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» **16 Days In China**
(Invisible Records 2008)

★ buy it!

In just over the hour it takes to watch "16 Days In China," you get unprecedented footage of British musician and producer Martin Atkins playing drums, eyeing Chinese bands and blowing his top. In fact, there should probably be an accompanying drinking game: take a shot every time Atkins loses his cool. Or just hook an IV up, it will be kinder on your wrists. But experience with Public Image Ltd., Pigface, Nine Inch Nails and others under his belt, Atkins obviously could care less.



Rapid fire, cartoony and loosely woven together, "16 Days In China" can be hard to follow. The documentary leaves out key details, such as a clear definition of the plot. Long story short- Atkins and an assistant he hired off MySpace take to Beijing in late 2006 with two tasks: sign bands to his record label and record Atkins' dub experiment album. The latter gets less screen time but a scene of a Chinese DJ mashing Atkins' drumming with traditional Chinese and Tibetan sounds and instruments is fascinating.

The main focus is, in fact, on the bands that make up the Beijing underground, specifically playing at a club called D-22. Embodying the spirit of the now gone CBGB's, as Atkins states, D-22 plays home to creative and unique Chinese bands. Performances with bands like Subs, Tookoo, Carsick Cars, PK-14 and others show that this scene isn't just punk, indie or artsy; there seems to be a band for every musical taste.

Here and there between segments, Atkins makes some heavy-handed references to politics, such as the Chinese government preempting a CNN report on a shooting in Tibet. Other times he insults the audience's intelligence for not realizing a quick clip they set up as the border crossing is actually a tollbooth (why we'd assume it's a border crossing when he's flying directly to Beijing is unclear). Not to mention with the Cultural Revolution artwork displayed so prominently as the cover art and discussed during the film, it was disappointing the film didn't include the opinions of the bands on how they're affected by their country's politics and culture.

"16 Days In China" is the perfect foot in the door giving you glimpses at a talented music scene you otherwise might be unaware of. Luckily the film drops enough names to provide a nice jumping off point.

B

★ buy it!

-Corinne

16 Days In China

Official Website

DVD Reviews

16 Days In China

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