

ROCK MUSIC

GOTHIC

RELEASE THE BATS

MUSIC BACKGROUND:

This one's a bold shocker. It's a rip-roaring, come-on-strong, rabid gothic rock offering about bats that attack and bite people.

The lyrics are all rubbish, of course. Bats do not attack and bite people unless they are rabid. But rabies in bats is much rarer than in other mammals. Real vampire bats (such as *Desmodus rotundus*) do softly land in the night on sleeping mammals (rarely humans). They make a small incision, and then lap up the blood from the wound. But they never attack anybody.

There are over 1,240 bat species on the planet and most of them are highly beneficial to mankind; destroying numerous pesky insects, pollinating fruit trees, carrying seeds, etc. This song and other rock songs do much unfortunate damage to the reputation of bats, but then so do all the vampire books and films.

When Nick Cave and his band moved from Australia to England in 1980 they "changed their name to The Birthday Party, and set about destroying every musical and social rule and convention they encountered. Their fierce, careering musical attack, built on the three-pronged assault of Howard's stinging guitar, Calvert ferociously dogging him on drums, and Cave's apocalyptic wowl was downright scary. In their four years together, the band amassed a dedicated following whose rebelliousness rivaled the band's own." (Schoemer 1989)

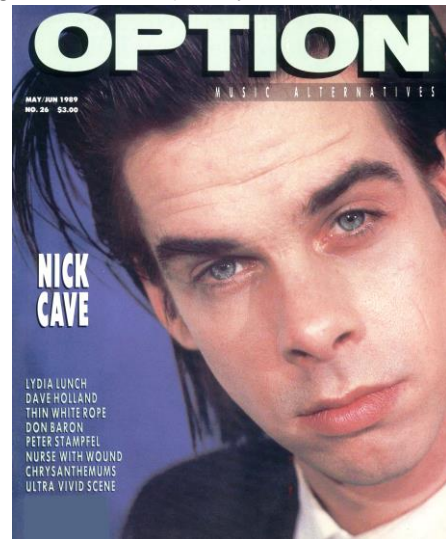
The first stanza of this insane, violent song spells it out –

Whooh Bite ! Whooh Bite !
Release the bats. Release the bats
Don't tell me that it doesn't hurt
A hundred fluttering in your skirt

Then in the chorus – My baby is a cool machine...
Sex vampire, cool machine !
Release the bats !

Apparently The Birthday Party hated this song (Artslut 20909) and Nick Cave was a bit frustrated by its success. They first performed it on BBC Radio One on April 28, 1981. After that they performed it on a regular basis at nearly all their concerts during 1981-82. (Anon. 2016)

The renowned British disc jockey, John Peel, broadcast regularly on BBC Radio One from 1967 to 2004. Every year he would ask listeners to nominate their favorite tracks of the past year and then he would air their picks as the "Festive Fifty." "Release the Bats" was voted 19 on the Festive Fifty 1981 and again in 1982 it reached 28. (Heatley 2004)



Ref: Anon. 2016, The Birthday Party, Concert Chronology, March 1980-August 1983, [fromthearchives](#)
 Artslut 2009, General Comment on Song, [songmeanings](#)
 The Bat, Data, [Wikipedia](#)
 The Birthday Party (band), Bio, [Wikipedia](#)
 The Birthday Party, Release the Bats, Mick Harvey & Nicholas Edward Cave, Song Lyrics, [songmeanings](#)
 Cave, Nick 1990, *King Ink*, 2.13.61 Publications, Los Angeles, CA. p. 16
 Heatley, Michael 2004, *John Peel: A Life in Music*, Michael O'Mara Books Ltd., p. 196 & 199
 Schoemer, Karen 1989, Get Your Wings, *Option*, n. 26, May-Jun 1989, Los Angeles, p. 36-43
 Vampire Bat, Data, [Wikipedia](#)

VARIOUS VERSIONS OF **RELEASE THE BATS**

In chronological order of performance

RK-GT-RTB1 United Kingdom 1981

RELEASE THE BATS

RK- Gothic Rock – Punk – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Mick HARVEY & Nick CAVE

