



**Desolation Center**

★★★★★

Dir: Stuart Swezey  
MU PRODUCTIONS. *ST*

**Barren nights: document of LA punk's original desert sessions.**

In 1983, LA punk Stuart Swezey decided to escape the LAPD's brutal targeting of live shows by school-bussing dozens of scenesters out to the Mojave Desert to see Minutemen and Savage Republic. Subsequent field trips included wilderness pyrotechnics with Einstürzende Neubauten; a musical voyage around San Pedro harbour and Sonic Youth and Meat Puppets playing to a tripping audience under a full moon. Rich in interviews and archive footage, Swezey's film captures the creative anarchy, not least Survival Research Laboratories' attempt to blow up a mountain ("people in their twenties are sociopaths," says Janet Housden of Redd Kross). The death of Minutemen's D Boon darkens the clouds, while Perry Farrell's presence in original photographs foreshadows the advent of Lollapalooza and Coachella. "I don't even know how I got there," says Blixa Bargeld, but this is a brilliant map back to a time and place.

Victoria Segal

Beat in five minutes while watching *The Twilight Zone*, and on their US return they became MTV darlings and played arenas with The Police – Sting buys them champagne when their album overtakes his group's to hit the top spot. Their disintegration two albums later – drug abuse, internecine rivalry – is painful but familiar; their joy at reuniting, palpable. An extraordinary group finally gets a well-deserved portrayal.

Lois Wilson

**King Rocker**

★★★★★

Dir: Michael Cumming  
FIRE FILMS. *ST*

**John Peel's 2020 film of the year.**



Just as Brian Wilson's inability to handle a surfboard gave added intensity to his paeans to the sun-kissed lifestyle of white Californian teenagers, so the cruel fate that prevented the comedian Stewart Lee from seeing *The Nightingales* first time around (in the '80s) has borne tender fruit in this ferociously entertaining appreciation of Robert Lloyd, Britain's most sardonic lyricist. Part Socratic dialogue, part post-punk buddy movie, part Black Country reboot of *Last Of The Summer Wine* with powerhouse Nightingales percussionist Fliss Kitson woefully miscast as Nora Batty, *King Rocker* takes Lloyd and Lee into the kind of deeply personal territory that neither seemed to be expecting to visit. From the White Riot tour's fast track to disillusionment to briefly replacing Nigel Slater as GQ's food writer, Lloyd's showbiz odyssey has been a singular one, and it could not have wished for a more

idiosyncratic and affecting cinematic monument.

Ben Thompson



**On The Record**

★★★★★

Dirs: Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick

DOGWOLF. *ST*

**Sober doc exploring sexual assault charges against rap supremo Russell Simmons.**

Painting a bleak picture of a music industry where sexual harassment appears the price women have to pay to enter, *On The Record* investigates the historic allegations of rape and sexual assault 20 women made against hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons in late 2017. The movie focuses on Drew Dixon – a former Def Jam A&R who lucratively teamed Method Man and Mary J Blige, but whose career at the label ended after Simmons allegedly raped her – as she makes her allegations public. But film-makers Ziering and Dick also take a wider view of the case's moral complexities, as survivors express guilt over impeaching a supposed black hero, while race and gender theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw argues rap's misogyny "dances to an ideology spread by the defenders of slavery". Most affecting, though, are the women's own testimonies against Simmons, who has since relocated to Bali, a

country with no extradition treaty with the US.

Stevie Chick

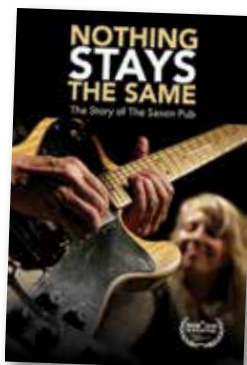
**Nothing Stays The Same: The Story Of The Saxon Pub**

★★★★★

Dir: Jeff Sandmann  
MVD ENTERTAINMENT GROUP. DVD/ST

**A beloved Austin music club's fight to survive.**

Austin, Texas is dubbed "the live music capital of the world" and the Saxon Pub is a reason why. The intimate venue's cachet grew when late guitarist Stephen Bruton set up a residency with loose outfit The Resentments and invited pals Kris Kristofferson and Bonnie Raitt to sit in. For three decades, Lone Star legends Willie Nelson and Kinky Friedman have performed, as have local bluesman Johnny Nicholas and soul sister Lavelle White. Director Jeff Sandmann captures the club's humanity by following lesser knowns, such as rocker Patrice Pike, and its close-knit family of artists, staff and patrons. All were affected when the music scene lured tech companies and gentrified Austin, ironically pricing musicians out of town. In 2015, the Saxon's landlord



threatened its future with plans to sell the building to a developer. But there's a twist at the end...

Michael Simmons

**White Riot**

★★★★★

Dir: Rubika Shah  
MODERN FILMS. C/ST

**How Rock Against Racism and the punky reggae party fought the nazis – and won.**



The overt racism of 1970s Britain, where the National Front won political traction through street violence and dog-whistle slogans ("It's our country, let's win it back!"), was deep-rooted in imperial history. So it's instructive to recall that the mass movement which resisted the fascists had humble origins: a letter complaining about Eric Clapton's 1976 on-stage outburst ("Throw the wogs out!") sent to the music press by agitprop theatre performer/photographer Red Saunders. Rock Against Racism's founders were veterans of hippy activism, but Saunders *et al* felt excited by UK punk, and crucially mobilised its kinship with reggae. Mixing archive footage with contemporary interviews (Pauline Black, Dennis Bovell, Steel Pulse, Topper Headon, Tom Robinson), Rubika Shah's film vividly evokes RAR's fanzine energy, culminating in April 1978's London carnival where 100,000 watched Sham 69's Jimmy Pursey, tormented by his band's far-right followers, join The Clash, a powerfully symbolic act. While acknowledging RAR's internal tensions – though not its fate – *White Riot* attests to the potential of racial solidarity, intimating that the wider campaign against "all-round, family, British racism" is unfinished business.

Keith Cameron

**The Go-Go's**

★★★★★

Dir: Alison Ellwood  
SHOWTIME. *ST*

**Insightful documentary maps the rise-fall-reunion of LA pop seditionaries.**



It was a story screaming to be told – The Go-Go's were the first all-female group to write their material, play their instruments and hit the US Number 1 spot – and director Alison Ellwood tells it straight, through new interviews with all the band's members plus archive footage and behind-scenes Polaroids. There's struggle: "Best of luck with your enterprising girl band!" one rejection letter states; "Show your tits!" shout skinheads when they support Madness and The Specials in the UK. But guitarist Charlotte Caffey had written We Got The

**Sons of the desert: Minutemen D Boon (left) and Mike Watt.**

