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Punk In Africa – Three Chords Three Countries One Revolution

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*Punk In Africa – Three Chords
Three Countries One
Revolution*

Punk In Africa – Three Chords Three Countries One Revolution (MVD)

It's a bit like discovering a long lost tribe, a previously undiscovered animal species, or a hitherto unexplored island. Just when you think you've seen and heard everything that punk rock has to offer, something like this comes along. This film documents the history of African punk – a whole phenomenon that I had been blissfully unaware of. The first hour or so focuses on South Africa, charting the early germs of the scene that were planted in the 1970s right through to bands that were active in the mid 90s. The format is much alike an early punk rock fanzine – a cut and paste scrapbook with snippets, outtakes, interviews, clips and all manner of gems glued together onto celluloid. That DIY approach means that this works more as a collection of clips fitted together to make a somewhat disjointed picture, rather than a complete image and documentation of a scene. That doesn't mean that this lacks in quality, as the archive footage and interviews shot within the last few years are all good quality.

The South African journey tours the various cities and highlights the bands of the time – Suck, Wild Youth, KOOS, Power Age, National Wake, The Genuines and more. Censorship, apartheid and a rigid militaristic society meant these early punk pioneers didn't

have a massive exposure to the international punk bands, and so the sound is very home grown. A lot of those bands have a really good sound and style and I will definitely be searching out recordings they have left behind. Those early artists talk about the issues they were confronted with, both societal and cultural, whether it is the Soweto Uprising or apartheid to issues around Afrikaans identity, and the sterile, boring cultural options that were available and socially accepted. This is a continuing story told by

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available and socially accepted. It is a captivating story told by various musicians.

For some reason the clock then jumps forward 10 or 15 years and introduces us to the contemporary South African punk scene. It's clear that internationalism has made big inroads and the cultural influences are a lot more Americanised. Having said that, African music styles also play a big part in defining the sounds of bands such as Hog Higgidy Hog or Sibling Rivalry so it doesn't really sound like your typical UK/ US ska punk, but retains its own character. This part of the DVD almost works as a scene report, showing the sights and sounds that blossomed in the period since democracy prevailed, also including an interesting interview and perspective of the minority Afrikaans people.

After this extensive introduction the South Africa's rich and varied history of punk rock, we are then taken on a whistle-stop tour of a couple of other regions, starting with Maputo in Mozambique. The interesting things the guys from the band 340ml tell is that they grew up in a civil war-stricken country, but that in Maputo they weren't living in a warzone. What it meant was they were essentially locked down and unable to travel within their own country. Here again ska builds the core of their sound, – as they say "ska is the African side to punk and rock music" , but also featuring African styles such as marabienta make this sound pretty different.

Moving swiftly on, we are taken to Harare in Zimbabwe.

The story told here is somewhat different to the picture that the 340ml guys told of growing up in Maputo, Mozambique. The Rudimentals introduce us to the world of making music in an oppressive regime, and so they started to music to make people aware of what was happening in the country around them. We then catch a glimpse of Evicted, who blend grunge with traditional African sounds, before revisiting the Rudimentals.

The film draws to a close by mentioning the underground punk rock scene in places like Cape Verde, Tanzania and Kenya. The overriding feel after watching this movie is that punk rock is a truly global and all-encompassing phenomenon that becomes a way of life for people the world over. Truly inspiring.

As mentioned at the start of the review, the film does not work as one coherent feature, but instead offers glimpses and snapshots into this previously undiscovered scene that I am sure the global punk rock world will love to see and hear about. This film came out a couple of years back but has been given a new lease of life with this re-release courtesy of MVD. **Tom Chapman**

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