

NYC'S GREATEST HITS

The city not only invented the modern album cover — we defined it with these classics

BY BILLY HELLER

WHEN IT COMES to classic record albums, New York's got it covered. Not only is Gotham the setting for some of the most iconic album art of the vinyl age, it's also where the modern album cover was invented — by a Brighton Beach kid named Alex Steinweiss. When Steinweiss became art director of Columbia Records, there were no images or photos on the packaging of 78-rpm discs. The covers were "mainly type," with the name of the artist, recalls Steinweiss, whose career is celebrated in a recent limited-edition book from Taschen. "I thought that what was being sold was crap," Steinweiss, 93, tells The Post from his Florida home.

He was just 23 when he went "on a campaign to beautify the package," he says. Columbia was pleased with a sample he drafted because "they knew damn well if that went into the market, it's gonna sell." His first effort was 1940's "Smash Song Hits by Rodgers & Hart" (inset) featuring an image of the Imperial Theatre's 45th Street marquee shot by a commercial photographer. "When I got the prints, I figured, 'Something is a little missing,'" Steinweiss says. He added circular lines, like record grooves.



To celebrate this Saturday's annual Record Store Day (recordstoreday.com), we take you under the covers with, in no particular order, 10 of the greatest NYC-themed record sleeves.

1 LED ZEPPELIN PHYSICAL GRAFFITI 1975



Location: 96-98 St. Mark's Place

Thirty-five years later, the East Village buildings on the cover look the same (left). Designer Peter Corrison has described his concept as a tenement with people moving in and out (the album came with the windows cut out and sleeves that could be slipped behind the cover showing band members and other famous people). Although he was happy with the look of the buildings, Corrison had to lop off a floor (the fourth) so it could fit onto the square album cover. For years, there's been a vintage clothing store named Physical Graffiti on the bottom floor of No. 98.

2 STEELY DAN PRETZEL LOGIC 1974



Location: Fifth Avenue, outside Central Park

"We were living out in LA, and I guess we were homesick," Donald Fagen says of his and Walter Becker's idea to feature a New York photo on their third album. Since designer Ed Caraeff didn't have a jacket warm enough for a New York winter, he gave the assignment to Raeanne Robinson, who snapped 13 pretzel vendors in one day, including one pretzel woman. As for the one who made the cover, "I think he asked me if I wanted a pretzel," Robinson recalls. "I said, 'No thanks.'" "That particular vendor had the *joi de vivre* we were after," Fagen says. "And he was the most creative spell-er." (He's selling "Hot Pretzles.")

3 SIMON & GARFUNKEL WEDNESDAY MORNING, 3 AM 1964

Location: Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel posed for 500 photos on the platform before realizing they were unusable. As they "packed up the cameras and guitars," Garfunkel says on the duo's "Old Friends" record, "I took a glance at the subway wall. And I noticed that written there, in the baroque style common to New York Subway wall writers, was 'the old familiar suggestion.' " Simon was more graphic during a UK concert: "See how mad we look, how angry? We were there for about a half-hour, taking all these pictures. And after we finished them, we looked and right behind us in very clear print was: 'F - - You' " "Of course," Garfunkel says, "we immediately told Columbia Records that this was exactly what we wanted on the cover of the LP." They didn't get that wish, but they did get the song "A Poem on the Underground Wall."



4 BLONDIE AUTOAMERICAN 1980

Location: Broadway and Eighth Street

Producer Mike Chapman insisted the band record in LA, of which Chris Stein lamented: "Every day we get up, stagger into the blinding sun, [and] drive past a huge Moon-mobile from some ancient sci-fi movie." But Blondie insisted on a cover from their hometown, posing on a roof at Broadway and Eighth. The photo was treated to look like a painting.

5

**KISS
DRESSED
TO KILL
1974**



Location: 23rd Street at Eighth Avenue (southwest corner)

"We were making a comic book/photo novela for Creem magazine where Kiss are dressed up for their 'day job,'" says photographer Bob Gruen. The shot that wound up as the album cover "was just a minor part of the whole shoot. We were heading back to the car, and thought, 'Hey, let's take a picture on the sidewalk.' They liked the look when they saw it in the magazine. That's where they got the idea for 'Dressed To Kill.' Some of the guys didn't even own suits. A couple of the suits are mine. Gene's wearing my wife's clogs. Ace is wearing my shoes." Despite the makeup, nobody paid the band much attention. "They were still just a New York underground band. You gotta be more than a little weird to get attention in New York."

