

**When the Drumming Stops**

By Steven Wishnia, 223 pgs.

One of the things I like about writing book reviews for *Razorcake* is that even when the books are bad, there is still something to say about them. And much more often than the music I get to review, the books are often pleasant surprises—things I would never have picked up on my own, but that I am happy to read and review. *When the Drumming Stops* is a novel and a good example of such a pleasant surprise. It's not the best book I've ever read, but it was enjoyable and something I was interested in coming back to every time I had the chance. The primary reason this book appealed to me is that it deals with a few topics that I am interested in: New York City, New York City punk, and what happens to punk rockers as they get older.

The book looks at the aging punk rocker, Underend Vicodini (yeah, I think it's a stupid name, too, even for a punk rocker), and chapters alternate between his life in the 2000s and the 1980s. The '00s is his current life and during the '80s his band, The Gutter Astronomers, was touring with a somewhat sizeable fan base. Although the band was never huge, they were able to cobble together a living in the '80s in New York. The early material explains how the band formed, the style of the music, their experiences playing shows, and living in New York. The chapters set in the '00s look at how the band members (and primarily Vicodini) struggle in their forties (or are they in their fifties?) as aging punks trying to make something of their lives. Members have labored with drug addiction, raising kids, struggling to find jobs and cheap rent, and just generally trying to understand how a city they loved so dearly could have changed so much. The band members with children constantly feel as though they have no time to do anything. The ones without family seem to have all the time in the world to contemplate how much they miss playing music and what to do with the time they have left in the world.

The band decides to reform in the '00s and see what they can make of themselves in this new age of internet promotion and commercial punk rock. It's not hard to see that the disillusionment they face at the changing landscape is likely a reflection of author Wishnia's feelings, as he was formerly a member of the '80s punk band, the False Prophets. This isn't a book about embitterment or jealousy, however. Rather, it's a book about a great city, people who love music, and their interconnected lives.

Thankfully, Wishnia has a master's degree in journalism and knows how to write. That's not to say this is told in a journalistic fashion, rather Wishnia has the

mechanics down: he can structure a fine sentence, understands how to engage his reader, and gets them to follow along. The story doesn't drag and reads well.

So, what happens to members of '80s punk bands when they grow older? It appears that, in the case of some, they spend time reflecting on what was, what could have been, and what is. And then they write books about it and ask us to think about the same things. There are no easy answers and things don't always work out the way we'd like them to, but it's good to know that there are others out there who are sharing our experiences. —Kurt Morris (Manic D Press, PO Box 410804, SF, CA 94141)



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**Circle Jerks: My Career as a Jerk: DVD**

You can't call yourself a fan of hardcore punk without having at least heard of the Circle Jerks. They're mandatory listening for anyone getting into the genre. Historically speaking, the band tends to get overshadowed in punk history books and documentaries by bands like Minor Threat and Black Flag, the latter of which Circle Jerks' vocalist Keith Morris was the original frontman. This documentary, directed by David Markey, shines a light on one of the earliest and most criminally underrated bands to come out of the L.A. punk scene of the late '70s and early '80s.

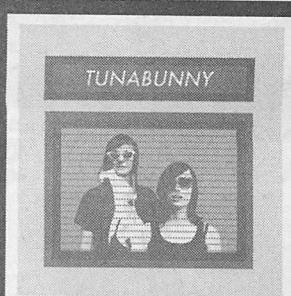
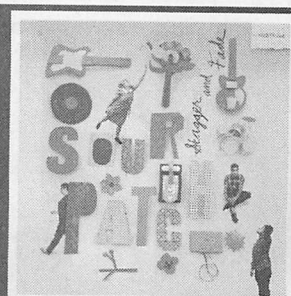
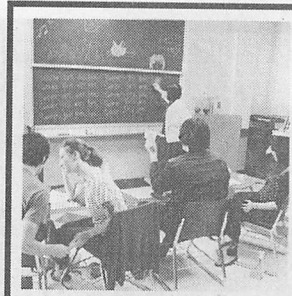
Markey, a friend and fan of the band, has been filming them since the early '80s. This documentary traces their history better than anyone else could hope to do, mixing archival footage with interviews from virtually every living person



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whoever took the stage as a member of the band. Keith Morris and Greg Hetson, the only two permanent members of the band throughout its tumultuous existence, are featured in multiple interviews, along with founding drummer "Lucky" Lehrer, and later members Earl Liberty and Zander Schloss, who each handled bass duties at points in the Jerks' history. Interviews from outside sources Henry Rollins, J. Mascis, and Greg Graffin add color and perspective to the impact the Circle Jerks and their music had on the exploding hardcore punk scene.

