



Punk's Not Dead

(Documentary)

An Aberration Films and Red Rover Films production. (International Sales: Vision Music, Los Angeles). Produced by Susan Dynner, Todd Traina. Executive producers, Markus Kaeppli, Panos Nicolaou. Co-producer, Patrick Nelson Barnes. Directed by Susan Dynner.

With: Henry Rollins, Charlie Harper, Wattie Buchen, Dick Lucas, Jello Biafra, John Doe, Captain Sensible.

By RICHARD KUIPERS

Veterans and new punks on the block put up a highly entertaining case to prove "Punk's Not Dead." Pacy, broad-based overview of the punk rock scene from 1977 to present packages a who's who of luminaries and rare performance clips into a vibrant proof-of-life statement underpinned by keen analysis of sociopolitical issues driving this abrasive musical form. World-premiered as a work in progress at SilverDocs, pic has already snagged theatrical distribution in Japan and Scandinavia. Further niche sales and a bountiful ancillary life look likely.

For this entry in the burgeoning field of punk-related docus, rock photographer-turned helmer Susan Dynner astutely skims over superstar outfits Sex Pistols, the Clash and the Ramones, whose stories have been extensively detailed elsewhere.

Refreshing emphasis is placed on punk's shifting from the underground American No Wave movement of the early '80s to grunge-punk's commercial breakthrough in the '90s and contempo pop-punksters eyeing major recording deals.

To remind audiences of the hysteria surrounding punk's arrival, docu blasts off with hilarious premonitions of doom from '70s TV talkshow "Donahue" ("This is different from Elvis.") and medical drama "Quincy" ("That music I heard was a killer."). Checkerboarding dire warnings with droll recollections of godfather figures Henry Rollins (Black Flag) and Jello Biafra (Dead Kennedys), the excellent first 20 minutes claims even President Jimmy Carter plugged into the hoopla by offering tax breaks to record companies that keep subversive soundmakers off the books.

Neatly ducking in and out of its musical history lesson, the pic gets down to the nitty gritty of how punk is practiced and preached today. Strongest ammunition against oft-written epitaphs of music founded by youthful disdain for authority and hype is fired most eloquently, and ironically, by oldsters still punking 30 years down the track.

Seen playing with their kids before tearing it up onstage, the fifty-something members of Subhumans, the Exploited, U.K. Subs and the Adicts emerge as inspirational and even respectable defenders of the punk sociopolitical faith. It's not all serious, though, with the Damned's Captain Sensible mooning the camera.

Forward-looking and valuable as a social-history document, docu streams in the thoughts of young fans and musicians operating in an environment where chain stores now sell pre-torn clothing, and so-called punk rock touring acts are feted by corporate sponsors.

With more than 50 talking heads and dozens of clips, the giddy mix is edited with rough-and-ready yet directly connective flourishes befitting the punk ethos. Copy viewed was a pre-final audio mix and picture grade, with nothing unfixable on show.

Camera (color/B&W, multiformat-to-Digital Beta), Dynner, Markus Kaeppli, Emma Pantall; editor, Patrick Nelson Barnes. Reviewed on DVD, Sydney, June 16, 2006. (In SilverDocs Film Festival, Silver Spring, Md.) Running time: 105 MIN.