

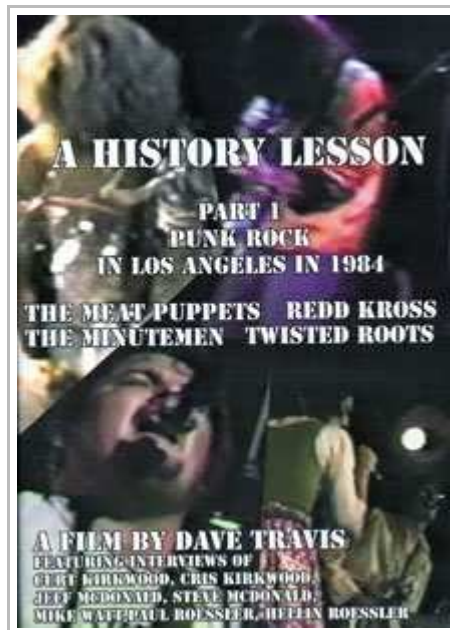
# FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2011

## DVD Review: History Lesson Part 1: Punk Rock in Los Angeles in 1984

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### History Lesson Part 1: Punk Rock in Los Angeles in 1984

*Directed by Dave Travis*

*Historical Records, 1984-2010*

*57 minutes, USD \$14.95*

*AHistoryLesson.com*

*MVDvisual.com*

Hardcore spread like a wildfire through the indie scene, ignited first by the New York (etc.) underground, added to the fury of the British punk movement, and fed by the election of little Ronnie Reagan. A nonconformist segment of youth was angry at the failure of the populace electing a restrictive, overbearing government that would have negative effect on nearly everyone's lives possibly for seven generations.

There are arguably two locations where this fervor took off from,

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### About Me

Robert Barry Francos  
Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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though both connected by a single person: Henry Garfield: DC and LA. And yet, he has absolutely nothing to do with this documentary. Go figure.

Back in the 1980s at the height of the LA hardcore explosion, Dave Travis videotaped a large number of bands, both in concert and in interview, and thereby pretty much documented the history of the scene. After all these years, he has compiled and edited some of these into an hour-long show, hinting that it may be just the first part of a series.

For his first release, he has picked some heavy hitters (and some not as much): alphabetically, it's the Meat Puppets, the Minutemen, Redd Kross, and the Twisted Roots. Which are which (in my opinion)? Well, all in due time.

First let me state right off the bat, the sound quality of the music is pretty lo-fi, obviously taken from the camera's (camcorder?) built-in mic rather than the stage or soundboard. There's barely a sung or spoken word from the stage that's legible. And for all that, well, who cares, this is still exciting as all get-out, to actually watch these bands play, getting an idea of what they were like live. I didn't get to see many of the LA groups (though I did see the Dickies play at Irving Plaza in the early-to-mid '80s, though I can't remember the opening band[s]; I was kinda chickenshit and stayed in the back, far from the more volatile than usual mosh pit), so having the opportunity to see this is a thrill, no matter what the sound quality.

The interviews between each of the songs are verbally crystal clear. Various members of each of the bands are tapped, some around the time period of the recordings, and some later; one of my only gripes about the package is that the date of the interviews - or even years - is not indicated. So, step by step, here are some of the (expanded) notes I made while watching the tape.

The credits roll over the Minutemen playing; I believe, "A History Lesson Pt. 2," which would make a lot of sense. First up is some opening interviews. We meet the dread-locked and ironically facial haired Paul Roessler (keyboardist of Twisted Roots, 45 Grave, Geza X, the Screamers, the Mommy-men, etc.) and his wife Hellin Killer (of The Plungers) - and their cat and dog. Then there are quick clips each of Jeff McDonald (Redd Kross guitarist), Curt Kirkwood (Meat Puppets guitarist) and his brother Cris Kirkwood (Meat Puppets bassist). There are lots of sibling pairs on this tape.

The first group up is the Meat Puppet (I have 8 of their SST albums - keee-rist), taped at Perkins Place in Pasadena, May 12, 1984. They open up with "Melons Rising," off their first self-titled LP. All the camerawork (and editing) is done by Travis, so to give the impression of multi-camera work, he edits bits of different parts of the show into a song, which is totally fine, just amusing because it tricked me for a while until I realized that some clothing was different from shot to shot. Cris plays in a woman's slip, and all is right with the world, as fuzzy the visuals and sound is. Hey, this was high-end for back then,

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in those wonder years before HD, and when video cameras weighed more than 7 lbs when loaded (well, mine did).

The next set of interviews is bobbing back and forth with the Kirkwoods, where they discuss drugs, Black Flag, and recording processes.

“Saturday Morning” (also from the eponymous LP) is the next song. Another kick asser, and almost literally as Kurt almost gets into a fight with someone in the audience at the end of it. Fun!

After another Cris interview, they break into “Lake of Fire,” from the *Meat Puppets II* album. This one is less hardcore, and slower. Though all these live bits and even some of the interviews, there is a lot of effects going on that were new at the time. If his Toaster (I’m guessing) could do it, Travis used it at one point or another. It’s very late ‘70s-early ‘80s, so again, it’s amusing to watch the slides, fades, fisheyes, bluescreen overlays, twirling prisms, etc.

Interviewed next is the ever dynamic and fidgety Minutemen bassist, Mike Watt. A ball of motion (especially with his hands), he explains how Minutemen songs were written. It’s an interesting piece, as Watt is almost always engaging when he talks. The first song by the Minutemen is “No. 1 Hit Song,” from the *Double Nickels on the Dime* LP (I have 7 Minutemen albums, all on SST). Even following the lyric sheet from the album, I can’t follow the song, so I just say screw it and sit back and enjoy it. By far, the Minutemen are the best group on here, and if not for the car accident that took vocalist / guitarist D. Boon’s life, who knows where they may have gone. They jangle and crunch their songs, which are great. D. Boon is a electrifying front man, even though he wears the same shirt for every performance (white, ripped in the back), including this one from the Olympic Auditorium on the same date as the Meat Puppets show above, May 12. It must have been a great day for Travis, and a fortunate one for us that he was there with his camera.

