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'X: The Unheard Music': Revisiting and Revitalizing the Pi

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By:

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The special edition DVD and Blu-ray release of [X: The Unheard Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X:_The_Unheard_Music) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X: The Unheard Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X:_The_Unheard_Music)) came out in December in honor of the punk rockumentary's 25th anniversary. Originally released in 1986, *The Unheard Music* follows the evolution of the band X, which burst on the Los Angeles underground music scene in the late 1970s.

For writer/director W.T.

Morgan and his team, the five years spent making the film in the early 1980s celebrated their love of film and cultural history. *The Unheard Music* combines live performance footage of the band and interviews with original band members John Doe, Exene Cervenka, Billy Zoom and D.J. Bonebrake with surreal music videos and montages of newsreel footage and vintage television commercials to help illustrate X's uphill struggle against the music industry.



Members of X: (from left) guitarist Billy Zoom, singer Exene Cervenka, drummer D.J. Bonebrake and bassist John Doe
Photo by Michael Hyatt

The film's aesthetic was inspired in part by the attempt to represent 100 years of film styles. "We used archival footage as original context as much as possible against the current footage at the time," says Morgan. "One thing I like about using archival footage is the presence of the past. Footage from 60 or 70 years ago has its own consciousness that I wanted to preserve and bring along to my film so that old and new were dancing off each other."



Writer/director W.T. Morgan
Photo by Suzanne Tenner

The transfer to high-def for the Blu-ray release presented some interesting challenges for Morgan. "We noticed immediately in doing the transfer to HD that every flaw in the original material was hanging out there," says Morgan. "In the transfer, I tried to avoid the flatness of some of the video, but I wanted to keep some of the raw textures in there along with the scratches and dirt."

For the HD transfer, Morgan went back to the film's 35mm color timed

interpositive. "That was one of the ironies," says Morgan. "Back in the original release, we spent more on the blow-up and final mix than we did in five years of making the movie. That made a big difference for the transfer."

X: The Unheard Music premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 1986; in 2007 Sundance rescreened the film and added it to the Sundance Collection, which is what prompted Morgan to produce the 25th anniversary silver edition. Watching the film at Sundance in 2007 with a mixed audience—some people familiar with the '80s punk rock scene, some not—was a revelation for Morgan. "One young guy came up to me after the Q&A and asked why I used all that footage of Reagan," says Morgan. "He thought this was a brand new film!"

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