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X: The Unheard Music: The Silver Anniversary Edition DVD

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By Chelsea Spear



To the layperson in the early '80s, punk rock was an atonal mess of a sound made by destructive adolescent boys with an all-consuming hunger for amphetamines and an allergy to shirts. In the documentary *X: The Unheard Music*, director W.T. Morgan and the punk band X challenge these stereotypes by focusing on the creative process and the day-to-day experiences of a working band trying to find their audience.

The film follows the members of X from the classified ads that first brought John Doe and Billy Zoom together, through their earliest gigs at firetrap clubs like the Masque and the Whiskey A-Go-Go, their recording sessions with the legendary Ray Manzarek, to their attempts to sign to a record label. True to their subject's engaging approach to music, however, Morgan and his editing team assembled a heady collage of interviews, live recordings, home movies, found footage, and photo animation to relate the band's saga. The diverse footage the editing team pulled together resembles the sleeve art for one of X's albums come to life—literally, in the seemingly-extemporaneous scene involving a house on a flatbed truck. Watch those interiors closely and you might see the cover of *Under the Big Black Sun*.

Morgan emphasizes the band’s egalitarian approach through a series of interviews. We first hear their speaking voices in an elliptical montage, explaining how each person came to join the band. Throughout the film, Morgan spends an extensive amount of time with each member, interviewing them and observing them at work. Watching each of the members on their own helped me to better appreciate what each of them brought to the band, and the amount of work involved with writing a song. Of particular interest is a scene in which DJ Bonebrake recreates an unlikely sonic influence on his drumming.

The film also takes a realistic—and at times hilarious—look at the record industry in the early ’80s. The record company execs that respectively shunned them (in favor of the Journey-esque Point Blank) and signed them are hilariously out of touch. Hearing then-Elektra CEO Joe Smith compare the raw punk sound of X to Fleetwood Mac and Billy Squier is both amusing and kind of depressing. Sped-up footage from X’s in-store appearance at a record store (where lines of fans snake through to meet them) and interviews with Jello Biafra and Rodney Bingenheimer remind viewers that for every industry bean counter there are passionate fans waiting for new music.

This “silver anniversary edition” is the second time the film has been available on DVD, and the transfer is generally pretty good, although the use of analog video in a few segments looks a little worse for wear. The disc contains a few extras, including close-ups of Exene and John’s lyrics books, a live outtake of “Some Other Time,” an interview with Angel City Films from the time the film was made, and contemporary interviews with John and Exene.

X: The Unheard Music is the kind of film that grabs you on a really deep level. And it makes me kind of want to be Exene, or at least as awesome as she is. Fans of Los Angeles punk rock or those with an interest in unusual-yet-influential bands should check this film out posthaste.

The Silver Anniversary Special Edition of X: The Unheard Music was released on [DVD](#) and [Blu-Ray](#) on December 13 from Angel City Media. It is available to order from *See Of Sound*.

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- [Issue 008: Jan/Feb 2009](#)
- [Issue 009: Mar/Apr 2009](#)
- [Issue 010: May/Jun 2009](#)
- [Issue 011: Jul/Aug 2009](#)
- [Issue 012: Sep/Oct 2009](#)
- [Issue 013: Nov/Dec 2009](#)
- [Issue 014: Jan/Feb 2010](#)
- [Issue 015: Mar/Apr 2010](#)
- [Issue 016: May/Jun 2010](#)
- [Issue 017: Jul/Aug 2010](#)
- [Issue 018: Sep/Oct 2010](#)
- [Issue 019: Nov/Dec 2010](#)
- [Issue 020: Jan/Feb 2011](#)
- [Issue 021: Mar/Apr 2011](#)
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