

PRODUCED BY RAY MANZAREK



Originally released April 1980



Originally released May 1981



Originally released July 1982



Originally released September 1983

Porterhouse
PRIME VINYL

THE MASTERPIECE COLLECTION



Frank Chagnon

DJ

I find it ironic that X is known as an archetypical Los Angeles band because we were considered an odd-ball band. That's the reason I was attracted to the band, because they were less punk, or less willing to be defined or categorized as only punk. There was more room to stretch, more possibilities for musical growth. The first 4 albums were recorded during a 5 year period when the 4 of us were focused almost exclusively on writing, rehearsing, recording and touring. I think we created a great body of work in that period. The songs still hold up.

Ray's greatest attribute was to let us be who we were, to support us and just let us play. He knew a good thing when he saw it and he wasn't going to do that producer manipulation that happens or break everything down. He attempted to get us a deal originally, sending introductory notes to all the labels but they rejected us at the time.

Exene

It was like being on a big boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with all the wildest people you could ever hope to meet. Some days were balmy and breezy and sunny, some nights were so stormy I almost got swept overboard. I couldn't see land and I had no compass, so I never knew if I was headed to a tropical island or San Pedro. It didn't matter, anywhere was exciting and new. Then my bed would stop spinning, and I'd wake up in Hollywood or Mount Washington, or Minneapolis or Austin. Quite a few of my fellow passengers did not survive those trips, and were buried at sea. Some rowed away in lifeboats, some swam towards Alcatraz. I tried to warn them they were swimming in the wrong direction, but they were rebels. pirates. high divers. captains. shipmates. We were all shipmates back then. We didn't think about the future, we just sailed towards the horizon.

John

Nathanael West. Jean Harlow. Charles Bukowski. Gary Cooper. Taxi Driver. Sullivan's Travels. Patti Smith. The Heartbreakers.

These people and movies are why I moved to L.A.

In 1975, the Hollywood sign had a missing tooth as the second "O" laid, collapsed on the ground. Decay was everywhere & we felt it was our duty to report the damage from the front lines.

We couldn't believe that a bona fide rockstar like Ray Manzarek would work with us. We didn't believe that any major label would want to sign us nor did we want to sign with them. Slash gave us 10 grand to record the first record & 20 for the second. That seemed like a lot of money at the time.

Billy

I thought the Ramones were going to be the new Beatles and I thought that well, we could be the next Animals or something and have two... three hits and then I wanted to go into producing cause that's what I always wanted to do.

I got more and more frustrated because we never had a hit. It seemed like we had everything thing in place we were supposed to have. I thought for a long time that eventually it was going to happen.



Debbie Leavitt



Diana Bonebrake



David Arnold

Power... Passion... Poetry!

Attack the world. Let's do some damage.

What a band. Four monsters of skin. My favorite rockers of the then time. John Doe - Mr. Handsome - of the deep rich voice, the hard, strong jaw, the angular bass stance and the hot/cool lyrics. Their harmonies - some would say Schoenberg - his partner Exene, of the wailing scream in the night, the clear eyed pinning of American failings, the fine words of love and booze and madness in the midnight dawn of Los Angeles.

"Johnny Hit and Run Paulene..." and he's got a sterilized hypo filled with a sex-machine drug, and he only has 24 hours to shoot all Paulenes between the legs. So get busy, boy. And he does. Listen to those words! That naughty, naughty Johny. I love 'em. And Exene's "The World's a Mess, it's in My Kiss." I just love that crazy combination: World - Mess - Kiss. And Billy Zoom on guitar, or is that at least 3 or 4 guitars. How does he do it? It's so massive, so sharp, so bright, so fucking LOUD!!! And he is so silver smooth and cool. Effortless fingering, impeccable on the frets. Doesn't he ever make a mistake? Is he a flesh and blood Valhalla guitar god? Yeahhhh! And who is that madman beating the living shit out those drums? Ladies and Gentleman... D. J. Bonebrake. Always driving the band, pushing the whole thing forward at some furious clip like a cocaine train out of control but locked in to his internal metronome that keeps perfect time, perfect pulse. I love his power and that big marching snare that cracks like a rifle shot every 2nd and 4th beat. Wow! X - the band.

I first saw them at the Whiskey a Go Go on the Sunset Strip in the City of Angles. The City of Night. At the very place the Doors - my band - got their start. Dorothy and I had gone to see a swell double bill with a neo rock-a-billy band called the Rockcats and opening for them was a band I had knowledge of only through their lyrics which I had read in the LA Reader in an article by Chris Morris entitled "Sounds Like Murder." Chris talked about the exploding punk rock scene in LA and included lyrics of tunes by 4 or 5 punk bands to illustrate his thesis of mayhem. And who's lyrics are in the article but X!!! And it's "Johnny Hit and Run Paulene." Holy shit ... I loved those crazy sex and death words!