Rts: Tactik Music

Perf: **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY**

Nick Cave (vocal)
 Rowland S. Howard (guitar)
 Mick Harvey (guitar, organ, & percussion)
 Tracey Pew (bass)
 Phil Calvert (drums)

Prod: The Birthday Party & Nick Launay

Prod. Co: (CD) 2:18

Rec. Co: (?) London

Rec. Date: April 1981

Time: 2:32

A. British Releases:

1. Single **45:** 4AD AD 111 (Aug. 1981)
Flip Sd: Blast Off
 7" 45rpm
2. Maxi **45 EP:** (June 1983)
 4 AD BAD 307
 12" 45rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 1)
3. **LP:** PRAYERS ON FIRE (Apr. 1981)
 4 AD CAD 104
4. Reissue on Compilation **CD:** A COLLECTION
 Missing Link SBCD 2017 (Tk 6)
5. Reissue on **CD:** JUNKYARD (July 1982)
 4 AD CAD 207 CD (Tk 13)
6. Reissue on Compilation **CD:** THE BIRTHDAY
 PARTY HITS (1992)

GAD 2016 CD

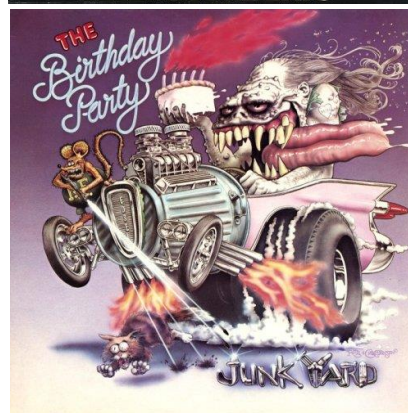
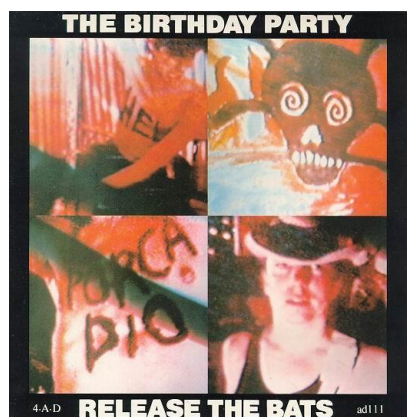
B. Greek **LP:** PRAYERS ON FIRE
 Statik

C. Australian Releases:

1. Single **45:** Missing Link MISS 37.12 (1983)
Flip Sd: Blast Off
2. Compilation **CD:** JUNKYARD (1991)
 Virgin VOZCD 2049 (Tk 12)
3. Compilation **CD:** CHOPPER (2000)



Harvey Cave Calvert Pew Howard



Liberation Music LIBCD 2003-2 (Tk 13)

Notes: This single "came out during the emergence of the gothic scene. This song about "vampire sex" was promoted by an advert with the words 'Dirtiness is next to antigodliness.'" (Anon. 2016)

One critic wrote – "Knuckle-dragging drums. Sickening, scything distortion. Barely comprehensible vocals in the Vic Reeves 'club style': here was a compelling sonic template for goth's lunatic fringe. Most gothic moment: Nick Cave's blood-curdling shriek: 'Whoaaaargh! BITE!'" (Lewis 2009)

One [YouTube](#) video uses clips from "Dracula" films plus several shots of bat flights and a flying fox walking on a branch, ending with fast cuts of different shots of Bela Lugosi as Dracula in the 1931 film and another [YouTube](#) video clip also uses a few shots of bat flights and bats hanging from a cave ceiling plus numerous assorted shots from the ubiquitous Dracula films.

This song was used for the "Bal Spéléo" which followed the banquet at the 2000 National Congress of the Fédération Française de Spéléologie.

