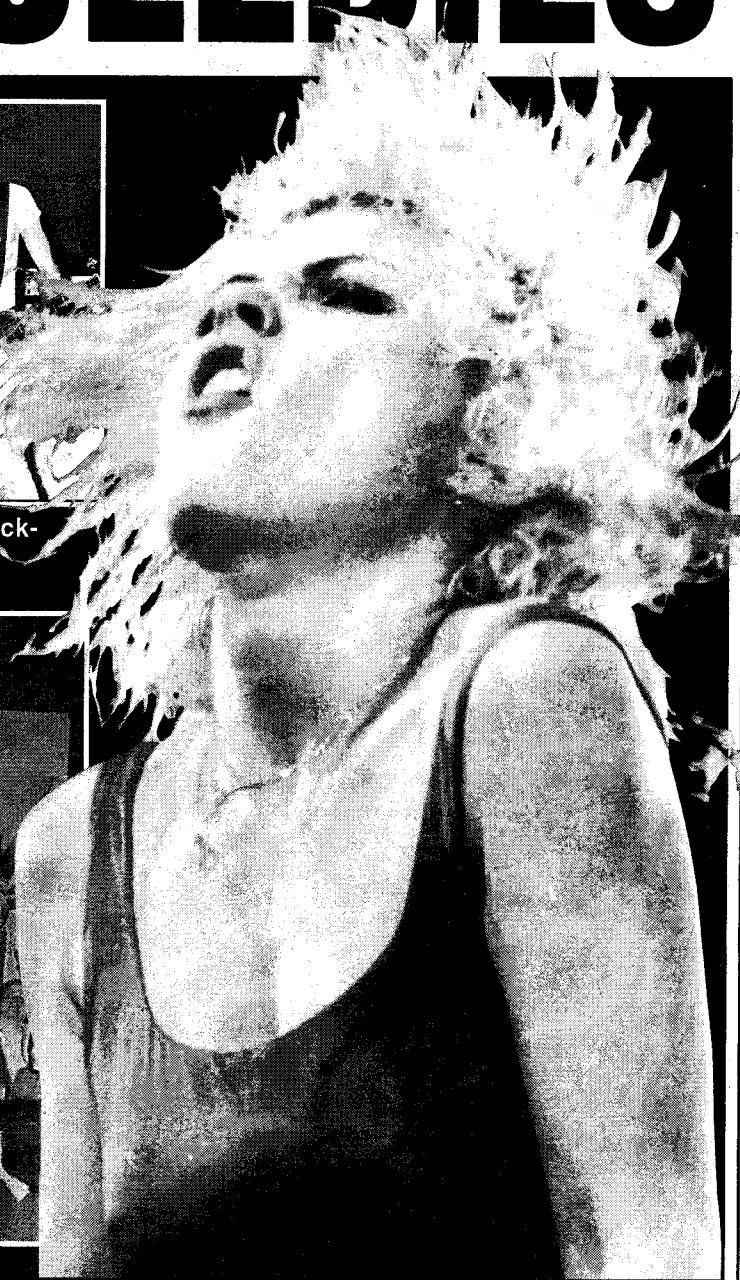


HEEBIE-JEEBIES



ROCK OF AGES: Rock-and-roll venue CBGB, hosting (clockwise from above) The Ramones, Deborah Harry of Blondie, and Patti Smith in the '70s, now faces a punishing rent hike.



Famed music club CBGB in rent peril

By LEONARD GREENE

The legendary downtown club that ushered in American punk rock is in danger of being priced out of its longtime haunt.

CBGB is facing the prospect of shutting down when its lease expires in August — and its annual rent could reach nearly half a million dollars.

For more than 30 years, CBGB has anchored the Bowery with its eclectic mix of live bands.

When owner Hilly Kristal opened the club in 1972, rent was a mere \$600 a month for the space under a Bowery flophouse.

But now that the neighborhood has become chic — that is, pricey — Kristal's rent could reach almost \$40,000 a month, twice what the Village Voice says is now \$20,000.

Supporters of the club have said CBGB was a vital force in bettering the neighborhood it may now have to leave.

Punks and professors alike have jammed into the



N.Y. Post-Susan May Tell

SAD NOTE: The club on the Bowery — whose name stands for country, bluegrass and blues — may soon be struggling to make \$40,000-a-month rent, owners say.

grungy CBGB to hear headliners like a wacky punk group from Forest Hills, Queens, called The Ramones, and The Stilletoos, better known by their later name, Blondie.

The club also auditioned bands on Monday nights; one of its biggest successes was The Talking Heads.

Despite the astronomical rent — and an insurance tab the Voice reported at

\$80,000 a year — the club's management hopes to stick it out.

"We're not closing," said Lisa Kristal, Hilly's daughter. "We're trying to negotiate."

CBGB is not the only club struggling with soaring expenses.

"It's a tough time in general," said Melissa Caruso Scott, co-owner of Tonic, a live music club

on Norfolk Street.

Tonic's rent has doubled since opening seven years ago, and Scott doesn't expect to make up the difference with more expensive drinks and a higher cover charge.

Scott did not say what her new rent will be.

Suffice it to say that it's high enough for Tonic to have to hold a "Webathon" to raise money for

the musical cause.

The Tonic Web site, which usually gives directions to the club and a list of upcoming performers, reads like a pledge drive for National Public Radio.

"We still have a long way to go, but we're off to good start," Scott said. "We've gotten a huge response."

The site is also filled with testimonials from musicians and patrons from Staten Island to Sweden.

"I know the musicians and the audience will come through on this because it is important to have this kind of diversity in music and in people in New York City," wrote Michael Hentz, a music promoter from Syracuse. "A place like this needs to be saved."

In addition to financial donations from patrons, Tonic is also getting musical donations from acts who are scheduling gigs to raise money for the club.

Among the scheduled acts are Sean Lennon and Yoko Ono, who will celebrate her 72nd birthday Saturday on the Tonic stage.