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**Various***The House of the Rising Punk (DVD)*

*The House of the Rising Punk* was a 1998 German TV documentary regaling the "wonderness" that was the world famous *CBGB's*; the New York City venue that opened in 1973 on sketchy Bowery Street. Now thankfully available on DVD for U.S. audiences the fabled tales have aged gracefully. At the time of the interviews, *CBGB's* was still open and founder Hilly Kristal was alive, so watching it now brings on a touch of bittersweet nostalgia.

When I first walked into *CBGB's* in the 90's, I expected and WANTED it to be a dump, and I wasn't disappointed. A friend's band played for a small crowd on a slow, quiet Tuesday night, but you could feel good vibes whispering through the joint. As Patty Smith colorfully states, "The place was always reeking of piss and vomit and dead cats" and I knew what she meant. Man, that's punk!

The iconic music that permeates throughout *The House of the Rising Punk* adds a delicious layer of flavor. After my first viewing (and I watched this several times!) I was inclined to dust off a few gems of the era from my own collection to keep the mood going. The documentary kicks off with Richard Hell (of the group Television, the Voidoids and others) talking about how Television was one of the first bands to play at *CBGB's*. Their reoccurring gigs incited bands like The Ramones, The Talking Heads and Blondie to ask for their own time slots as well.

Tom Verlaine, who also played in Television, is interviewed along side Patty Smith. It's interesting that Richard and Tom aren't together when they're speaking, and it's also fascinating to note what an important part of music history Richard, Tom and Patty play. The Patty Smith Band formed and jammed at *CBGB's* too and was part of the landscape that soon became known as the punk era.

The cast of characters involved in *CBGB's* propulsion to legendary status includes many individuals who weren't in a band. Journalist Leggs Mcneil, who wrote *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* and was the founder of *Punk* magazine, played a big part in keenly documenting the *CBGB's* scene. In fact, Leggs is credited as the first person to use the term "punk rock" to describe the wide array of bands that graced the bar's halls.

Another "non-musician" historian who contributed to the *CBGB's* mystique is Roberta Bayley, a New York City photographer. Roberta dated Richard Hell and worked the door at *CBGB's* in the 70's. (*There's a great gig!*) In addition, she began to photograph all the bands that crossed the stage and has some keen insights on the comings and goings of all the regulars. *CBGB's* was just a local pub at first, and a place where all walks of life hung out. Filmmaker Jim Jarmusch (*Permanent Vacation* and other cult favorites) and Danny Fields, the manager for The Stooges and The Ramones offer their informative and "worth every penny" two-cents to the mix. I just wonder if they knew back then how important the nightly activities at *CBGB's* would become to the music world?

Amos Poe, another New York City moviemaker, filmed a great number of the bands that set foot in *CBGB's* in the early 70's, "just because he could". I assume much his invaluable footage is featured in *The House of the Rising Punk*. Since this took place before we all had cell phone cameras, I for one am grateful someone thought to document what is now considered a classic time in punk history.

More great clips of all the fun and mayam include early recordings of Blondie (fun fact-Debbie Harry used to drive people home in her Mustang), and some fantastic footage of Iggy Pop as well as The Ramones. There's a great bit on the The New York Dolls, one of the first bands to wear lipstick, eyeliner and bouffant hairdo's; opening up the door for hairbands of the future.

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It's hard to pick a favorite moment, I was so enthralled with it all, but a great quote about the Velvet Underground is at the top- "only 2000 people bought a Velvet Underground album, but every one of those people formed a band" Indeed! *House* gets a little murky at the end- with an appearance by The Sex Pistols, (and many those interviewed say the Brits stole punk from New York) and a rather abrupt jump to the 90's. But none of it is enough to ruin the rapture I felt after the closing credits.

I loved the cross section of artists, musicians, writers and filmmakers who contributed to this lovingly made documentary. Even if you aren't a fan of the music or the era, at a lean 60 minutes, *The House of the Rising Punk* is a must watch for any music enthusiast. This intelligent film will educate and entertain for years to come.



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