman hybrid.

"What happened to Nicholas Fairbairn highlighted the value and accuracy of Throbbing Gristle," says Genesis P-Orridge, who, with bouffant highlights and sparkling

earrings, looks like a smartly dressed patroness of the arts, despite still technically being a man. P-Orridge and his wife are engaging in a project in which they are turning into the same person through surgery and hormone treatments. They celebrated Valentine's Day by getting matching breast implants. "The hypocrisy that we were outlining was validated, especially as the people who decried us were later prosecuted for things far worse than anything we had ever done."

Throbbing Gristle's goal was to reflect the reality of their lives, and that of the post-industrial age, through their music. The band took a journalistic approach to writing songs: they eschewed the usual romantic poetry of the pop lyric in favour of news reports of recent atrocities, letters from friends about severe burns victims, even death threats left on their answerphone. These they combined with home-made synthesizers and early sampling devices to create a sound that could be described, in all fairness, as challenging. Much like the Velvet Underground before them, Throbbing Gristle are one of those bands whose

influence far outweighs their popularity - something that the Re-TG festival, taking place in the satisfyingly inappropriate confines of a former Pontins holiday camp in East Sussex, is reflecting.

"There is a collection of oddballs who were teenagers when they came to see our shows," says Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson, who lives in Bangkok. "Now they're musicians, computer whiz-kids and heads of corporations. They have a clout we never expected. Luckily, they still have a great affection for us."

Throbbing Gristle's story begins in 1976, when former performance artists Cosey Fanni Tutti and Genesis P-Orridge staged a show called Prostitution at the ICA in London. It featured pornographic photographs of Cosey taken from the pages of the top-shelf magazines she modelled for at the time, a performance by a stripper who did her best not to slip on the fake blood covering the stage, a few used tampons that were distributed by P-Orridge and the debut performance by Throbbing Gristle. The staging of pornography in an artistic setting was enough to offend feminists, politicians, the press - even porn barons.

P-Orridge and his wife are in the process of turning themselves into the same person. They have matching breast implants

it really says," says P-Orridge. "You reveal structures and symbols that have been deliberately hidden from you, and now that process of deconstruction is used a lot. I was in the Lower East Side recently and a dreadlocked kid came up to me and said, 'You're Genesis, aren't you? I'm a hip-hop DJ and we use TG all the time.'" It turns out that there's a huge community of African-American musicians whose main influence is Throbbing Gristle."

The band's influence can be traced in the black music of Detroit and the cartoon horror-rock of Marilyn Manson, but also in the work of artists such as Jake and Dinos Chapman and Tracey Emin. And Throbbing Gristle were the original non-musicians. As Christopherson puts it: "The punks were always saying you only needed to learn three chords to form a band. My attitude was: why do you need to know that many?"

Throbbing Gristle ended in 1981, partly because they were becoming iconic: the goal had been to make strong artistic statements based on a refusal to be sidetracked by any other genre or political movement, not to create a movement themselves. The festival will be the first and only time they will play together since they split up. It's hard to imagine the band waging the all-out assault they did back then. Have they changed?

"Well, I think I have," says P-Orridge with a flutter of his/her lashes.

"After nearly 30 years, we can sit in a room and still follow the same processes that we did when we started," says Christopherson. "But this isn't going to be a Rolling Stones-like nostalgia concert. We plan to destroy our own myth very efficiently."

The Re-TG festival is at Camber Sands Holiday Centre, East Sussex, from May 14-16. Box office: 0870 1000 000.