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Music Documentary Monday

SpokAnarchy!

Posted on October 8, 2012 by Sean Caldwell

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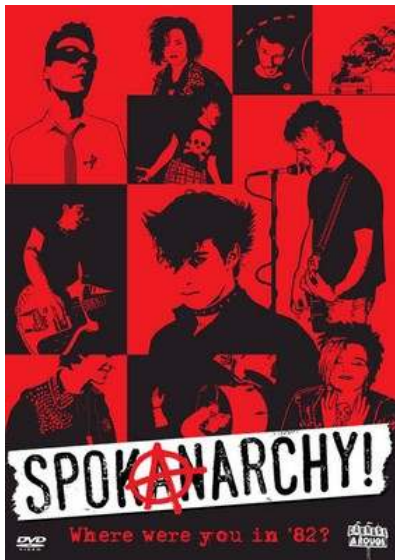
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Directed by David W. Halsell,
Erica K. Schisler, Joe
Swanstrom, Heather
Swanstrom, Theresa Halsell,
Cory Wees
[USA, 2011](#)
Genre: [Punk](#), [Post-Punk](#)

Much of what it is unusual,
unpopular, or under-appreciated
in music's continually evolving
history came from misfits

committed first and foremost to just doing something different. It's a fairly standard tale, especially common in Reagan-era America, when conservatism, conformity, and the homogenization of American culture gave rise to the alienated backlash of hardcore and its diligent, DIY work ethic. Hardcore's figureheads have established something of a music documentary cottage industry relating their experiences in scenes largely sprung from affluent suburbia or urban indigence. [SpokAnarchy!](#) is an outlier in this crop, chronicling the art and music scene that sprang up in the twilight zone of Spokane, Washington, in the late 1970s and early '80s.

"It's kind of how you explain Spokane to anybody from anywhere else: it's the world's largest hick town," an unseen speaker explains early in the film. "It's like the caboose on the train – everything gets here late. And by the time we're doing it, everybody else thinks it's passe." In that vacuum, a sparse

community of freaks and fringe dwellers who'd heard of this thing called "punk rock" found an [opportunity](#) to create their own brand of strangeness in an eastern Washington city far removed from both the pulse of popular culture and the underground musical networks curated in other, better-known parts of America.

Filmed and directed by scene survivors David W. Halsell, Erica K. Schisler, Joe Swanstrom, Heather Swanstrom, Theresa Halsell, and Cory Wees, *SpokAnarchy!* chronicles an artistic community born out of the [psychosis](#) of small town life, as a collective of weirdos finds camaraderie in the desperate pursuit of something new. "If you're weird in a small town, a small place, you really suffer for it," notes interviewee Tim Cridland, a native of nearby Pullman who went on to become noted sideshow performer [Zamora the Torture King](#).

The story starts in 1978 with Sweet Madness, a new wave act revelatory to Spokane's youth. Largely shut out of clubs that catered to cover bands, Sweet Madness pursued alternative venues, drawing other bands in their wake and enabling a punk scene that found resonance in a new breed of youth culture and permanence in the pages of cut 'n' paste zine journalism. The extremes these kids pursued in order to make sense of their reality put them in the sights of Spokane's conservative townsfolk (and led many to drugs and alcohol). Beatdowns were common, cops shut down venues, and as the kids got older, disillusionment took hold; those who didn't leave Spokane were eventually left behind. It's a very honest depiction of small-town life, one that embraces the joy and sense of the possible that comes with discovering where you belong but also cautions that to grow, you sometimes have to leave.

Equally inspired by punk rock and performance art, the music and live footage in [featured in SpokAnarchy!](#) encompass both the straightforward vitriol of punk (the Teenagers, Terror Couple, Vampire Lezbos) and obscure, experimental art noise (PP-Ku, M'na M'na, An 425lb. Yorkshire Sow). A multifaceted and fascinating requiem for a scene, it's is one of the few

documentaries to discuss any sort of creative uprising in a setting so sheltered. The DVD supplements include fliers and slide shows of zine artwork, a short film about a Spokane punk rock reunion, and another short featuring the very raw and erotic work of zine artist Mikal Vollmer.

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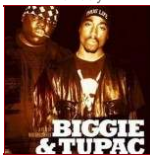
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