

Review: 'Punk in Africa'



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An interesting if accidental companion piece to recent docu hit "Searching for Sugar Man" -- in which a U.S. musician unwittingly helped fuel anti-apartheid sentiments in 1970s South Africa - - "Punk in Africa" chronicles the more overtly rebellious influence of punk music in that nation (and some neighboring ones) a few years later.

Dennis Harvey (<http://variety.com/author/dennis-harvey/>)

An interesting if accidental companion piece to recent docu hit "[Searching for Sugar Man](http://variety.com/t/searching-for-sugar-man/)" — in which a U.S. musician unwittingly helped fuel anti-apartheid sentiments in 1970s South [Africa](http://variety.com/t/africa/) — "[Punk](http://variety.com/t/punk/) in Africa" chronicles the more overtly rebellious influence of punk music in that nation (and some neighboring ones) a few years later. This aptly raw, energetic survey of a very DIY scene should appeal to programmers looking for an arresting intersection of music, politics and underground culture. A 52-minute edit is also available for broadcast.

The focus is primarily on South African bands that began springing up in the late '70s, inspired by the punk movement elsewhere, though the pic notes that short-lived local metal band Suck set a model for anarchistic impudence several years earlier. Acts like Wild Youth, National Wake and Kalahari Surfers followed the lead of many hardcore ensembles abroad in offering ramalama rock with lyrical rants against the prevailing conservative regime.

Sassing Reagan and Thatcher was quite different from critiquing Botha's white-supremacy government, however, and secret surveillance, police raids, harassment, the threat of prison, etc., were serious issues for these groups. Their increasingly multiracial makeup also led to mixing indigenous idioms with punk styles in a lively alternative music scene that survives today, long after apartheid's fall. Organized geographically — chronicling punk activity in Durban, Johannesburg and other cities in South Africa — the pic moves on to more succinctly limn similar movements in [Zimbabwe](http://variety.com/t/zimbabwe/) (<http://variety.com/t/zimbabwe/>) and Mozambique, where musical agitation against the powers that be retains varying levels of risk. Briefer still is an eye-blink peek at punk's impact elsewhere on the continent.

Co-helmets Deon Maas and Keith Jones draw on a colorful array of interviewees — albeit one whose gender makeup suggests these particular punk scenes weren't all that empowering for women — and a rich archive of videotaped performance footage. The earlier music soundtracked suffers from tinny DIY original recording, but fares better on a free, lengthy online mix tape on [SoundCloud](http://variety.com/t/soundcloud/) (<http://variety.com/t/soundcloud/>).

Punk in Africa

South Africa-Czech Republic-Zimbabwe-Mozambique

Production

A Meerkat Media, Peligroso Prods. and Bohemian Lion production. (International sales: Rise and Shine World Sales, Berlin.) Produced by Jeffrey Brown, Keith Jones, Deon Maas. Directed by Keith Jones, Deon Maas.

Crew

Camera (color, HD/Super 8), Gary K. Griffin; editor, Andy Willis; sound, Juri Suchanek. Reviewed at Santa Barbara Film Festival (Cinesonic), Feb. 1, 2013. (Also in Rotterdam Film Festival; 2012 Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, New York film festivals.) Running time: 81 MIN.

With

Ivan Kadey, Michael Flek, Warrick Sony, Lee Thomson, Paulo Chibanga, Tiago C. Paolo, Rubin Rose, Teboho Maidza, Derek Bailey, Mark Kannemeyer, Marcel Van Heerden, Steve Moni, Benji Mudie. (English, Afrikaans, Portuguese dialogue.)

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