I had to see them and a few weeks later they were at the Whiskey. Well, they destroyed me. So tight and fast and wild and twelve tone row like harmonies pouring off the stage that I had sat upon behind my Vox Continental organ and Fender Rhodes keyboard bass a decade or so before. It was like being home again. But twice as fast. God, they could play fast. And they even played the Doors' "Soul Kitchen"... of course at a thousand miles per hour. I didn't even recognize it. Dorothy said to me, "Do you know what they're playing? It was maybe the 5th or 6th song of their set. I was buzzed out. Overwhelmed. In aural shock. "Honey, I have no idea what any of these songs are," I said. "Well, listen close, you'll recognize it." And I put my ear brain to it and lo and behold it's "Soul Kitchen." Holy shit, again!! The set ended in flaming heat and we ran back to the dressing room, completely forgetting the Rockcats. I introduced myself. Said I'd love to produce you guys and help you in the studio. Nothing fancy. Just like you are. You play the music, I'll make sure it sounds as powerful as I can make it. It should be a mother-fucker. And it was! They called it "Los Angeles."

- Ray Manzarek



1980

With the early seeds having already been sown with two singles “Adult Books” and “Los Angeles” on L.A. based Dangerhouse Records, X was jelling in a growing music scene that was beginning to find its voice.

At the time no one really knew that the band would end up so completely associated with that era or serve as an artistic catalyst and inspiration for so many who followed in their wake.

Slash Records had already released the Germs (GI) in 1979 and was the obvious label partner to bring the band’s first full length to the world.

Armed with nine solid songs clocking in at just under thirty minutes “Los Angeles” quite simply set the bar so high that the band were catapulted (willing or not) to flag bearer status within the Los Angeles music community.

Word spread fast across the country and the album fared well, selling in excess of 50,000 copies on the indie imprint before later being absorbed into the major label system in a deal that sent most of the Slash catalog to Warner Brothers for manufacturing and distribution.

The album was the first in a set of four albums to be produced for the band by Door’s keyboardist Ray Manzarek. Ray’s touch was gentle enough to allow the rawness of the band’s anger and message to shine through but reining enough to give the L.P. balance and poise.

The result has been written about, discussed, treasured and even worshipped. But it was just the first salvo in a body of work that is recognized as being exceptional, unique and enduring.

Rated #1 Los Angeles Times Critics Poll. (1980)

Rated #16 on the Village Voice Critics Poll. (1980)

Rated #24 on Rolling Stone’s list of Top 100 Albums of the 1980’s. (1989)

Rated #287 on Rolling Stone’s list of top 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. (2003)

Billy

Los Angeles is all about Rick Perrotta, He had bought the old Radio Records building in Hollywood and put a brand new Harrison console in it. Rick called me and said “I hear you’re going to make an album for Slash” I said “Ya” But I told him “look they are only going to give us \$10,000.00 to do it” and he said “I don’t care, I want to engineer it. Just give me whatever they give you and I’ll give you as much time as it takes to finish the album, don’t worry about it.” Slash never came by... they were thrilled that they got records for that kind of money.

It took a couple hundred hours, even though we were doing everything live. We overdubbed the vocals and the solos. It was all Rick that made that album happen.

It took ten days to sell the first 20,000 copies of Los Angeles and then there weren’t anymore. We went on tour and had in-stores at every town we went to, and every time the van door opened there was someone saying “you got records? ...we don’t have any records!” Nobody could get it!

Exene

12 years old in rural Illinois listening to “Light My Fire” by The Doors on the car radio. It’s the first time I’ve heard the ‘long version,’ and I am forever transformed. Walking along the Venice boardwalk in 1976. It’s winter, foggy, getting dark, and totally deserted. A bar jukebox is playing “Strange Days.” I don’t have money to go in, so I stand in the doorway until the song ends. Ray Manzarek is what I remember most. He is a master magical ancestor, alchemical deliverer of people, art, music, events. I was so wild back then, first time recording an album, scared, difficult, but also triumphant, awed, thankful, honored. A dream that I had, actually came true!

John

Los Angeles took 10 days to record & less than a week to mix. I don’t recall why we picked the songs we did, but left several that we’d already written for the second record. As I recall, Ray deserves much credit for choosing those songs. Musically & lyrically they told a story that we had seen played out at the Masque or on Hollywood Blvd. There were sterilized hypos, dirty invitations, clocks on Hollywood Blvd., smooth chords on the car radios, head’s with a crack like a bank. We meant to prove to the rest of the punk rock world that Farah Fawcett wasn’t the only sex symbol in Los Angeles.

