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Punks Not Dead

2007

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In the 1940's the groundwork was laid for what would become rock n' roll, something that evolved when Elvis burst onto the scene in the 50's and then again when the Beatles brought their fame to the United States in the 1960's. The 60's would also see the rise of heavy metal and while some might associate the 70's as being the era of disco, there was another new form of music that began in the underground only to find mainstream success; punk rock. Three different genres of music it might seem, but with quite a bit in common. Each was considered a fad that would pass, parents hated it, and they are still around as are many of those who were involved in the very beginning.

Punks Not Dead, also the name of the first album release by The Exploited, is the latest documentary to tackle a very broad subject; the origins of punk rock. There are those today who have a different view of what punk sounds like and should be, thanks to the corporate record labels who package and brand bands who have no business being called punk, but here you will find some of the origins of the genre.

This isn't just some overblown, facts and figures type of documentary but instead features a vast assortment of people who brought about the punk rock movement. Jello Biafra from the legendary Dead Kennedys, Henry Rollins from Black Flag, brothers Wattie and Willie Buchan as well as Gary McCormack of The Exploited, Brian Barnes and Alan Campbell of the U.K. Subs, Dick Lucas from the Subhumans and even David Vanian of The Damned are among the many, many people that have contributed to the documentary, and punk rock wasn't always the money making machine that it is for some today.

The candid interviews cover the lean days that many of the bands went through where getting paid meant their might be just enough to cover gas to the next show and grab a little food. Punk was also about networking, something that could find you a floor to crash on when you came through town. Having grown up in the scene during the 80's, this was very much a truth. The small mill town in Northwest Washington, Longview, happens to share its name with the song that broke Green Day into the mainstream. The band actually did play in the town in a friend's garage of all places. This was all a part of the pink networking however, a way to get shows, and none of the bands who are interviewed will deny it.

From the fond memories though, we see that the scene and the true spirit is still very much alive in some parts of the United States as well as the rest of the world. Every town has at least one house that acts as the “band house” where there are parties and small gatherings held, complete with whatever bands are together at the time. Again, this was very much a part of the scene I grew up in where you’d have a collection of punk bands from all different genres playing together with bands that were more of a rock influence as well as the only metal band in town (which I was actually a part of.)

Punks Not Dead is more than fond memories though, it’s a look at memorabilia, it’s about hearing how festivals have started that represent the old and the new, and it’s a collection of not only vintage photos, but vintage concert footage that you aren’t going to readily find, though I’m sure it’s floating around somewhere as tape trading has always been a huge thing. But there is also a look at the legends who really were the driving force behind a phenomenon. The Ramones for instance have always been influential on just about everyone that was into punk, and while their musical approach was a bit more of the pop punk style that is commonly heard today, there is no mistaking the fact that they really helped push the music into the forefront. There are bands like Stiff Little Fingers who formed back in 1977 who are still playing to this very day, and in fact many of the musicians interviewed are still doing what they love best. They may have grown up, they may have families, but the spirit of punk is still very much within their heart and soul.

The first hour of *Punks Not Dead* examines the old school and is a joy to watch. So many of these bands are ones that I grew up on and still enjoy listening to even now, though obviously not every band who was part of the movement could be featured. Bands like Big Black who had a very different punk sound, Crass, Rudimentary Peni, Cryptic Slaughter and The Accused are many of the memorable acts that sadly aren’t here. Also bands from the crust punk subgenre who would influence the rise of grind core acts like Napalm Death, Carcass, and Terrorizer.

There is also a brief focus on the new breed of “punk” that has been hitting the mainstream, and it’s great to hear the old school punks have the same opinion; these bands are NOT punk rock. The Ataris, Blink 182, Sum 41, Pennywise, and undoubtedly My Chemical Romance aren’t punk, nor do they have the same attitude that is associated with the genre. The new breed is a cry from that of the old, something that was seen in the metal community with the rise of the nu metal bands. If you need three drummers to play fast like the case is with Slipknot, maybe you shouldn’t be trying to play that way, and the addition of turntables as heard with Linkin Park and Limp Limp Bizkit. There’s always the matter of Hot Topic as well, the thorn in the side of the music community that has given rise to the ever-annoying mallcore kid.

Punks Not Dead goes beyond the documentary itself and features a number of bonus features, over two hours actually. These look at a number of different aspects of the punk rock culture from housing and hair styles to some of the legendary clubs like the CBGB. There are plenty of stories that aren’t covered in the main part of the documentary and it’s definitely worth watching. There are also the usual things like deleted scenes, some outtakes, and of course the trailer for the film, the amount of additional material definitely outweighs these commonalities that are found on just about every DVD release.

Long time fans of punk who know the music and bands are going to find that this documentary is going to bring back a lot of memories from the glory days of punk rock when it was an underground phenomenon that drew legions of loyal fans and followers. The new breed of “punk” might want to take some careful notes on what should be done, and what you shouldn’t do. *Punks Not Dead*, at least not the true ones, but the new breed are too busy trying to peddle merchandise at the local trendy store found in a mall near you.

-mike-

Directed by:
Susan Dynner

Featuring:
Henry Rollins
Jello Biafra
Tim Armstrong
Green Day
Sum 41
The Exploited
The Subhumans
The U.K. Subs
The Adicts
TSOL
And many, many others

DVD Features:
Anamorphic - 1.33:1
Audio: English Dolby Digital 2.0
Punk Rock Housing
Hair
Interruptions
Adicts – The Fall
Prez vs. Punk: Fact of Fiction
Stories
Set Lists
Fat Mike’s House Tour
Punk Rock Bowling
Fun Stuff
Inland Invasion
The Diffis – Deleted Scenes
Rodney on the ROQ
Smash the Discos: The Business
Selling Out
CBGB/The Roxy/The Masque
Teaser Trailer
Original Theatrical Trailer

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