Ref: Anon. 2016, The Birthday Party (band), Bio, [Wikipedia](#)

The Birthday Party, Junkyard (album), [Wikipedia](#)

The Birthday Party, Release the Bats 45, [Discogs](#)

The Birthday Party, Release the Bats, (2:58), [YouTube](#) (◀COMPLETE AUDIO-VIDEO SAMPLE)

The Birthday Party, Release the Bats, (2:33), [YouTube](#) (◀COMPLETE AUDIO-VIDEO SAMPLE)

The Birthday Party, Release the Bats, Mick Harvey & Nicholas Edward Cave, Song Lyrics, [songmeanings](#)

The Birthday Party, Release the Bats, National Film & Sound Archives, bats-p. 11, [afc.gov.au](#)

Cave, Nick 1990, *King Ink*, 2.13.61 Publications, Los Angeles, CA. p. 16

Chopper CD, Liberation Music, [Discogs](#)

Fitzgerald, Helen 1982, *Master Bag*, v. 1, n. 15, Aug. 4-12, 1982, London, p. 12-14

Lewis, Luke 2009, Release the Bats – It's the 20 Greatest Goth Tracks, *New Musical Express*, [nme](#)

Michel P., *New Wave*, n. 16, (Juin) 1982, Paris, p. 14

Nick Cave Discography, The Birthday Party, [oocities.org](#)

RK-GT-RTB2 United Kingdom ? 1983

RELEASE THE BATS (LIVE)

RK– Gothic Rock – Punk – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Mick HARVEY & Nick CAVE

Perf: **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY**

Nick Cave (vocal)

Rowland S. Howard (guitar)

Mick Harvey (guitar & percussion)

Tracey Pew (bass)

Phil Calvert (drums)

Prod. Co: Funeral Music

Rec. Loc: The Hacienda; Manchester

Rec. Date: July 22, 1982

Time: (?)

Bootleg Compilation **LP:** COITUS SANCTUS AMEN

Funeral Music 668993

12" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 4)

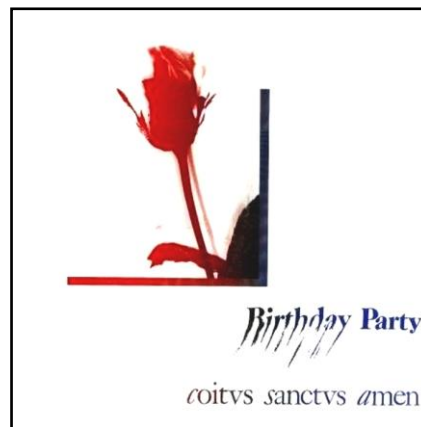
Notes: The first known bootleg of the song. "This is the music from the video, 'Pleasure Heads Must Burn'. The sound quality of my copy is extremely poor." (Maes 2009)

Ref: The Birthday Party, Coitus Sanctus Amen LP, [Discogs](#)

The Birthday Party, Discography II, Unofficial Releases, [fromthearchives](#)

Maes, Maurice 2009, Nick Cave, The Birthday Party, Bootlegs, [iae.nl](#)

Pleasure Heads Must Burn DVD, [Wikipedia](#)



RK-GT-RTB3 Australia 1985

RELEASE THE BATS (LIVE)

RK– Gothic Rock – Punk – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Mick HARVEY & Nick CAVE

Rts: Tactik Music

Perf: THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Nick Cave (vocal)
Rowland S. Howard (guitar)
Mick Harvey (guitar, organ, & percussion)
Tracey Pew (bass)
Phil Calvert (drums)

Prod. Co: Missing Link Records

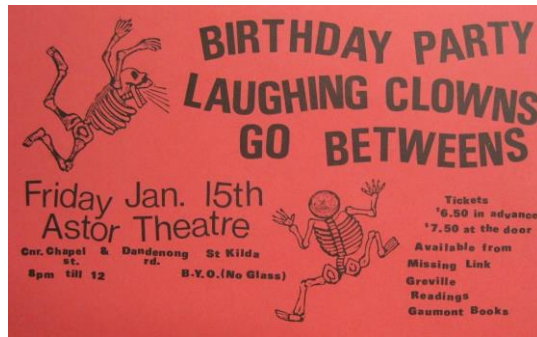
Rec. Loc: Astor Theatre; St Kilda, Melbourne, Victoria

Rec. Date: January 15, 1982

Time: 2:35 or 3:14

A. Australian Releases:

- LP:** IT'S STILL LIVING
Missing Link ING 009
12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 3)
- LP:** IT'S STILL LIVING (1991)
Virgin VOZ 2048
12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 3)
- CD:** IT'S STILL LIVING (1991)
Missing Link LINK 28 CD (Tk 9)
- CD:** IT'S STILL LIVING (1991)
Virgin VOZCD 2048 (Tk 9)



Notes: Recorded live at the Astor Theatre in St Kilda, Melbourne.

