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Dead End Drive-In: Now Showing - Clockwork Orange County

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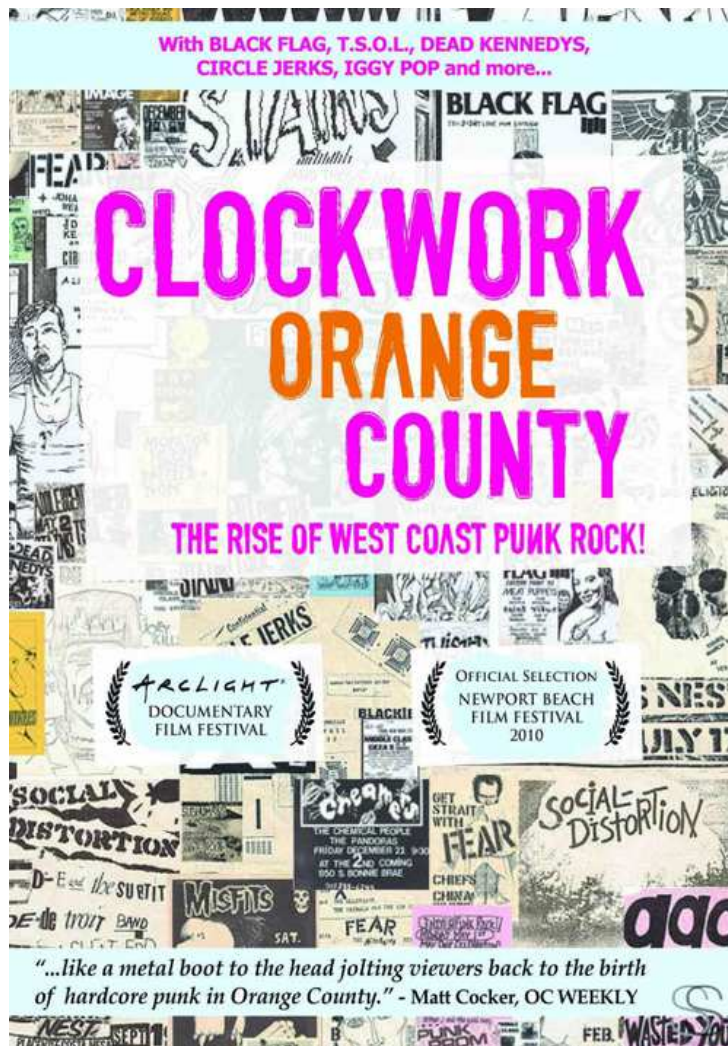


Clockwork Orange County (2010 - Endurance Pictures/MVDvisual/Wienerworld)

"The Rise Of West Coast Punk Rock!", the subtitle of Clockwork Orange County, Jonathan W.C. Mills' 2010 documentary, is almost as misleading as the film's title itself.

Originally released theatrically in 2010 as We Were Feared, Clockwork Orange County now hits the physical and virtual shelves of UK retailers on a region-free DVD, and a captivating watch it is, it has to be said.

That subtitle, though, offers little about the core of the film: Clockwork Orange County is, rather than just a by-numbers account of the history of punk rock, a love letter to a venue that pushed boundaries, upset a lot of people (from band members to police to politicians), yet, ultimately, provided a major stepping stone for prospective punk rockers.





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Jerry Roach was in real estate when, instead of a commission, he accepted a club as payment instead. Noting that a popular West Coast hot spot was named Jaws after the blockbuster movie of the same name, Roach decided to pilfer Hollywood for a venue name too and, after settling on a Jack Nicholson classic, The Cuckoo's Nest was created in the late '70s.

The club would, as proved by some startling archive film (utilising footage from the 1981 documentary Urban Struggle: The Battle of Cuckoo's Nest), provide a base for a whole new breed of punk rockers, become a hugely popular venue on the circuit, and be held responsible for a whole new 'dance' craze.



Henry Rollins - who appears here in typical talking head fashion, alongside the likes of Jello Biafra, Jack Grisham, Duane Peters, Joe Escalante, Steve Soto, and a wonderfully blunt Keith Morris - actually played his first show with Black Flag at the Cuckoo's Nest, and, with archive performance footage of them alongside T.S.O.L., Circle Jerks, The Adolescents, Ramones and Dead Kennedys, it's easy to see how influential Roach's club was to punk rock.

With classic photography from Ed Colver rubbing shoulders with flyers from the punk archives, the documentary paints a fine picture of the growing of a scene on the West Coast and the troubles that came with it. The running battles between the local 'cowboys' and the punks was headline news - one newspaper headline shown reading "The Spurs Vs The Safety Pins" - but it was from within that the biggest battle would rage.

Yes, 'slam dancing' happened.

The Cuckoo's Nest is generally regarded as the birthplace of the slam dance. The natural (?) progression from pogoing would, ultimately, draw football and wrestling jocks into the scene, heads shaved in readiness of trouble. For these meatheads the music mattered little compared to the opportunity for violence. It's at the point of their introduction that this documentary shifts from music film to social commentary.

The running battles were now inside the club itself, with white power imagery welcoming the new 'hardcore' scene, violence the new fun activity. That violence would spill out into the parking lot, into nearby areas, so much so that legions of cop cars would line up outside the club waiting for the merest flicker of trouble, the closing of the club the ultimate aim.

Somehow, in just 74 minutes, the filmmaker managed to squeeze what equates to not one, but two documentaries into Clockwork Orange County's running time. The first half of the film is a vibrant recollection of a bristling music scene, the second half a cold reminder of how quickly things can turn into bloodied pulp.

This DVD release contains, trailer aside, nothing but a recommended film that documents a cultural shift as much as it does a musical one.



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