**BOB DYLAN
THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN 1963**

Location: Jones Street, between Fourth and Bleecker streets

Dylan and his girlfriend Suze Rotolo lived at 161 W. Fourth St., just steps from where Columbia Records photographer Don Hunstein shot them one cold February day.

"It was one of those days after a snowfall, and it was really damp and cold," Rotolo recalls. "Album covers in those years were very stylized and posed. And what was so unusual about this was that it was so spontaneous — no makeup, no special clothing, nothing posed."

At first, Hunstein shot some inside their tiny apartment. In the late afternoon — "Don liked the light, which was fading" — they went out. "Don said, 'Why don't you walk up and down the street.'"

"It was a freezing cold day, and Bob had on this light, suede jacket. Even though he was from the North Country [Minnesota], and probably used to the cold, that was not the jack-

et for that day.

"He wanted his look to be a certain way. With Bob, as a folk-singer from that time, image was all. You had to look funky, but look good. I was very bundled up, with a really thick sweater of his, a sweater of my own and a coat, so I kind of blow everybody's image by looking like an Italian sausage."

They spent less than an hour on Jones Street before heading off to a neighborhood spot for soup.

"That cover really exemplified the exuberance of a new generation," says Rotolo, adding that she lost that green coat in an apartment fire a few years later.

6

7

**BEASTIE BOYS
PAUL'S BOUTIQUE 1989
Location: Corner of Rivington and Ludlow streets**



You couldn't actually shop at Paul's Boutique on the Lower East Side, because "it didn't exist," says Jeremy Shatan, who took the shot (left, and as it looks today, above). It was a set crafted by the Beastie Boys, who hung the sign at a LES storefront. The Dwight Gooden Mets jersey, other clothes and knickknacks out front "was literally all their stuff," says Shatan. "They brought their records — they kind of wanted to show their influences. You can see Al Green on there, and a Modern Lovers album."

The title came from a radio ad they sampled on the album's "Ask for Janice" track. "There was this great reggae deejay, Gil Bailey, on WLIB, and the ads he did were classic, a real New York thing," says Shatan, who befriended Beastie Mike D at the Walden School.

Mike D had an idea for an album cover with a 360-degree view, but he had no idea how to do it. Shatan did, so he was hired. He rented a camera that spun around on the tripod for the 360-degree effect, and hired an assistant adept at the technical side. The Beasties chose the location. "They liked the gritty, New York look on the Lower East Side," Shatan says.

After snapping a few test Polaroids, they set up the camera in the street. "It was pretty early and off the beaten path, so there wasn't much traffic." Shatan and his assistant, he says "had to crouch under the camera to avoid being in the picture. And it was all natural lighting, that's why there's a huge flare in the picture [seen only in the gatefold] from the sun."

After a few hours, they packed up and had a bite at Mike's Barrow Street apartment, then headed for another location, the rooftop at 101 Park Ave. "The best part was when we got in the car to head uptown, they put on a cassette of an early mix of 'Paul's Boutique.' Nobody had heard it yet. It sounded great."

**8 LL COOL J
BIGGER AND
DEFFER 1987**



Location: Andrew Jackson HS, Cambria Heights, Queens

It was homecoming night for LL Cool J when he returned to his alma mater to shoot the cover of his second

album. "He's actually standing on his own car, very gingerly, which he was very proud of at the time," says photographer Glenn E. Friedman, who used a long exposure to create the image. "That green hue is what happens with a time exposure of the New York City street lights at that time — that's what's so beautiful."



9

**SONIC YOUTH
BAD MOON RISING 1984**
Location: Empty lot, Greenpoint, Brooklyn, or Long Island City, Queens (no one remembers for sure)

Sonic Youth had a hot time creating this cover in the autumn of '84. "Thurston [Moore] had the can of lighter fluid, and the first time he lit the pumpkin, he used too much," says guitarist Lee Ranaldo. The scarecrow with the flaming pumpkin head "was a nod to John Fogarty's independent American music and hard-core [punk]. We liked the idea of the flaming pumpkin head, kind of like it had a mohawk. A very clear urban setting was key to us." Before lighting the pumpkin, the band plucked dried weeds from the lot and stuffed the head. The background which shows buildings along the FDR Drive, from about 25th to 30th streets, was caught by photographer James Welling as the sun was setting. After the shoot, Ranaldo says, "I took the flannel shirt home and wore it for another couple of years."