Referring to this CD one critic wrote – “The entire album is recorded in the wake of ‘Junkyard,’ and the classic hit (much to Nick Cave’s endless puzzlement and frustration) ‘Release the Bats.’” (Braeden 2005) There are some discrepancies regarding the running time [Discogs](#) gives it as 2:35; but [Wikipedia](#) gives it as 3:14.

Ref: The Birthday Party, Concert Chronology, March 1980-August 1983, [fromthearchives](#)

The Birthday Party, It’s Still Living LPs & CDs, [Discogs](#)

Birthday Party, Live at the Astor Theatre, National Film & Sound Archives, bats-p. 13, [afc.gov.au](#)

Braeden, Jeffrey 2005, It’s Still Living, Customer Reviews, [Amazon](#)

It’s Still Living LP, Data, [Wikipedia](#)

Nick Cave Discography, The Birthday Party, [oocities.org](#)

RK-GT-RTB4 Belgium 1985

RELEASE THE BATS (LIVE)

RK– Gothic Rock – Punk – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Mick HARVEY & Nick CAVE

Perf: THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Nick Cave (vocal)
Rowland S. Howard (guitar)
Mick Harvey (guitar & percussion)
Tracey Pew (bass)
Phil Calvert (drums)

Prod. Co: Party Records

Rec. Loc: Berlin

Rec. Date: Nov. 3, 1981

Time: (?)

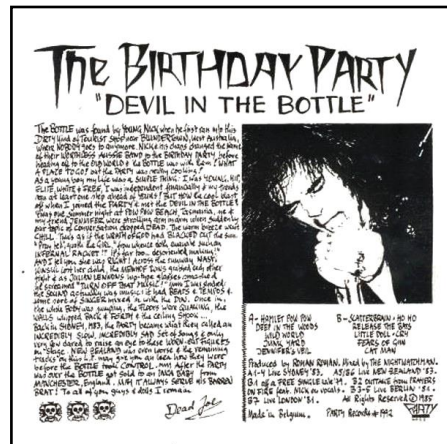
Bootleg Compilation **LP:** DEVIL IN THE BOTTLE

Party 1992 (Blue vinyl)
12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 3)

Notes: Recorded live in Berlin, West Germany.

Ref: The Birthday Party, Concert Chronology, March 1980-August 1983, [fromthearchives](#)

The Birthday Party, Devil in the Bottle LP, [Discogs](#)



The Birthday Party, Discography II, Unofficial Releases, [fromthearchives](#)
Maes, Maurice 2009, Nick Cave, The Birthday Party, Bootlegs, [iae.nl](#)

RK-GT-RTB5 United Kingdom 1987

RELEASE THE BATS (LIVE)

RK- Gothic Rock – Punk – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Mick HARVEY & Nick CAVE

Rts: Tactik Music

Perf: **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY**

Nick Cave (vocal)

Rowland S. Howard (guitar)

Mick Harvey (guitar, organ, & percussion)

Tracey Pew (bass)

Phil Calvert (drums)

Prod: Dale Griffin

Prod. Co:

Rec. Co: BBC Enterprises Ltd.

Rec. Date: April 21, 1981

Time: 2:32 or 2:34

A. British Releases:

1. **LP: THE PEEL SESSIONS – BIRTHDAY PARTY**
Strange Fruit SFPS 020
12" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 1)
2. Reissue EP-**CD:** (Aug. 1988)
Strange Fruit SFPSCD 020 (Tk 1)
3. Reissue on **CD: THE JOHN PEEL SESSIONS** (2001)
Strange Fruit SFRSCD 098 (Tk 5)

B. Spanish Bootleg Releases:

1. Bootleg Compilation **LP: YOUR BIRTHDAY PARTY HAVE NOW BEGUN!** (1980s?)
Ral 3 NP-205
12" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 5)
2. Bootleg Compilation **LP: WELCOME TO THE BIRTHDAY PARTY** (2000?)
Ral 3 NP-205
12" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 5)

Notes: Recorded for the John Peel Show on Radio One; taken from Session 5.