DJ

We had momentum. By the time we recorded Los Angeles we had played two or three years of shows. We had some critical acclaim, we had resolve, and we were determined despite being turned down by major labels. And we had Ray Manzarek confirming that our music meant something. We were just anxious and excited to record... like kids and we had no expectations. In some ways it was easy we just went into the studio and played what we did.



David Amoff



Dobbie Leavitt

Side 1

Your Phones Off the Hook, But You’re Not
Johnny Hit and Run Paulene
Soul Kitchen
Nausea
Sugarlight

Side 2

Los Angeles
Sex and Dying in High Society
The Unheard Music
The World’s a Mess It’s in My Kiss

Art: J Ruby Prods. Inc
Photos: Frank Gargani

Engineers: Rick Perrotta, Norm Graichen

Recorded: January 1980
Golden Sound Studios, Hollywood, CA.

Slash 104
PHR-2010



1981

“Wild Gift” is the not so distant cousin of

“Los Angeles”. The two records have a

symbiotic relationship and in fact, the album

might even be considered an extension of

“Los Angeles.”

Filled with the same brooding darkness of it’s predecessor, “Wild Gift” expanded on the band’s debut while closely guarding its spirit. The track count jumped to a lucky thirteen (no mistake) and there were mid tempo numbers like “Universal Corner” and “White Girl” that showcased the band’s secret weapon... tension.

Certainly the fact that the record was recorded and released within 13 months of “Los Angeles” gives it a kindred spirit but “Wild Gift” also expands on it’s themes in dramatic and aggressive style.

The record still sounds self assured to this very day, as if armed with the confidence of the initial success and recognition X had received as a young band. But it never sounds cocky or takes anything for granted. The themes are gritty but poetic, complicated yet visceral.

In 1981 things were changing quickly in popular music as well as in American politics. Hardcore as a musical genre was breaking off from what was considered “punk rock”. The sound of ‘77 was evaporating, shows were becoming violent and the art of punk was about to be thrown aside. There would be no opportunity to go back and recapture what was fast slipping away.

In so many ways “Wild Gift” is one of the last signposts before that turn.

Voted #1 New York Times Critics Poll. (1981)

Voted #1 Los Angeles Times Critics Poll. (1981)

Voted #333 on Rolling Stone’s list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.

Voted #2 Village Voice Album of the Year. (1981)

Reached #165 on the Billboard Top 200 Chart. (1981)

Side 1

The Once Over Twice
We’re Desperate
Adult Books
Universal Corner
I’m Coming Over
It’s Who You Know

Side 2

In This House That I Call Home
Some Other Time
White Girl
Beyond and Back
Back 2 the Base
When Our Love Passed Out On the Couch
Year 1

Cover Art: Exene, John & Frank Gargani
Photos: Frank Gargani and Chris D.

Engineer: Clay Rose
Assistant Engineer: Carl Hogan

Recorded: March 1981
Clover Records, Hollywood, CA.

“White Girl” Recorded at :
Golden Sound Studios, Hollywood CA.

Slash 107
PHR-2006

DJ

Wild Gift was a continuation of the first album in that we had so many more songs that we were playing live and we wanted to release. There was a little more expectation and we were under some pressure but it wasn’t that great because we weren’t that big. However, by ‘81 we were headlining the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles and the major record companies took notice.

John

Wild Gift were two words on a billboard at the corner of Highland Ave & Franklin advertising Wild Turkey as a great present for Xmas in 1980-81, good title. By now we had grown a little tired of being thought of as drug addicts & Society’s Outcasts. We had more playful songs with humor like “absence make the heart grow

fonder, so I never want to see you again” and “du plenty people go for Tomata?” referencing Tomata from The Screamers. We always looked to early rock ‘n roll for inspiration & now made it more obvious with songs like “Year 1,” “Adult Books,” “Beyond & Back” and “In This House That I Call Home.” I think we spent a whole three weeks recording and mixing this one.

Exene

Many of the songs on Wild Gift were written at the same time as the Los Angeles songs. I was surprised so many people liked Los Angeles, and was much more confident recording. The idea that I wasn’t a total outcast made me happy. At least the other outcasts and I had found each other! This is a happy kind of record, I think, lots of humor. X is really very funny, in that we comment on the bizarre and ridiculous, like “House I Call Home.”

Fayette Hauser



David Arnoff



Billy

Bob Biggs from Slash heard us do “White Girl” live and was convinced if we could just get into the studio and cut it as a single we could have a hit record. Rick and his partner were suing each other so we couldn’t get the studio when we did Wild Gift so we went around to all the studios in Hollywood and they wouldn’t even let us book time because we were a punk band. They’d just tell us “we don’t want you in here... we’re busy... we’re booked.”

