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Punk's Not Dead

Released yesterday to DVD after visiting film festivals from Cannes to Cleveland to Copenhagen, Susan Dynner's indie documentary *Punk's Not Dead* is a 97-minute D.I.Y. dredging of the sand banks lining the now decades-old channels of punk rock. The genre's undercurrents sculpted the foundation of an anarchic Pangaea that has since become so fractured it's beginnings are barely perceptible - like you need some kind of documentary to sort it all out or something. *Punk's Not Dead* is just that. It's a crash course for the less informed latecomers, with plenty of fun stuff in between for the aging punk in all of us, not to mention the aging punks that are featured in the film. And the young ones that have taken over the course of today's sound.

The film's opening credits kick-start the proceedings with a montage of sound bites from the Ramones, Sex Pistols, the Damned, and The Clash. If you pay close enough attention, you'll see Tim Armstrong (of Rancid) credited as one of *Punk's Not Dead*'s Associate Producers - right before a cut to a young Phil Donahue warning American parents about the dangers of young "punks." This is backed with a slew of newspaper articles on, and plenty of first-hand stories of, picked-on punks and mohawked mayhem and bare-knuckle brawls from icons like Social Distortion's Mike Ness.

The antagonizing intro is a fantastic lead for the film's look into the roots of punk, though the set-up quickly progresses to the results. We're given a swift gist of the genre's genesis; angry and trapped working class kids - both English and American - who voiced their frustrations with fast, aggressive music. The basics considered common knowledge, what *Punk's Not Dead* more quickly emphasizes is the way in which the style of a handful of upstarts and outcasts exploded into a cultural movement, laying the groundwork for an unbelievably influential musical genre and community.

Remember when the simple act of hearing the music you cared about was infinitely harder and impossibly meaningful? In case we have forgotten, or perhaps never really knew, *Punk's Not Dead* is quick to remind us of all the sacrifice in the floor-sleeping, van-trekking, money-scraping years put in by bands like Black Flag and the Subhumans. Back when the term "punk" was an insurance risk rather than a viable commodity, it was a pioneering spirit that ensured the survival of the punk rock species.

The documentary moves fast to the 1990s when punk bands (or punk-inspired bands, depending on which side of the divisive authenticity fence one lands) like Pennywise, Rancid, the Offspring and Green Day broke into the mainstream, and continues to present day, with lots of fond recollections on the way it was. The examination is pleasantly scatter-brained, but is loosely centered on the ethics of Punk's cooption and commercialization; the advent of events like the Vans Warped Tour and the implication of new, corporate-backed bands being considered Punk. Offsetting the political discourse is a variety of footage on the reminiscing, recollecting, and even the bare asses of the genre's icons - as well as the cheeky, self-proclaimed "punk historian" Alan Parker, and the man-faced, apparently-female, Texas Terri. There's also Keith Morris, Jake

Burns, Ian MacKaye, Fat Mike, Henry Rollins - just be prepared for all those new guys from Sum 41, My Chemical Romance and Good Charlotte as well.

Although Punk's Not Dead has screened at numerous film festivals over the past year it has otherwise been of limited availability, and the extra materials included with the DVD release are notable for their scope and volume. Real gems include "Hair," a pretty hilarious (hair-larious, if you will) and enlightening How-To Guide for punk rock hair with Total Chaos' Rob Chaos and The Adicts's Kid Dee; "Stories," full of 'em; and "CBGB/The Roxy/The Masque," a terrific, quick diary of the legendary music clubs that puts each in its historical context.

If you're not the buying type (the film invariably has its own official website and online store), Punk's Not Dead should at least make it on to your Netflix queue. It covers the roots and aggression that made punk music what it was, then goes on to ask all of the questions about its evolution - what it is and what it's becoming. The footage, interviews, photos, stories, and soundtrack aren't half bad either.

TRAILER: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoJ8LFswY9c