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'X: The Unheard Music,' 'Sid and Nancy'

January 29, 2012 By [Glenn Abel](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

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“Being under the radar is a good thing,” says Exene Cervenka, the singer-poet of the L.A. rock band X.

“Celebrity-hood is not a good thing. ... Being able to live your life as an artist and matter is a good thing. ... I’m happy with the way things turned out.

She pauses. “Other people in the band, maybe not so much ...”

[X](#) holds the title of quintessential L.A. rock band, brushing past such contenders as the Doors (too psychedelic) and Love (too ephemeral).

Yet the quartet's profile has always been low, even when it was artificially high — the cover of Rolling Stone, a major label record deal.

“Maybe we just weren't ready for prime time,” says singer-bassist John Doe.

W.T. Morgan's jittery [“X: The Unheard Music”](#) (1986) captured the band in the mid-1980s, standing tall atop the ashes of the city's punk scene.

The filmmakers' intention was to capture a group of artists reaching out to a mainstream audience. The filmmakers succeeded, even if the artists didn't.

MVD Visual has rereleased the feature film as an excellent “Silver Anniversary” Blu-ray that blows away the old Image DVD.

Cervenka and Doe revisit the movie and their glory days via a 20-minute talk that appears as an extra on the Blu-ray (and DVD). Both musicians, understandably, are proud of the film and its time-capsule view of the Hollywood scene of the time.

“Early '80s Hollywood, there was no place like it,” Cervenka says. “It was our little club. It was our playground.”

Director Morgan made the most of the band's Hollywood vibe. Stylized segments feature each of the band members. Cervenka, a rag doll with Bette Davis eyes, gets to star in her own silent movie.

Then there's guitarist Billy Zoom (part Buck Owens and part Gorgeous George); and John Doe and drummer D.J. Bonebrake (both blessed with leading-man looks).

“Unheard Music” covers some band biography (“Billy put an ad in the Recycler ...”) but mostly it's X performing amid a blitzkrieg of images that range from Edsel ads to death squads shooting up El Salvador. The director called the film “a cubist painting.”

There's a visit to the ruins of the Masque punk club. A ghostly night scene shows a house transported across a freeway bridge as the title song plays. The band and producer Ray Manzarek of Doors fame re-enact the recording of “White Girl.”

A record label executive explains how he couldn't waste “my people's time” on a band like X due to a lack of Top 40 potential. Doe talks about the band's days at singer-songwriter haven Elektra Asylum: “They treated us like a painting, to be bragged about to their friends.”

The film, shot in 16mm, looks quite good, considering. MVD says “Unheard Music” has been “completely restored and transferred from original 16mm negative to HD.”

The audio (choice of stereo or a new 5.1 surround mix) has plenty of punch to cover the opening frame's directive to “play it loud.” Menus are imaginative and inviting.

Reflecting the care given to this home video release, handwritten lyric sheets decorated by Cervenka can be accessed as stills via your remote. Don't miss them. The sheets also are available as PDFs.

There's also a post-production interview with the filmmakers, who clearly were putting together the project on a dime. X performs one bonus number (“Some Other Time,” with shaky sound).

* * * * *



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Sid Vicious was “the Elvis of punk rock” — assuming that talent for self-destruction counts as talent.

Even the Sex Pistols wanted to dump the nasty bugger, but their marketing-minded manager refused: “He embodies the dementia of a nihilistic generation.” Vicious was so inept as a bass player that the guitarist played his parts on the punk band’s one and only album, [“Never Mind the Bollocks.”](#)

Vicious’ legacy, then, boils down to the cool name, a lot of T-shirts and the movie [“Sid & Nancy.”](#) making its debut on Blu-ray as a skimpy collector’s edition from Fox Home Entertainment (MGM).

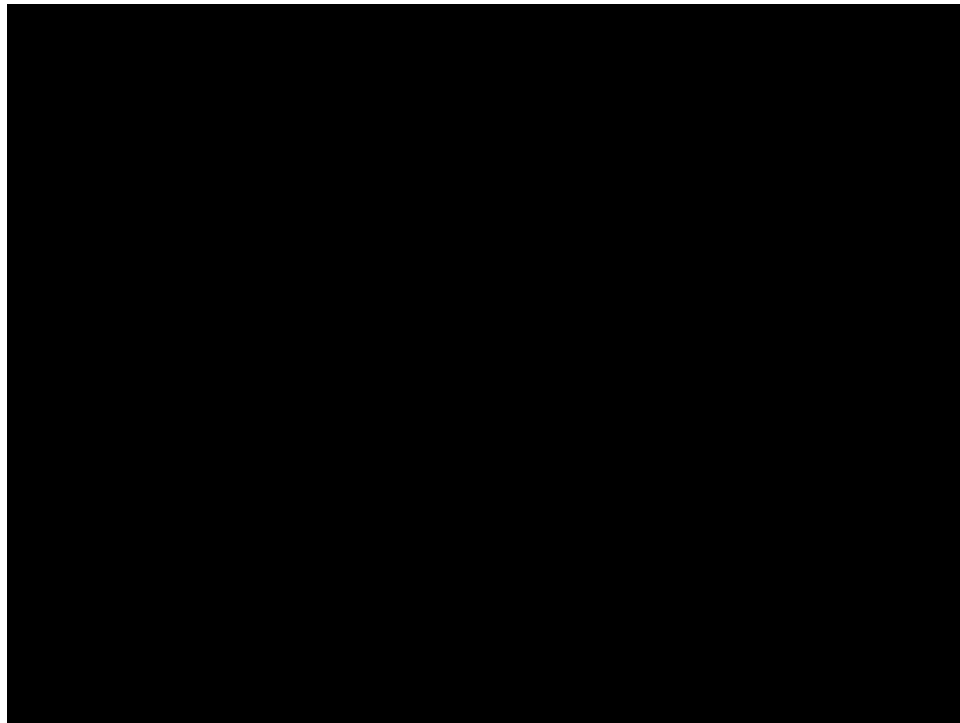
Alex Cox, who enjoyed a brief run as a professional Hollywood outsider, directs with a sure hand. The performances of (then unknown) Gary Oldman and Chloe Webb as Vicious and girlfriend Nancy Spungen elevate the film, which for all its noise, grime and anarchy, still feels like a Hollywood price-of-fame bio. Cinematographer Roger Deakins’ money shot has the lovers kiss in a Manhattan alley as garbage rains down on them. Awww.

The Blu-ray has two featurettes that survey the Sex Pistols, the London punk scene, and Sid & Nancy. The remaining Sex Pistols don’t participate. One “insider” says that Webb’s performance as Spungen is “not half as difficult and annoying as the real Nancy” — aka “Nauseating Nancy.”

A lot of the 1986 movie’s key scenes were shot soft and dingy in low-light conditions, but the Blu-ray images (1.85:1 widescreen) look good regardless. The 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio is ready to rock, although a lot of the music in the film remains pretty pedestrian, even with the participation of the Clash’s Joe Strummer.



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