

On Screen

Films & DVDs



Ian MacKaye, 1983

Salad Days: A Decade Of Punk In Washington DC 1980–1990

Scott Crawford & Jim Saah (Directors)

New Rose DVD 2015, 90 mins

This feature length documentary sets out to chronicle a scene but can't decide whether to serve as an entry level introduction or insider document, so factoids for obsessives jar continually with overly familiar stories.

Salad Days is unsurprisingly a deeply Dischord-centric film, beginning, middling and ending with stories from Ian MacKaye's longstanding label that, while a useful primer for the uninitiated, will already be known to anyone with a vague enthusiasm for the subject. The section dealing with cult hardcore group Void is a highlight, of interest to both existing fans and anyone with an ear for the genuinely unhinged, unearthing some great footage of their

deranged noise. The film shows clearly through both unpublished photos from the archive of co-director Jim Saah and sections of well-curated live footage how community spaces, veterans' clubs and church halls were the crucibles where American hardcore truly took shape, giving form to a genre in which location mattered as much as sound.

Despite hardcore's cock forest terrain, we do hear from some women, including the members of all female proto-emo band Fire Party, photographer Cynthia Connolly, and writer and musician Sharon Cheslow, although the lack of any mention of Chalk Circle (the all-female Minor Threat contemporaries for whom she played guitar) is a particularly glaring lost opportunity to uncover some new ground. It's a shame that the chance to highlight female participation loses out in favour of the lazier punk doc school of vox poppery where women's voices

are edited only to opine about sexism, thus underscoring rather than disrupting their marginalisation. By contrast, the film lacks any discussion on racial politics within the scene, but does feature a notably wide range of ethnicities. Given that this seems to challenge the consensus on punk's historical and contemporary whiteness, it's a strange thing to gloss over. Similarly, No Trend, a group from this era that baited often conservative hardcore audiences with their confrontational shows, feature in the film only via uncredited, incidental riffs soundtracking some urban footage. While No Trend's sound would quickly transcend anything that could be called punk, given that a slew of marginal DC rock also-rans do feature, theirs is an unfortunate exclusion that misses a chance to show what the city's scene was harbouring beyond the realms of Dischord.

While it wouldn't be a punk documentary if it rolled its closing credits without shoehorning in a connection to Nirvana, ending the film with a platitude so outrageously asinine that it could only have come from the mammoth mouth of Dave Grohl is still an insult to some of the genuinely affecting and challenging groups (Beefeater, Marginal Man, Rites Of Spring, among others) featured earlier.

Producer, writer and co-director Scott Crawford appears rather a lot as a talking head in the film, reminiscing about the Washington DC gigs he attended as a teen. But *Salad Days'* incongruous iTunes-style HD graphics and apparent wariness to delve very deep into personal stories other than Crawford's own ultimately fail to elevate the film much above standard Kickstarter-funded nostalgia fayre. Bryony Beynon

The Ex And So Say All Of Us

Ex Records/Practice Tapes DVD 2015, 87 mins

Given their formidable live reputation, it's perhaps no surprise that The Ex have a handful of concert films and documentaries to their name. That each one offers something different is testament to the Dutch outfit's quality control and openness. In comparison to the Bush-era reportage of Jem Cohen's *Building A Broken Mousetrap* (2007) or the backstage informality of *The Convoy Tour* (2009), *And So Say All Of Us* is a relatively straightforward concert film, deftly editing highlights from a 2012 residency at London's Cafe Oto into a tremendously exciting 90 minute set. Shooting on handheld cameras and cutting in time to the music, Seán Zissou and Dave Knox of Dublin's Practice Tapes collective

artfully capture the energy of The Ex live experience.

The culmination of a series of concerts celebrating the group's 33 1/3 anniversary, the Oto run saw The Ex joined by guests including the free jazz horns of Brass Unbound (Mats Gustafsson, Roy Paci, Ken Vandermark and Wolter Wierbos) and a duo of Ethiopian dancers, with comedian Stewart Lee acting as a suitably awkward master of ceremonies. Despite the occasion, *And So Say All Of Us* is no underground *Last Waltz*; it's very much a celebration of where the group are at now.

With his spiky guitar style and sardonic commentaries on consumerism, Arnold de Boer has undoubtedly helped revitalise The Ex after the departure of founding member and vocalist GW Sok, but of equal importance has been their ongoing interest in free improvisation and African music.

The confluence of these influences on "Addis Hum" and their version of Ethiopian saxophonist Getatchew Mekuria's "Lale Guma" is electrifying, as the horns alternate between tight riffs and free blowing over scratchy guitars and Katherina Bornefeld's rolling grooves. Playing polyrhythms over an insistent kick drum pulse, Bornefeld's style is closer to that of Tony Allen or Jaki Liebezit than a conventional rock drummer, opening up space in which the guitars and horns can clang and squall. The Necks' Tony Buck joins her on several numbers, gleefully thrashing at a cymbal during an ecstatic "Theme From Konono No 2".

In a mark of The Ex's generous collectivism, two sequences are given over to guests and collaborations. There's Mats Gustafsson, fighting his way out of a tar pit on baritone sax, while Andy Moor and Terrie Hessels gouge fistfuls of barbed wire from

their guitars. There's an intriguing piano and trombone exchange between Steve Beresford and trombonist Wolter Wierbos, with the former picking out delicate Satie-like impressions while the latter huffs, slobbers and slurps like a contented hippo. Then there's a remarkable clarinet trio of Ken Vandermark, Ab Baars and Xavier Charles, which goes from Stravinskian ritual to Gershwin's New York, before taking flight in a chorus of birdsong. Moor's collaboration with Anne-James Chaton is particularly compelling, the brittle guitars and pounding beats building tension behind Chaton's deadpan French poetry.

The Ex remain a vital force, for whom the DIY punk spirit embodies not only freedom from corporate structures, but the freedom to experiment. *And So Say All Of Us* is an inspirational guide to their world. Stewart Smith