

PURE
PUNK!

by Scalpel Webster

For punk lovers, Toronto's
first-ever "punk sinema"
package was a blockbuster —
a gutsee triboot to the
reel thing that paved
the way for the noo wave
Cumin

"I mean, look at those people down there, man. They're walking this way and they're walking that way — they don't know where they're going anymore, they don't have any guidance... 'course, this punk rock thing is just a tip of the old iceberg — mate!" Dialogue from punk film — *Ziggy*.

The punk movement in Britain was originally spawned (skeptics might hazard, vomited up) in a climate of spiralling social dissent and despair. Urban blight and deprivation mirrored a democracy gone wrong, where everything was in a mess. Punk became an anthem, a battle-cry for those angry enough to contest the squalor of their lives and attempt, through music — punk rock music — to vent their frustrations at the status quo.

Replacing the old complacency there emerged (as Woodstock had ten years earlier) a radical return to pop culture. Punk rock suddenly became a barbed activist that angrily voiced the social ills of the nation and its people: for unless they escaped from the complacent disco "flash and trash" mentality of the 1970's, everyone was doomed to abysmal ruin.

Out of this "renaissance" a school of filmmakers also emerged. Their intent was to orchestrate their individual styles with the essence of the movement.

Such was the scene in Canada when Reg Hartt, owner of Toronto's Cineforum, first became aware of "underground" punk films.

"I was approached," says Hartt, "by Toronto filmmaker, Colin Brunton, who showed me his film (*The Last Pogo*) and asked if it could be screened at Cineforum. I wanted to say yes, because I loved the film, but unfortunately, because of its length, (25 minutes) it was prohibitive. Faced with this dilemma, we bandied about the idea of 'Well, it might be impossible to show just one punk film, but what if we came up with a series of them?' Which is exactly what we did — and voila! Toronto's first Punk Cinema Package was born."

The "package" roared into Cineforum's diminutive auditorium on Mercer street in the spring of this year where it played to capacity houses for one month. It garnered praise from music and cinema patrons alike, who commented on the films' overall lack of pretense and hype. "It's as if," commented Hartt, "these films broach the gap between eclecticism and style." Fairly lofty credentials for a type of cinema which could just have easily been penned — because of the miniscule monies available — "The Cinema of Poverty."



Scalpel Webster is a free-lance writer in Toronto who is currently involved in the writing of a New Wave comedy show.

Proud to be Punk!

Cinema Canada/27

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The program kicked off with Colin Brunton's **The Last Pogo**, a 16mm documentary that chronicles an array of original Toronto punk bands, assembled together for a farewell concert at the Horseshoe Tavern (then a bastion of punk) in December '78. The film's concert footage gives the impression that the bar was a cross between a boozecan and a riot. Everyone went crazy (or so it would seem) with a total disregard for physical, let alone mental, well-being. The bands (and the audience) performed with wild abandon, making the concert footage both memorable and colorful. Interspersed with the music are snippets of animated conversations with real punks, pseudo punks, promoters and anyone else who lucked into getting their boat-race (face) in front of the camera — all of them commenting on what they think punk is (and isn't) all about. Finally, **The Last Pogo** succeeded in capturing that extremely tenuous quality of spirit, which was to eventually lay the foundation of today's "new wave".

Following **The Last Pogo** was Suzanne Naughton's **Mondo Punk**. "With **Mondo Punk**," declared Naughton, "I tried to capture that impossible-to-explain violence, frustration and subsequent anarchy in a film. It is everything most people never wanted to see about punk, 340 shots in six minutes, cut to

four, edited, classic music selections including Beethoven's 9th Symphony "Song of Joy", Ramone's "Blitzkrieg Bob", Sex Pistols "Anarchy in the U.K." and "God Save the Queen." Taking all of my elements which included photographs from magazines and record covers, party and live studio footage, pixillation, etc., I went onto an animation stand along with the actual 16mm workprint — some of which I rephotographed frame for frame (7 or 9 frames to one) — to optically slow the action down. I deliberately mixed negative and positive stocks, black-and-white and color film, (filmed off xerox 35mm contact sheets) color-filtered, black-and-white, monochromed color film to give the film a raw aggravating edge."

Although the film has received kudos practically everywhere that it has been screened (including the British Film Institute, where it opened as part of the feature "Punk in London" 1978 rock film retrospective) there have been some dissenters, including one of the judges at a Canadian Student Film Festival who felt that the film was as "objectionable and degenerate as the phenomenon it was studying!"

