

# FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

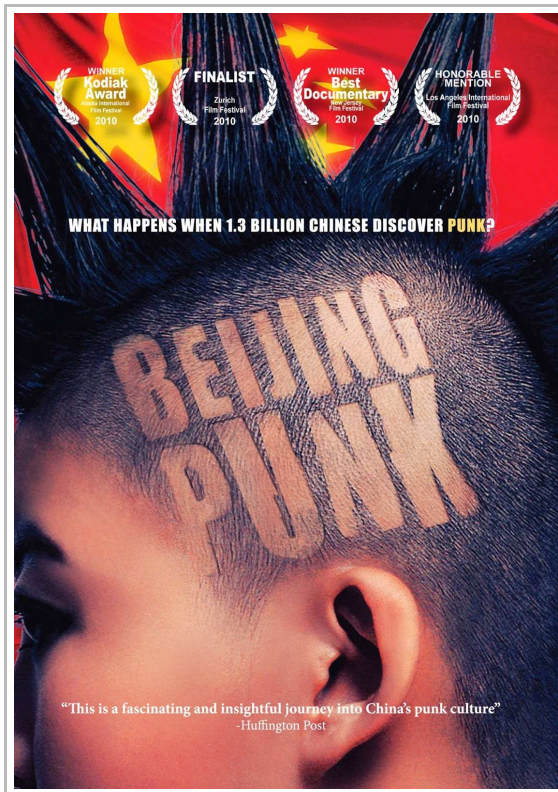
Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

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## DVD Reviews: Beijing Punk, Live from Japan

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 Images from the Internet

Both of these films display the influence of modern Western music on parts of Asia. While one focuses on a singular style – albeit various subgenres – the other looks at a diversity of categories. Either way, the scenes are DIY, and independent of the general culture, which make it all the more interesting.



### Beijing Punk

Written and directed Shaun Jefford  
 Seminal Films / It's Time! Entertainment / Newground Films  
 83 minutes, 2010 / 2012  
[www.beijingpunk.com](http://www.beijingpunk.com)  
[www.Seminalfilms.com](http://www.Seminalfilms.com)  
[www.MVDvisual.com](http://www.MVDvisual.com)

It comes as no surprise to me that this film has won a whole stack of international film festival awards, from Cambridge and Alaska, to New Jersey and beyond.

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Filmed around the time when China was preparing for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Shaun Jefford gamely turns his attention to the various styles of punk rock bands that formed in the city thanks in part to the Internet, and from the Western presence of certain individuals who are presented in the film.

One example is Michael Pettis, a professor of Fine Arts at a university, who opened the D-22 Club, which is compared in the film to CBGBs, and, I would add, Max's Kansas City, which has as much to do the origin of punk as CBs. But I digress...

There is also "Creative Genius" (film's descriptor) Nevin Domer, who books the shows and helps run China's punk label, Maybe Mars Records, which at the time of the recording had 40 releases.

While there are a number of bands there, such as Joyside, Snapline and The Gar, the film focuses mainly on three or four of the groups. They live in squalor in the "TZ" (Thingzou) neighborhood which is much like the East Village, which also fueled punk's artistic nourishment.

Two of the bands that receive some coverage are P.K. 14, a Talking Heads-style art punk group which we don't really see much of, and Hedgehog, who grabbed my attention and I wanted to see more. The main focus is on the tiny female drummer, Shi Lu (Atom), the only women musician in any of the bands in this film. She is definitely a power drummer in the trio, which has a '90s Seattle sound. Definitely a band I would have enjoyed back in the day. I can imagine them on a bill with the likes of The Mumps, Mong or Student Teachers.

The main focus, however, are on the bands Mi San Dao (or Misandao, or MiSanDao; it is shown all ways) and Demerit. I will discuss separately.

Mis San Dao, as far as I can tell, is Beijing's only skinhead/Oi band. They have the standard Doc Martins (now made in China rather than England), suspenders, knee-high shorts, and bald heads. Lemmy and Mötörhead is their godhead, represented in a bootleg video they watch repeatedly.

The lead singer is a tough, wide dude, much like you would expect a skinhead to be, in the classic sense. Obviously, he doesn't go for the white supremacist stuff, but leans more towards the nationalistic bent (e.g., anti-Japanese, saying some complementary things about Hitler as an artist, but not as a good leader because he made *mistakes*, such as with the Jews). We meet his wife, his two pitbulls, and watch the band on stage during a short music festival tour of Germany. Mainly what we see is the band drinking a lot of beer and cough syrup with codeine. Oh, and some stuff from Mongolia that looks vile that makes the director puke.

The other band, Demerit, looks like they could have come out of England in 1980, with the mohawks and leather jackets. Their sound ranges from overproduced Sum41/Green Day punk harmonies (lead singer is a fan of Good Charlotte), to Black Flag style hardcore. We even meet their No. 1 fan (i.e., groupie), who is seems right out of the Nancy Spungen overzealous and questionable character checklist.

The best parts of the documentary, of course, are when the bands are

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- 2009 (78)
- 2008 (70)
- 2007 (22)

## About Me

Robert Barry Francos  
Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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performing, either on stage or in their practice studios (usually a basement). What I find interesting is that all sing in English (subtitles are usually supplied anyway). In typical punk form, it is protest music about the Olympics, the government, religion and society as sheep. You know, punk rock. But it also is more dangerous there: think Tiananmen Square plus the push to cleanse for the international visitors attending the Olympics. The government does not exactly smile down on social dissonance. As one of the musicians in Demerit states, "We are not political, just about freedom."

One aspect I found ironically amusing is that no matter where you are, musicians have a tough time in similar ways. For example, for Demerit's record release show, they have no records due to a holdup at the record factory. Punk rock!

Jefford is not merely a disembodied voice here, but is actively seen talking to the bands, drinking various questionable liquids, and even getting his head partially shaven against his wishes (Oi!). The cameraman, Alexandre Kyriakidis, who we only see once, has a negative reaction to all the consumption, and ends up in (the) hospital at one point. Punk rock!

If you're wondering, yes, there are mosh pits and crowd surfing (the latter mostly by Nevin). The audiences are small but enthusiastic, and this documentary shows that punk is a movement that cannot be contained by totalitarian control. They still need to open up more to women musicians, but in general, it feels good to see the music that formed me help (hinder?) so many others in cultures one would not expect.

This documentary is an excellent record of that, and I would like to see a Part II, updating not only these bands, but where the scene has progressed since (beyond the usual title cards at the end about the bands). Okay, one more time, with feeling: punk rawk!