10

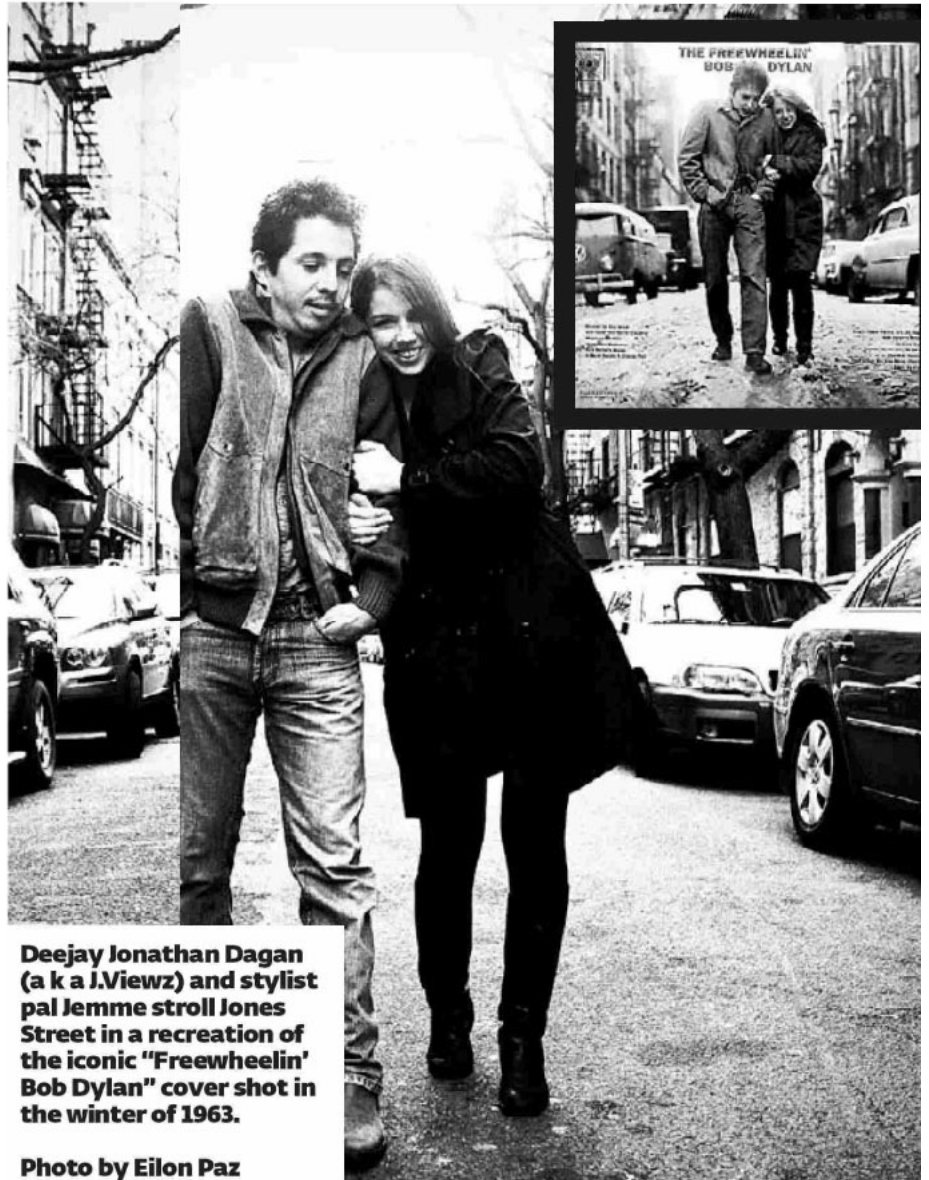
**BILLY JOEL
52ND STREET 1978**
Location: 52nd Street at Seventh Avenue

"The photo was taken right outside the A&R Studios where we recorded it," Joel says. "We just wanted a shot of the entrance to the studio — sort of a New York twist on the famous 'Abbey Road' Beatles cover." Photo assistant Earl Steinbicker calls it

"a perfect spot, since we only had to pop out the door, shoot and get back in the studio before a crowd formed."

"The name of the album was chosen before the photo was taken," says Joel. "52nd Street is also called 'Swing Street' because of the history of all the great jazz clubs that used to be there in the '30s, '40s and '50s."

Despite his Piano Man moniker, Joel is holding a trumpet. "That horn belonged to the great jazz musician Freddie Hubbard, who played on the track 'Zanzibar,'" Joel says. "Obviously, I couldn't just be standing casually on the street with a f---ing piano."



Deejay Jonathan Dagan (a.k.a. J.Viewz) and stylist pal Jemme stroll Jones Street in a recreation of the iconic "Freewheelin' Bob Dylan" cover shot in the winter of 1963.

Photo by Eilon Paz