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## REVIEWS: X-RAY SPEX - [CD/DVD]



**TITLE:** X-ray Spex - [CD/DVD]  
with free mp3 download for 'Oh Bondage Up Yours!' from Live @ The Roadhouse, London by X-ray Spex  
**LABEL:** Year Zero/Future Noise  
**DATE:** 12-02-09

**REVIEW BY:** Bill Adams

Now Playing: 'I Am A Cliche' from Live @ The Roadhouse, London

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Does anyone else see the hilarity in the idea of first-wave punk bands reforming and performing greatest hits sets? On one hand, yes, it's a testament to the longevity of the music and proof positive that, as much as youth culture may have changed in the last thirty-five years, themes of discontent, ennui and frustration at a world that seems to keep many people that are different on the outside looking in (usually because of social or economic standing) still hold water. Even so though, the Sex Pistols are now playing worldclass venues in Las Vegas? The Germs are back on Warped Tour? The idea of such longevity seems contrary to the original spirit of the music. Take the fact that X-ray Spex performed at The Roadhouse last year as an example; in their very brief heyday, the band released just one full-length record and a handful of singles. They reveled in the possibility of being here today and gone tomorrow; in the song "Art-I-Ficial" (which happens to be the second song in this performance), singer Poly Styrene shrieked, "I want to be instamatic I want to be a frozen pea I want to be dehydrated in a consumer society" – yet, thirty years later (as is the case with the foam the singer's stage name refers to), they remain. In their glory days, X-ray Spex bandmembers were in their teens performing nineteen of the twenty songs (one's new) they played at The Roadhouse in 2008 – only now they're in their fifties? That such a limited output continues to exert such an influence is just... incredible. Because of that too, it would be very, very easy for the band to coast through this performance and the fact that they don't is even more incredible.

True, the band isn't moving as quickly as it once did but, from the moment they kick off with their staple "Oh Bondage Up Yours!," X-ray Spex is certainly working for a living. Of course, what comes is indeed a greatest hits set, how could it not be? With such a small but time-honored output, that's all the band has to work with.

Whether the catalogue that the band has to choose from is lean or not though, it doesn't take away from the performance nor does it feel at all contrived. The incendiary tone of the show is set with the unhinged pummel-and-drag of "Oh Bondage..." and the audience buys it hook, line and sinker so the band steps the energy up still further with definitive performances of "Art-I-Ficial," "Obsessed With You" and "Warrior In Woolworth" that all find the band's careful balance of calamity and camp as precarious and perfect as ever; guitarist Jak Airport's slash and burn tactics scorch eardrums twenty times over (but particularly in "I Am A Cliche" and "Identity") and returning saxophonist Laura Logic injects her lines with a (slightly) more melodic sense that, in this case, packs a far greater wallop - particularly when Styrene and Logic echo each other's lines.

As the set progresses and the presentation of the songs gets progressively more self-assured

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