Though sometimes grainy, I enjoyed the archival live footage of the band, most shot by Markey himself, and how the live footage is interspersed with interviews to tell the story of the band. The interviews themselves were great, detailing the behind the scenes history of the band, and the revolving-door nature of their lineup over the years. There's a bit of a jumping back and forth in the early part of the film that makes it difficult to follow the story of how the band came together and their early existence. I had to watch this part a second time to properly understand the chronology of events.

From there, though, the rest of the documentary proceeds relatively smoothly, tracing the band's history all the way up to their aborted attempt at recording a new album in 2009, which led to Morris' formation of the band Off! with Burning Brides frontman Dimitri Coats, producing those recording sessions.

It is clear in watching this documentary that director Markey is a great fan of the band. His attention to detail and drive to document everything shines through in every interview and in the live footage. Reaching out and interviewing virtually everyone involved in the band over the years took a lot of time and commitment, and it shows through in the quality of the finished product.

That said, Markey never lets his love for the band color the story. From members' battles with drug use to tensions between members over participation in other bands over the years, and the unresolved situation that was their attempt at a 2009 return album, Markey gets everything on tape as members bare their frustrations, angers, and fears, felt over nearly thirty years of making music together. What emerges is one of the most honest accounts of a legendary band ever set on film. It's a story that longtime and newer fans alike should check out. Highly recommended viewing. —Paul J. Comeau (MVD Visual)

**John Hillerman: Dat Woret: DVD**

German party punks John Hillerman (named after the guy who played Higgins on the '80s TV classic *Magnum P.I.*) deliver a well-packaged DVD/CD combo with

an extensive booklet. Digging in, I found this to be rather hard to digest, as my fluency in German is nil. From what I could gather, the band seems to have been active in the late '90s. The DVD contains the CD tracks, an interview, and a live show from Berlin that is literally half-filled with the band just standing around, drinking beer, and chatting in a room smaller than the bathroom at Razorcake HQ. The interview is all in German so I really couldn't follow along at all, which was a bummer. From what I can tell though, the band didn't take itself too seriously and seemed to have had a fun time, which is really all you can ask for from a band like this. As it stands, this DVD is really hard to recommend to anyone other than a punk with a serious Teutonic fascination. —Garrett Barnwell (John Hillerman, jan@trust-zine.de)

**Punk Machine, The: DVD**

This DVD seems compelling enough based on the cover spiel: "An inspiring story of an aspiring punk band—if only they could actually play!" Being a sucker for a good inspirational story, I plopped the DVD in my player and settled in, ready to be inspired. What I got instead was a load of live videos by many of today's top purveyors of English punk (Subhumans, Citizen Fish) as well as some decent live footage of Yanks: Leftover Crack and Star Fucking Hipsters. These clips are interspersed with ongoing snippets (would skits be more what is going on here?) of Citizen Fish's Jasper, Matt and Silas playing the aspiring punk band.

Honestly, these portions of the DVD seem like they were done on the first take and come off pretty goofy. Citizen Matt is pretty much cracking up in each scene, as if not even he can believe he is participating in such tomfoolery (I've only dreamt of using that word in print.) But, all in all, credit must be given for even attempting something other than just straight live video clips on a DVD. On that level, it succeeds and is a fun watch initially. Any replay quotient would come from the music clips themselves that are thankfully broken out in the DVD menu so you can just watch those. This DVD would probably appeal to fans of Citizen Fish/Subhumans as well as anyone who is interested in U.K.-based punk. After getting over my obvious disappointment in *not* getting an inspirational story I rather enjoyed it. —Garrett Barnwell (crashassailantrecords.com)



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