

bag further under my chair with my feet.

Having spent increasing amounts of time with her ageing parents over the past few years — her father, Bud, died in March, aged 88 — Hynde opened Akron's only vegan restaurant, the VegiTerranean, in 2007. The venture has proved so successful she plans to open another in New York. Linda McCartney, who was one of her closest friends, would have been proud.

So does this mean attitudes have changed? Hynde shoots me a look. "People are still supporting slaughterhouses and killing animals," she says. "People are ignorant. Unconscious. I don't know how to wake them up but if I can provide some alternative I can deal with, then I'll do it."

Those alternatives have famously included claiming to have firebombed McDonald's (which was a joke), taking a knife to Gap's leather designer goods and generally being an on-call activist for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the punk organisation whose extremist tactics often involve celebrities. Hynde is as uncompromising about her principles as she is about her music. "Tax meat" read her T-shirt at Farm Aid in Massachusetts in 2008.

She'll be campaigning to stop mulesing — the removal of chunks of skin, without anaesthetic, from the backsides of sheep — during her Australian visit.

"I look at it like this." She sighs, turns up her palms. "If I was in a room with someone who was beating up a child, even if it was not my child I would definitely try to stop them."

Although her daughters — 27-year-old Natalie Rae (whose father is Ray Davies of the Kinks) and 25-year-old Yasmin (whose father is Jim Kerr of Simple Minds) — don't eat meat, they are not as militant as their mother. As burgeoning actress Yasmin Kerr told the London *Evening Standard*, "If people ask I'll explain why but I don't say 'That's disgusting' or start giving lectures, because it makes people uncomfortable. My mother would disagree."

In a throwback to punk's gobby DIY spirit, Hynde lets her opinions flow so passionately, there's no doubting the strength of her emotions even when she's at odds with herself. Her irreverence is sometimes breathtaking: before today my overriding memory

of Hynde was from 1995, when the Pretenders played London's Royal Festival Hall as part of What Women Want, an event intended to draw attention to the changing position of women in society. Before an almost exclusively feminist audience, Hynde sashayed to the front of the stage in her skin-tight jeans. "What do women want?" she declared to confused applause. "A body," she taunted, "like mine."

She shrugs when reminded. "Well, you can't argue with feminism," she says, adding something particularly politically incorrect about what "most of them" want. "I just wish they hadn't started shaking hands; I've had my hand crushed so many times that when I go out it's the thing I fear the most." (The fist bump, it turns out, is to protect her slender guitarist's fingers.)

## LUST ONLY EVER LEADS TO MISERY IN MY EXPERIENCE. ALL THAT SUSPICION AND JEALOUSY IT UNLEASHES

CHRISSIE HYNDE

"All these women moaning about their problems in public," she says. "You don't hear the women who've excelled at something saying it's been harder because they're female, do you?"

And feminism led to the pill, which led to illicit sex (I can't believe Hynde uses the words "illicit sex"), which led to the breakdown of the family structure, which will lead to the end of civilisation as we know it. It's a mind-boggling syllogism. Scratch an old hippie, it seems, and you'll find an ultra-conservative underneath.

"My beliefs probably aren't in step with other people's," she concedes. "I believe in capital punishment, for example. If you can't pay back your debt to society and you are dangerous, then society has a duty to look after itself. It's a no-brainer if you ask me."

I didn't, but it doesn't matter. Hynde tells me anyway. As she talks I get flashes of the skinny wannabe rock chick who squatted and shoplifted and hung around with the Sex

Pistols, who nearly married Johnny Rotten so she could stay in the country. Who drank and took drugs and had flings with *New Musical Express* rock journalist Nick Kent and the Byronesque-but-doomed Farndon (who toured with Australian folk-rock outfit the Bushwackers before joining the Pretenders). Whose explosive rows with Davies extended all the way to the register office and prompted the celebrant to call off the wedding.

Despite being the object of lust for men and women alike, Hynde swears she's never had a one-night stand with a fan. "A guy can see a pretty girl in the audience and give her one that night and get back on the bus and not even think about it. It doesn't work that way for women. We're wired differently."

Whenever a relationship ends she cries a lot, as she did when her seven-year-marriage to Colombian sculptor Lucho Brieve ended in 2004. "Lust only ever leads to misery in my experience," she says. "All that suspicion and jealousy it unleashes. I don't want those things in my life."

She bemoans the dearth of real men, nonetheless: "Show me a man now! Where are they? Men don't have to become men these days. Most of the ones I know would benefit from being in the army. Come on, dudes! Take off the baseball hat and shorts and grow up! All these 50-year-olds acting like children. It winds me up."

So although her libido is as rampant as ever ("If I could get rid of it I'd be delighted"), she lives alone in her London garden flat with her rescue dog, Sid, whom she leaves with friends when she's touring or in Akron, where she recently bought an apartment. When she's not making music or guesting (her voice has graced recordings by everyone from Elvis Costello, Tom Jones and Cher to U2, Frank Sinatra and INXS), she sometimes smokes dope at night while listening to classical music ("That makes me cry, too"). Or she reads. Hynde loves reading: John Banville. Martin Amis. The religious thinker Karen Armstrong.

There is someone, though. A guy she met at a party in London in 2008, when both were too drunk to make much sense: 31-year-old singer-songwriter JP Jones. He told her he'd recently gone solo after his

band split, and that he'd grown up on a fairground in Wales. Hynde gave him her number, then left for a US tour supporting the Pretenders' 2008 album *Break Up the Concrete*. Jones sent her songs, and texts. "One said, 'I don't know why, but I think we could make a great album together.' No one's ever said that to me before."

The resulting disc, *Fidelity*, is an intensely personal affair, one fired by the two musicians' instant attraction to each other and buoyed by a harsh dose of reality. "The whole idea of the thing is that I'm too old for him. We really like each other, and we make beautiful music together, but that's the way it is." By the time you read this, JP, Chrissie & the Fairground Boys will be playing their acoustic-driven songs — with titles such as *Perfect Lover* and *If You Let Me* — in tiny venues across the US to about 100 people a night. "I'm starting over," says Hynde animatedly.

Australia will be like a holiday, she adds. "I love the place. I love those wineries. I love Aussie guys. How am I doing? Am I doing OK?" She flashes a grin. "I'd hate to have you go away and think I'm a c . . . t. Go on, ask me anything."

The past, then: how does she think the Pretenders' sound has evolved over the years? "The band evolved because two of its members died in 1983 and we had to make some changes and, you know, I don't know, man. I kind of feel enough is enough now."

"The Beatles were only around for 10 years and then they got out of it. I didn't know what else to do, being a single mum and trying to pay bills and keep my little thing alive."

She's still reflecting as, interview over, we stand up to leave. "What else was I going to do?" she says, eyeing my bag but giving me a fist bump anyway. "Anyway, it's rock-'n' roll, man. It's fun."

**The Pretenders and Blondie** open in Perth on November 4 and then tour to Peter Lehmann Wines, Barossa Valley (South Australia); Melbourne; Rochford Wines, Yarra Valley (Victoria); Josef Chromy Wines, Launceston; Sydney; Bimbardgen Estate, Hunter Valley (NSW); Sirromet Wines, Mt Cotton (Queensland); and Canberra.

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