

No PRETENDER

WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GAY RIGHTS
AND ANIMAL RIGHTS ARE ALL PART
OF THE SAME CONTINUUM, ROCK
LEGEND CHRISSIE HYNDE TELLS
KATRINA FOX.

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Girls with guitars and a band are two-a-penny nowadays, but 30 years ago they were a rare breed. With her trademark dark fringe, outspoken views and 'anti-fashion' look, Pretenders front woman Chrissie Hynde is the epitome of cool and she's set many a dyke's heart racing over the past three decades.

Originally from Ohio in the US, Hynde moved to London in the 1970s and established herself in the burgeoning punk scene. In 1978 she formed The Pretenders, and despite numerous changes in line-up over the years, has kept the band going to date. With a string of hit songs such as 'Brass in Pocket', 'Stop Your Sobbing' and 'Back on the Chain Gang', the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2005, while Hynde has collaborated on various projects with musical behemoths such as Frank Sinatra and Ringo Starr.

In addition to her rock icon status, Hynde is known as much nowadays for her passion to end animal cruelty in all its forms. Whenever she's touring, she slips into her role as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) spokeswoman and promotes a particular campaign for the country she is visiting. On a recent trip to Australia, the cause was to ban 'mulesing' — a gruesome and cruel procedure in which huge chunks of skin and flesh are cut from lambs' anuses, without any painkillers or anaesthetic, to prevent them being bitten by flies.

It's four hours before she's due to go on stage, and Hynde is reclining on a sofa in her hotel room overlooking the water at Circular Quay in Sydney. At 55, she remains beautiful, slim and healthy — a testament to her vegan diet, which is the vehicle through which she sees the world. "I have never thought in terms of gay, Jewish, feminist and so on — I think in terms of meat-eater or non-meat-eater," she asserts. "I don't feature gender or sexuality issues. What I say is 'I won't eat you if you don't eat me'. I won't kill you if you won't kill me — to me, that's a nice fair way of getting through the world."

Unlike many celebrities who simply put their names to a cause or show up for the occasional charitable benefit, Hynde does the hard yards. She's been arrested twice, once for protesting outside a Kentucky Fried Chicken shop in France, and for cutting up

leather jackets in a GAP store in New York. "I spent the night in jail and didn't get out till 6am the next morning," she laughs. "I had a show to do that night, and I knew my manager must be thinking 'Oh fuck!'" She may not call herself a feminist, but Hynde lives and breathes Simone de Beauvoir's edict 'the personal is political', never afraid to speak her mind, even if what comes out of her mouth occasionally gets her in trouble. She's told an audience of gun-owning, meat-eating Texans to "fuck off", to the consternation of fellow band members, and McDonalds took out an injunction against her, forbidding her to talk about the fast-food chain in public, after she joked about how she'd like to blow the company up and a fan fire-bombed one of its branches in her honour.

Although straight, Hynde is aware that she's popular with lesbians. When it's suggested that a lot of dykes, younger ones in particular, no longer embrace veganism or at least vegetarianism because they consider it old-fashioned, she makes a parallel with the music scene. "Being a product of the '60s I thought everyone in music would be vegetarians by now, but it's not so," she muses. "It's real disappointing when I walk into a recording studio and some idiot walks in and says 'I'm going out to Burger King, does anyone want anything?' and I'm sitting there thinking 'Yeah, I want you to fuck off'. But he's our tape op, and I'm like 'Who are you people?' So you can find a parallel in the gay community: Somewhere out there, there's a couple of dykes cooking up their steak dinner tonight and moaning about how much they hate men, and as far as I'm concerned — go fuck yourself! I just bring it back to the same thing — I won't kill you if you don't kill me, but if you cross that line, then as far as I'm concerned you're one of them, and that's the only way I see them and us."

If meat-eaters and other animal abusers get the sharp end of Hynde's tongue, so too do the plethora of pop starlets churning out bland tunes with lame lyrics and using sex to sell their products. While PETA has also been accused of doing this to 'sell' the animal rights message, it's not the same thing, Hynde argues. "It's not the kind of sex that a lot of idiots in the music business use when they turn themselves into soft porn stars when they're making their videos — to me that's

bullshit because they're serious about it. Some of these so-called pop icons that I've heard women say are female icons make me hang my head in shame. Like I said earlier, I don't really feature gender issues — an idiot's an idiot."

While minority or equal rights movements are often splintered into various factions, each focusing only on their own cause, they are all inter-linked, Hynde opines. "I know so many people in the music business and they're trying to solve the world's problems but they're big meat-eaters. They don't make these connections — like Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. This film has all these things about climate change but never talks about animal agriculture so it kind of makes you wonder 'Why is that always left out?' It's a mind fuck. Anyone who cares about the environment or calls themselves an environmentalist has got to be vegan."

Raising one's consciousness and becoming aware of these kinds of connections would go a long way to putting right some of the world's wrongs, Hynde, who follows an Indian Vedic philosophy, believes. "Take just five minutes and really think about what goes on in a slaughter house," she says. "Most people ask me, 'Why are you bothering with animal rights when there's all these issues with people?' But you generally find that if people are kind to animals they usually don't have all these other problems. That's the beauty of animal rights because if someone can feel compassionately about an animal, then obviously they're being sensitive and they have a consciousness that can have empathy."

For information on Chrissie Hynde and The Pretenders, visit pretendersarchives.com. To support PETA, visit peta.org

