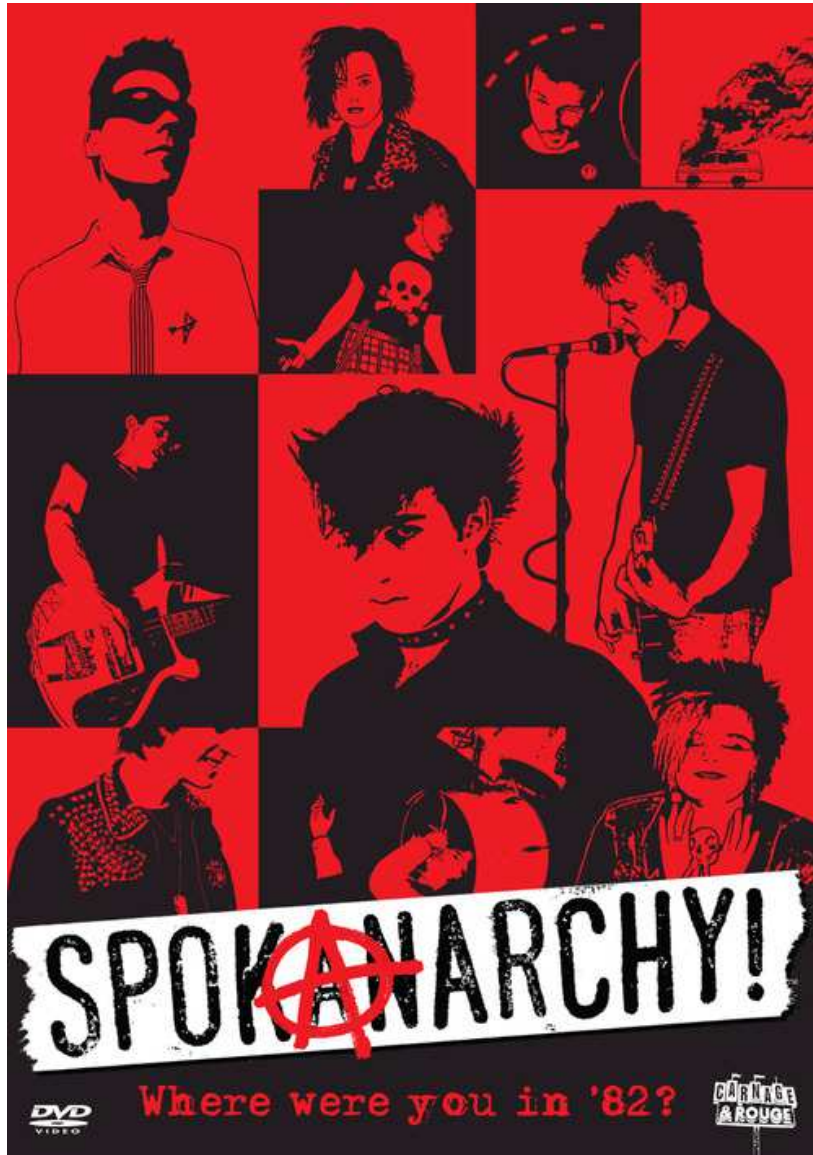


# The Impaler Speaks

## SpokAnarchy!: Where Were You In '82?

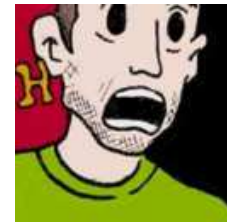
Here's my review of an indie film (out now on DVD) about a music scene that pretty much has everything I'm looking for in a film - or at least in a documentary (i.e., no zombies, dammit!). Learn more at [www.spokanarchy.com](http://www.spokanarchy.com) and at the embedded links below. Follow the filmmakers on Twitter at [@SpokAnarchyFilm](https://twitter.com/SpokAnarchyFilm) too. Review done for [Mass Movement](#) 34, a work in progress.

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SpokAnarchy!: Where Were You In '82? (Carnage & Rouge/MVD Visual)

'SpokAnarchy!' is a film about the underground music scene in Spokane, Washington. That's the condensed description - or, perhaps it would be better to call that the primary thesis of the project. Like all documentaries, a deeper look is necessary to ascertain what is really going on here. The story begins in 1978, when information about punk and new wave - the music, the fashion, the politics - was beginning to escape the confines of the big cities and infiltrate the small towns and rural areas of the United States. Spokane, for those unaware, is - or certainly was at the time - a fairly small city, an insular place, an extremely conservative community located on the eastern edge of Washington state. It was far from Seattle - which, at the time, was far from the hotbed of culture and expression that it is today - and far from, well, pretty much everything else. Remember Jello Biafra's rant about being assaulted by rednecks in downtown Portland, Oregon (Washington's neighbor to the north) in the Dead Kennedys song 'Night Of The Living Rednecks'? It was recorded in 1979, and by all accounts certainly could have taken place in Spokane just as easily. The 'kids' - some of them actual kids,



The Impaler Speaks... supporting local music worldwide, from Austin TX to the United Kingdom and everywhere else. The Impaler has been a member of the Mass Movement creative team since it was a cut-n-paste fanzine many years ago. This is a way to add some depth to the coverage I am able to provide in MM, and so much more.... Support indie music. Support indie film. Support indie life.