One more shot of Watt further describing the songwriting process, and we move to “Martin’s Story,” also on *Driving 55 MPH on Highway 10...* I mean *Double Nickels on the Dime*. It’s a short tune. In fact, most of the songs here are pretty brief, and when tallied, I’m guessing the interview times are probably as long as the music shots.

Watt again (why not George Hurley?...I’m just askin’), of course, and the Minutemen do “Jesus and Tequila,” from the same LP, but this time it is taped at the Cathay de Grande in Hollywood, dated simply 1984. This is one of the MM’s bluesier numbers, and it’s nice to hear them shift gears a bit.

After Watt discusses how he misses D. Boon (they had been friends since the age of 13), we’re back to the Olympic Auditorium on May 12 for “The Big Foist, again from that same LP (hey, it was a double disk, y’know). D. Boon puts on a great show.

Anyone who has followed the Minutemen know that Watt has his own

musical language (e.g., mersh = commercial; merch = stuff of the band's to sell), and here he explains how a band's world is basically either flyers or gigs. Watt gives great interview; he's as intriguing a talker as D. Boon was a frontman. Their last number is "Bob Dylan Wrote Propaganda Songs," from the *What Makes a Man Start Fires?* album, again at the Olympic. As with all their songs, the lyrics are deeper than one can tell aurally; thank God for lyric sheets.

After being reintroduced to the Roesslers, who describe how the Twisted Roots was formed and picked their sound (Germs meet Screemers, Paul claims), we get to hear their first cut, "Never Was" (I do not own their one EP, if I remember correctly), recorded at the Music Machine in LA during the spring of '84. Maggie Ehrig (who acted in the punk film *Suburbia*) is a decent front person, and of course there's Dez Cadena (Black Flag, Misfits, DC3, etc.) on guitar, and yet, I found them kind of lacking. The song sounds a bit classic rock mixed with a tinge of folk. I've heard them described as more new wave than punk. Either way, they didn't really do much for me.

Paul explains that he sees the band as "Public Image meets the Beatles," which partially explains their next number, "Love Your Friends," which has a nascent Goth vibe, again with just a tinge of folk in there; maybe it's Maggie's colorful skirt? I kid, of course.

Following another ho-hummer with Paul and Hellin, the Twisted Roots play their best song here, "Mommy's Always Busy in the Kitchen." By far, it has the widest musical range, and kept my interest throughout.

For Redd Kross, the interviews are a brief one with bassist Steve McDonald, and mostly with his bro and guitarist, Jeff McDonald. Steve claims that band was anti-dinosaur rock, but pro rock star attitude, while Jeff claims KISS and Alice Cooper as major influences of the band. The line-up for this version of the band is different than the one Posh Boy 12-inch EP of the band that I have, when they were still Red Cross, and it included Black Flag's Ron Reyes and the Circle Jerks' Greg Hetson. For this show, it's Dave Peterson on drums, and his sister - and future Bangle - Vicki Peterson (no sign here of other sibling, Debbi).

Their first number is "Janus, Jeanie and George Harrison," taped at the Pasadena Valley Auditorium in June of '84. To me, they sound more like a hybrid glam metal and hair band, though they dressed like a cross between Aerosmith and the Small Faces, with furry clothes and long hair that they whip around. They're noisy, thudding, and guitar-focused, with few lyrics and lots of instrumentals between. Vicki is barely seen except in the dark or in profile (with that sparkling black top that slides off one shoulder she would wear often in the Bangles; she has since gone on form the Continental Drifters and the Psycho Sisters, both with her sister-in-law Susan Cowsill).

I think I'm going to quicken this up a bit as this is getting long now. The last two tunes they do are also name songs, "Linda Blair" and one (or a version of one) that's on my Posh Boy 12-incher, "Annette's Got the Hits." All the songs are intriguing, but sound pretty much the

same.

During the interview segments, the rest of which are of Jeff obviously years after the band was gone, he tells how Vicki was his girlfriend for six years, and this was the only time they ever played together during that time, not even jamming at home, which I find odd (and now is he married to ex-Go Go's Charlotte Caffey). He also goes on to say more than once that he did not like the sense of community in the scene and that he and his brother Steve preferred to imagine themselves separate from the audience. Further, he states distaste on having been on SST, claiming "they were a cult."

The only other quibble I have with this collection is that while the chapters are broken up by band, each the secondary search leaps may stop anywhere from the beginning of a song or at an interview. After watching the Q&A for the first time, on further viewings I would want to see just the music (some of the final tip ends are cut off), so if the talking heads were put at the *end* of the subchapters, all one would have to do is hit the search at the end of each song, and then jump from tune to tune to tune, etc.

I am so glad that Dave Travis took this live footage (along with the interviews shot by himself, Dave Jones, and Dave Markey), and that he is releasing it to a waiting and wanting audience.

Meanwhile, I am so looking forward to *Part 2*. Let 'er rip, Dave!

Posted by Robert Barry Francos at 12:01 AM 

Labels: [A History Lesson](#), [Bangles](#), [Dave Travis](#), [DVD review](#), [FFanzeen](#), [Hardcore](#), [Kirkwood](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Meat Puppets](#), [Minutemen](#), [punk rock](#), [Redd Kross](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Roessler](#), [SST](#), [Twisted Roots](#)

Reactions: interesting (0) cool (0) informative (0)

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