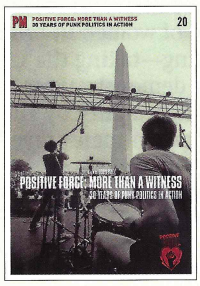
Positive Force: More Than a Witness ★★★

(2014) 69 min. DVD: $19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Back in the mid-1980s, a bunch of young musicians from the punk rock scene in Washington, D.C., decided to channel their frustrations about society and government—typically aired in loud, brash songs and raucous performances—into concrete action on behalf of the disenfranchised and vulnerable in America. Thus was born Positive Force, a social action coalition of regional bands who wanted to make a difference. This interesting documentary tells their story, now 30 years old and still going strong. While its graying founders remain committed to original principles, the organization's energy is constantly replenished by newcomers to the D.C. music scene. The most interesting parts of director Robin Bell's film look back on the founding of Positive Force in 1985, followed by the extraordinary decision of its loose-knit membership to buy a house and convert it into a headquarters (which still exists). The originators recall idealistic meetings with free agendas in which musicians hammered out priorities and rallied around plans for fundraisers and street demonstrations addressing the issues of homelessness, hunger, income inequality, Reagan-era politics, and much else. Combining archival concert footage featuring bands including Bikini Kill, Fugazi, and Anti-Flag, with interviews of Dave Grohl and others who discuss their history with the collective, this should appeal to punk fans and socially conscious viewers. Extras include bonus live performances and archival documentary shorts. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (*T. Keogh*)

Surviving Earth ★★★

(2014) 95 min. DVD: $39: public libraries; $195: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

In an interesting meta-note, Australian filmmaker Peter Charles Downey here goes on a Yarra Valley radio show during Suicide Prevention Month to discuss this eco-alert documentary, which he positions as a call to the human race to not commit mass self-destruction. Along the way, Downey serves up a litany of woes: human population is ballooning out of control; growth-at-any-cost capitalism is creating wealth inequity, stress, and mental illness; fossil fuels are running out (here, a radio caller scolds Downey for driving a car; he pleads guilty); and species are going extinct while rainforests are being eradicated at a rate never before seen. And, of course, there's global warming. While all of these issues have been widely addressed before, Downey offers a solid comprehensive overview in a film that combines imaginative graphics and visuals with invigorating interviews of, among others, author Paul Ehrlich and Bindi (daughter of Steve) Irwin. Aud: C, P. (*C. Cassady*)

Take Back Your Power: Investigating the Smart Grid ★★

(2014) 88 min. DVD: $24.95 ($199 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River.

Director Josh del Sol clearly thinks that "smart" power company meters are a really dumb idea—causing, he says, home fires and radiation overdoses, not to mention a massive violation of homeowner privacy, since it allows for two-way transmission of data into a larger smart grid. This documentary claims that a "corporatocracy" is behind a "soft tyranny" surveillance, using tactics pushed by both big government and business. At first, *Take Back Your Power* seems to be on solid ground, noting that consumers are unable to opt out, while also showing allegedly untrained power company employees engaging in break and enter operations to install home power meters. In addition, the film makes persuasive claims that the meters are inaccurate, violate the constitutional protections of the Fourth Amendment against unlawful search and seizure, and are subject to cyber attacks. Unfortunately, as the documentary progresses, credibility is undermined by references to a "controlling elite," "controlled freakery," and the Nuremberg trials, as well as overheated remarks ("I feel I've been raped"), the usual unsubstantiated supporting claims of "vast amounts of published science," and the *de rigueur* ominous music. Extras include bonus footage, as well as instructions on how to disable and dismantle a smart meter (note: doing it wrong could result in electrocution). Treating a potentially important subject with overkill and bombast, this is not recommended. Aud: P. (*S. Rees*)

Ukraine Is Not a Brothel ★★★

(2013) 78 min. In Ukrainian & Russian w/English subtitles. DVD: $300. DRA. Film Platform (avail. from www.filmplatform.net). PPR.

Ukraine's feminist movement is the subject of Kitty Green's critical, yet sympathetic documentary about Femen, an organization formed in the wake of Ukrainian independence from the Soviet Union that aims to shed light on the hardships faced by Ukrainian women. Over the ensuing years, many women left the country to work as prostitutes in the West, while today many foreigners also visit the Ukraine to frequent its brothels. Femen focuses on sex workers who have been the victims of human trafficking, but their methodology is questionable at best (Femen member Yana, for instance, is an exotic dancer, but doesn't feel that she has other options). They also take orders from a man named Victor, who proclaims, "These girls are weak." Femen's signature act of civil disobedience is the topless protest, which naturally attracts attention, although not necessarily for the intended reasons. At these events, male photographers take pictures, male observers hurl insults ("Whores! Prostitutes!"), and male police officers haul the women away. But it's hard to tell if the women they seek to liberate actually appreciate their actions. According to Femen member Inna, "Nobody in this country wants to listen to women, but everyone wants to see beautiful, sexy women." They also sell t-shirts, mugs, and bags, and receive charitable donations—mostly from men, such as a Turkish lingerie manufacturer, who welcomes the publicity. Inna even refers to their followers as fans rather than supporters. A woman named Irina agrees with Femen's aims, but she left the group because she doesn't believe nudity is necessary. Femen's next goal is to take over the leadership from Victor. Once they do that, it may be easier to take them more seriously. An interesting profile of an unconventional feminist group, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (*K. Fennessy*)

TEEN ISSUES

Moment to Moment: Teens Growing Up with FASDs ★★★1/2

(2015) 56 min. DVD: $24.99 ($200 w/PPR). NTI Upstream. ISBN: 978-09707762-4-2.

Filmmaker Gabe Chasnoff's illuminating documentary aims to update public awareness about the consequences of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. While many have long known about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, a wider Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) exists with a broad range of impacts on unborn children from drinking. *Moment to Moment* defines these different problems, some of which are less extreme, but also capable of presenting issues as a child grows older. Underlying all of the points on the spectrum are cognitive challenges resulting from underdevelopment of the brain. An inability to process information so as to make reasonable and safe judgments is a common symptom, but degrees vary. One child might commit an assault while another will send nude photos of herself via cell phone because someone asked her to do so. One