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# Sex, drugs and vulgar trademarks

Retro-rock band Thunderpussy may win a legal battle over its name



Thunderpussy and lightning aren't so frightening.

BY MAXFIELD MORRIS / maxfieldm@newsreview.com

was trying to reclaim the disparaging name—and in 2017, won their case.

But then Thunderpussy got a message back that the cases were different, so its appeal was grouped in with FUCT's. It's unclear when a final decision on Thunderpussy's trademark will come through.

"I can't imagine that they'll come back with another excuse," Petty says, "but they very well may, and we'll just have to keep fighting."

Until then, rock 'n' roll waits for no government's approval. "I could be having the worst day ever and walk in front of a crowd—and all I want to do is entertain them," Petty says.

The band tries to channel its favorite 1970s rockers: Aerosmith, Thin Lizzy, Queen and AC/DC. Not surprisingly, it draws a primarily male crowd.

"I did suspect there would be more of an older, middle-aged, male contingency that was going to flock toward this thing," Petty says. "I

don't know if that's because we're women and men are attracted to us, or if it's because we play such ballsy rock 'n' roll, and men generally love that."

At the same time, there are also young girls coming out to shows with their moms. That there's an audience is immaterial to Petty. Thunderpussy started as a passion project between her and Sides. Their first show was

a set at The Pink Door in Seattle

in 2014—Petty improvised guitar licks onstage while Sides crawled through the audience singing. They released a self-titled debut in 2018, and have stayed true to the basics throughout. "I just went into it wanting to make music with Molly," Petty says, "and if that meant jumping up and down on my bed in front of a mirror, that'd be fine with me."

**Are you familiar with ... "the equivalent of the** profane past participle form of a well-known word of profanity and perhaps the paradigmatic word of profanity in our language?"

That's how U.S. Deputy Solicitor General Malcolm Stewart referenced FUCT—a streetwear brand that was previously denied a trademark—during April 15 arguments in front of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Seattle-based rock band Thunderpussy, set to play Holy Diver in Sacramento on Saturday night, watched the case attentively. But what does FUCT have to do with Thunderpussy?

Well, both of their applications for the Patent and Trademark Office were rejected on the grounds that they were "scandalous and immoral." In June, however, the nation's highest court ruled that the ban violates the First Amendment.

The band's legal fight began in 2015. "We got this flat-out denial letter, citing Urban Dictionary—something about finger-banging," Thunderpussy lead guitarist Whitney Petty says. "It was like, 'What the f--k are you talking about?'"

Benjamin Kerr, a lawyer and friend of the group, helped Thunderpussy with its appeal. At first, Petty, lead singer Molly Sides and bassist Leah Julius were told to wait until the outcome of another rejected trademark case, one by Simon Tam of The Slants. The Asian-American rock band

**"I could be having the worst day ever and walk in front of a crowd—and all I want to do is entertain them."**

**Whitney Petty**  
lead guitarist, Thunderpussy

Catch Thunderpussy 7 p.m. Saturday, July 20 at Holy Diver. Black Pistol Fire also performs. Tickets are \$15. 1517 21st St. For tickets, visit holydiversac.com.