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If you have a serious question or comment, this is the place for it.

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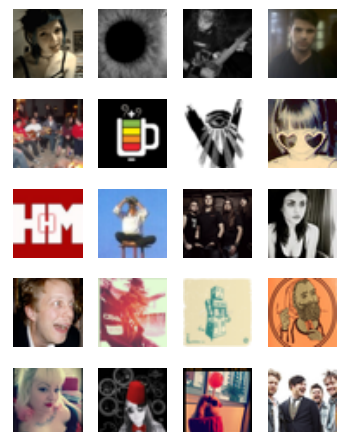
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some of them young adults, all of them disaffected youth in comparison to the ultra-conservative citizenry of the place that they called home – of Spokane needed an outlet to express themselves, to assert both their individuality from the masses and their solidarity with each other. So they created a punk scene, one by one. 'SpokAnarchy!' is primarily a narrative-driven film, presented largely in a linear fashion. The punk scene in Spokane ostensibly began with the formation of Sweet Madness, a new wave band with a noticeable Devo fetish. The band found places to play, advertised its shows with handmade flyers, adopted a very un-Spokane-like mode of fashion... and quickly attracted attention – good and bad – from peers and foes alike. Soon, other bands – including The Teenagers, Strangulon, P-P-Ku, and Terror Couple – popped up. The bands began sharing bills, helping each other with the most difficult part of performing live in Spokane at the time: finding places to play. Before long, fanzines like Spokane Sado, Zulu Ray, The 1<sup>st</sup> Church Of Card Tables & OM, and Wavo Scenario began circulating. Other forms of artistic expression, from clothing to graffiti, were taking hold. Against all odds, a scene had formed. As the 70's gave way to the 80's, more bands – Vampire Lesbos, Cattle Prod, M'NA M'NA, Social Bondage – emerged. This brought new hangouts like Moe's Body Shop (an actual auto body shop that some members of the scene purchased and renovated into a live music venue, skateboarding site, and general place to party) and, later, 123 Arts (which, in true Northwest USA fashion, also featured a coffee shop – back in 1986!). Not unexpectedly – this was all taking place organically and without direction by a group of people who had no support outside of their own insular circle, after all – the attraction of bigger cities, bigger things, and bigger highs than the typical beer and other low-level intoxicants grew stronger over time. Heroin became a scourge on the scene, ruining – and taking – lives indiscriminately. Vampire Lesbos took their show on the road for a full US tour, showing the others that it might be possible to get out of Spokane, that maybe there was a punk rock El Dorado somewhere out there. The filmmakers – David W. Halsell, Erica K. Schisler, Jon Swanstrom, Heather Swanstrom, Theresa Halsell, and Cory Wees – were all part of the scene, and contribute both as behind-the-camera interviewers/directors and as on-screen interviewees. This is a film about friends, made by friends, and it shows. This is a great thing in many ways: they know what they're talking about; they know what to focus on; they get to tell their own stories. The film concludes with a 2009 reunion that included a massive live event attended by fans and friends of the artists from across the world. An approach like this also creates a rub for documentaries and for independent artistic endeavors of every stripe, including questions about people or events being excluded (and the reasoning behind such exclusions), as well as the concept of being indie and doing it for 'the scene' vs. the very nature of art, which is to expose it to as many people as possible, therefore potentially ceasing to be truly indie anymore. My take on 'SpokAnarchy!' is that they let it all hang out, exposing more ugly truths than rose-colored visions. When Heather Swanstrom described the formation of the scene by comparing it to Frankenstein's monster – with a look borrowed from New York, a sound borrowed from Los Angeles, an unchecked attitude toward drugs and sex, and so on – a vision of what was happening in Spokane crystallized in my mind. Interviews with scenesters like Jan Gregor (Sweet Madness), Charlie Schmidt (who ran a studio that recorded most of the bands and seemed to have his fingers in nearly every pie), Francois Haroldson (who led The Teenagers and other bands before relocating to Los Angeles and finding a certain level of fame with a band that most definitely is 100% The Impaler approved, Motorcycle Boy), Brad Mueller (Strangulon, Social Bondage), Erich Thaler (who went from M'NA M'NA to the Boston-based Stompbox – watch the film for a taste of the drama surrounding that whole scenario), Erik Phillips (who fronted the band Red Summer and offers my favorite quote in the film when he declares 'This tastes like the 80's...' while downing a 40-ounce bottle of Olde English malt liquor), and others make up the bulk of the film, with video clips, still photos, and scans of flyers and fanzines interspersed to fill in the gaps. The Impaler's verdict: 'SpokAnarchy!' is an engaging film that is not to be missed, even for those who have never heard of any of these bands – and for those who have never even heard of Spokane. Independent art – music, film, painting, writing, all of it – thrives because of 'scenes', whether organized or not. Conversely, these same 'scenes' often cause their own downfall. This film takes a look at both sides of the fence in a direct, honest, and fascinating manner. DVD extras include outtakes, the original production trailer, photo slideshows (the one with the flyers is fantastic), and a couple of short films. **The Impaler** [@impalerspeaks](#)

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2 notes

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