The Spanish bootleg releases are both very poor quality. The second LP titled, *Welcome to The Birthday Party*, is just the earlier record, *Your Birthday Party Have Now Begun*, with a new Xeroxed sleeve glued on a white cover.

Ref: The Birthday Party, Concert Chronology, March 1980-August 1983, [fromthearchives](#)

The Birthday Party, Discography II, Unofficial Releases, [fromthearchives](#)

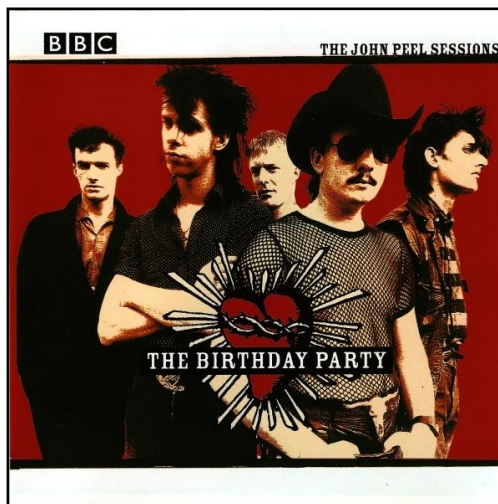
The Birthday Party, The John Peel Sessions CD, [Discogs](#)

The Birthday Party, Release the Bats, Peel Sessions, National Film & Sound Archives, bats-p. 12, [afc.gov.au](#)

The Birthday Party, Your Birthday Party Have Now Begun! LP, [Discogs](#)

Maes, Maurice 2009, Nick Cave, The Birthday Party, Bootlegs, [iae.nl](#)

Nick Cave Discography, The Birthday Party, [occities.org](#)



RK-GT-RTB6 United Kingdom 1999

RELEASE THE BATS (LIVE)

RK- Gothic Rock – Punk – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Mick HARVEY & Nick CAVE

Rts: Tactik Music

Perf: **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY**

Nick Cave (vocal)

Rowland S. Howard (guitar)
Mick Harvey (guitar & percussion)
Tracey Pew (bass)
Phil Calvert (drums)

Prod. Co:

Rec. Loc: The Venue, London

Rec. Date: Nov. 26, 1981

Time: 3:05

- A. British **CD:** THE BIRTHDAY PARTY – LIVE 1981-82
4 AD GAD 9005 CD (Tk 7)
- B. French **CD:** THE BIRTHDAY PARTY – LIVE 1981-82
4 AD 7243 8478412 6 (Tk 7)
- C. German **CD:** THE BIRTHDAY PARTY – LIVE 1981-82
4 AD RTD 120.2164 2 (Tk 7)
- D. Australian **CD:** THE BIRTHDAY PARTY – LIVE 1981-82
Shock CAKE 6 (Tk 7)

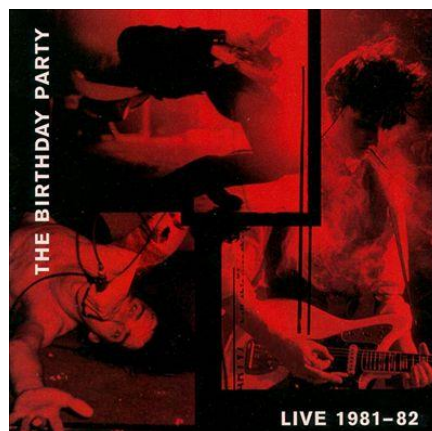
Notes: Recorded live at The Venue in London.

Ref: The Birthday Party, Concert Chronology, March 1980-August 1983, [fromthearchives](#)

The Birthday Party – Live 1981-82 CD, [Allmusic](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

The Birthday Party – Live 1981-82 CD, [Discogs](#)

Hanson, Amy 2005, *Kicking Against the Pricks: An Armchair Guide to Nick Cave*, Helter Skelter Publ., London,
p. 29-33



caveinspiredmusic.com