To sum up the motivation behind punk and all it angrily and, after a fashion, naively proclaimed, is at best difficult. Nonetheless, **Ziggy**, a 30-minute black-and-white film made by Bill

Kucheran and Bruce Pirrie, attempted to tackle these questions using a novel and at times quite brilliant approach. A satire, it chronicles the life of a recently graduated university student intent on securing a niche in showbiz. He is "befriended" by a somewhat shady talent agent who, after trying to set him up as a ventriloquist, decides instead to "create" a new persona for him — "Johnny Forklift," punk rock 'n' roll star. Forklift's fame is undermined when, due to his rise in popularity, the Federal Government tries to cajole him into working for them — as an ambassador of "worker rock." Rock for the people.

Director Bill Kucheran commented "I wanted the film to have an element of cynicism that was reflective of our culture — a Canadian equivalent of what was happening in England." Kucheran and Pirrie both agreed that at the time the picture was being made (it was begun at York University in '78) they were both influenced by German film director Werner Fassbinder and his ability to make, despite his incorporation of powerful foreign pop influences, an unabashedly German film.

Special mention should also be made of actors Pirrie and Cresswell for their realistic portrayal of the film's principal characters. "Those guys are hot!" remarked New York Production Manager,

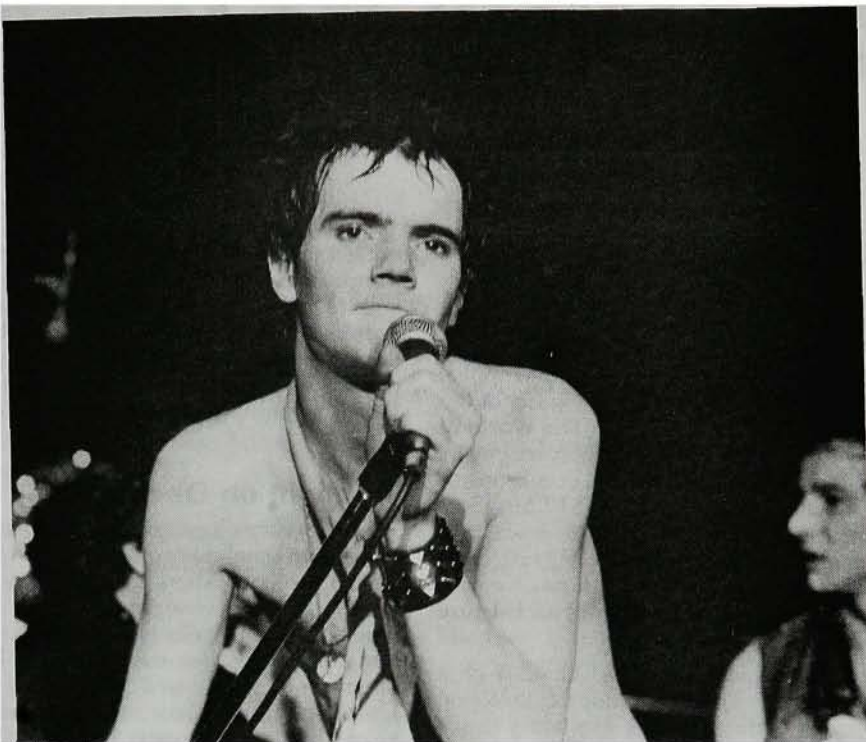


Deborah "Rosie" Ross, after seeing the film: adding, "Tell those Canadians to nurture those guys, 'cause if they don't we'll snap 'em up in a second and it'll be their loss!"

In view of the enthusiastic response this punk film package received, it was ironic that none of the critics of the city's three major newspapers bothered to attend, though all had received invitations. Invariably, one must speculate as to who are the true harbingers of popular culture in Canada. The irony becomes more pointed when one considers that these same critics now cram their respective dailies with postpunk articles and the "new awareness."

As a retrospective on a movement Reg Hart's Punk Sinema was important because it gave audiences an insight, a visceral sense that something new, well perhaps not new, but at least different, was happening on the pop scene.

As to why these filmmakers chose to make these films in the first place, one might be hard pressed to come up with an overall definitive answer: save perhaps, that like all movements, theirs was spawned out of frustration, and sustained by an allegiance to a kindred spirit.



"Nazi Dog and the Viletones" says it all!



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