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## Donations

## Film Reviews: X: The Unheard Music (1986) - By Josh Samford

Posted on Tuesday, January 03, 2012 @ 15:01:40 Mountain Standard Time by Duane



In several ways, I am a unbiased and ideal viewer for *X: The Unheard Music*. Having a affinity for punk rock music and the DIY aesthetic that comes

with the culture, I am not immediately turned off by the music like some critics might be. I generally love the rebellious nature of punk rock music, and consider it a valuable cornerstone in Rock music history. During the seventies and eighties, it would hard to find a more experimental form of youthful contemporary music. Punk generally stands for something, whether it be political or sociological, the genre has always been about more than just simple aggression. Many artists use their music as a bullhorn for which they can then share their thoughts and feelings to anyone who would dare lend them a ear. The band X were quite different from many of their peers in the same way that they were different from the mainstream conformists pop culture. Considered a punk rock form of folk, their music was centered around ideals first, rather than the attitude being a catalyst for their message. Mixed with this concept, the band utilized each member and their distinct personalities to create something that was familiar, but wholly different from what had come before. *The*

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*Unheard Music* certainly presents these issues, but at the same time presents a very strong documentary that at times even exceeds the expectations for the average "rock doc."

Shot between the years 1980-1985, *X: The Unheard Music* is director W.T. Morgan's chronicle of rising punk group X who came barreling out of the Los Angeles music scene with a very unique sound and inspiration. The documentary follows them for their trials and tribulations as they attempt to go as far with their music as possible, while not selling out their credibility or becoming something they don't respect. The group has flirtations with major record labels, and we watch as they craft their very different style of music. Shot during a era that could never be repeated, we see band member John Doe, Exene Cervenka, Billy Zoom, and D.J. Bonebrake try and remain artistically viable in a city known for its abhorrence of all things real.

If *The Unheard Music* shows anything, it shows that X was certainly a group that held to their own beliefs. They were young people who had very strict beliefs, but it was their hatred for all forms of commercialism that seemed to connect them. When Exene describes the Safeway in her neighborhood, where televisions were placed above every checkout line playing a endless loop of commercials, the conviction in her voice is very evident. Even though she may seem a bit naive, the dedication she has to her beliefs are not to be questioned. These kids had such earnest convictions, and imagined the world being reduced to zombies by mindless television, but now such things are almost considered trivial. Even in the internet marketplace, we find the same form of commercial product placement. Try browsing around YouTube without a product being advertised before at least one video that you watch. To these kids though, it wasn't a joke. It was the destruction of a culture and their idealism is refreshing to a jaded viewer like myself, even if their opinions remain brash. This is part of what has always drawn me to the punk rock aesthetic. Even if people change as they get older, there is always another

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generation of youth who will be there prepared to take over the battleaxe and wage their own war against the deterioration of our culture.

*The Unheard Music* has been referred to as "the punk rock *The Last Waltz*," and such glowing praise can be understood after watching the film. With editing that is very fast paced, the movie gives a very lucid vision of what Hollywood was like during these early 80s. This isn't so much a concert film, as it is a detailed look at the growth of one band as well as their surrounding area. Taking a truly art house edge, the movie doesn't look to be anything that one expects. During many live performances, we hear the music but are instead treated to footage and photographic montages similar to music videos. The montages serve a purpose, however, and they aren't simply here to evoke a sense of style. This was certainly a film made by artists and art school graduates, *The Unheard Music* is like watching a collage of artistic flourishes mixed with a very strange family home video. Filled to the brim with moments that fill the viewer up with context about the surrounding time and events, the movie gives light to a very peculiar era in music history.

Although it doesn't hurt to be a fan of X, this documentary is strong enough to warrant a watch from just about any viewer. It is a creative and fun ride that shows the internal struggles of a band that seems on the brink of doing something big within a once-powerful music industry. I highly recommend it for all audiences. It is available now through MVD Visual. You can read more about the band and their recent exploits via their official website:

<http://www.xtheband.com>

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