This guy Clay Rose who was a friend of a friend came up to me at the Hong Kong and said “Hey Billy, I heard you’re looking to do an album and I just got a job engineering at Clover Records and I can get you in at a pretty low price if you let me engineer.” It was pouring rain the whole time we were there and there was this hum, and it was a hum you couldn’t get out of anything... so that’s in there if you listen closely. It was kinda dreadful... but I like the songs on that album.



Michael Hyatt



David Arnott



Diana Bonebrake



Debbie Leavitt



Steven Harris



Diana Bonebrake



Michael Hyatt



Unknown



Michael Hyatt



Michael Hyatt



Debbie Leavitt



Unknown



Diana Bonebrake



Unknown



Debbie Leavitt



Diana Bonebrake



Debbie Leavitt



David Arnott



David Arnott



Debbie Leavitt



Michael Hyatt



Debbie Leavitt



Michael Hyatt



Debbie Leavitt



Michael Hyatt



Debbie Leavitt



Unknown



Debbie Leavitt



Unknown



Debbie Leavitt



Side 1

The Hungry Wolf
Motel Room in My Bed
Riding With Mary
Come Back to Me
Under the Big Black Sun

Side 2

Because I Do
Blue Spark
Dancing With Tears in My Eyes
Real Child of Hell
How I (Learned My Lesson)
The Have Nots

Cover Illustration: Alfred Harris
Cover Photography: Frank Gargani

Engineer: Clay Rose

Recorded: February 1982
Cherokee Studios, Los Angeles, CA.

Elektra - 80150
PHR-2010

1982

The album “Under the Big Black Sun” has been talked about as a game changer many times in the scope of X’s career. It’s an expansion of the band’s core sound, a heartfelt expression of growing up and a pointed description of what such a transformation entails.

The blinders were now completely off and any pretense of innocence or playfulness was relegated to the past. The band was showing us the world as it appeared to them, callous, vengeful and unforgiving.

The fact that X had now left the confines of the indie label world and had decided to engage with a major label at a time of growing distrust in corporate America had to have an impact as well. There was no turning back... and they themselves knew it.

Hungry Wolf may be the best opening track on any of the band’s records and is so lyrically raw that it made you feel as if you were about to be fed to that snarling animal so eloquently acted out by Billy’s right hand.

As a consistent fan favorite though the years, when “Under the Big Black Sun” is studied in the context of X’s body of work, it clearly has it’s own cadence and demeanor. The closing number “The Have Nots” expresses the loneliness of being human in a strident and almost shocking manner.

No one is the same after listening to this recording.

#2 Los Angeles Times Critics Poll. (1982)

#1 Newsday Best Albums of 1982.

#4 New York Times Best of 1982.

Reached #76 on the Billboard Top 200 Chart.

Billy

We got \$100 grand for signing to Elektra, we got ten grand each and the rest evaporated. I thought the move to Elektra was going to do it... I mean they gave us real budgets, so we made the third record at Cherokee which was a really famous studio with a Trident A Range and a big room.

By the time the third record came around we had used up all our original material and we had to write new songs. John and Exene were scribbling notes on tour and came back with a bunch of ideas but we have didn’t long to turn them into songs. I think they gave us 60 grand to make the record and we went over.

There are some tracks on Under the Big Black Sun that I really like. “Come Back To Me” is kinda cool, the saxes were a little syrupy, with Ray pushing me in that direction, but I went, so...

We used to make jokes about Elektra that no one would ever come by the studio or anything. They absolutely left us totally alone, they never suggested anything.



Pat Snyder



Exene

I didn’t really want to make this record. I didn’t want to write the songs. John kinda moved it all along. I wrote the words for “Please Come Back to Me” in Cleveland, just like in the song, on a typewriter in the office of Pirate’s Cove, the club we were playing. It’s sad, but X just kept going. I just kept going. We all do, right? Many people have told us how this record has been a consolation when they have lost family and friends. That is a good reason for making a record and I’m glad now we did.

DJ

Because we were concerned that our record company might pressure us to change our sound, we wrote into our contract that Ray would produce and that we would have full artistic control. I think we felt the heat from fans that were calling us “sell-outs” for going to a big company. There was definitely that going on, it was a real thing.

We felt that we were going to do an album that wouldn’t be affected by striving for commercial success. There was pressure to be ourselves and not change but the result was a recording with some creative leaps.

John

Back in the spring of 1980 everything changed for Exene when her sister Mirelle died tragically in a car crash. It took three years until Under The Big Black Sun finally dealt with those events. Exene & I were so in-sync by then we wrote songs for each other. She wrote “The Have Nots” for me & I wrote “Come Back to Me” and “Riding With Mary” for her. The title track was a swirling account of our lives in X at that point set to the Bo Diddley beat. Elektra was paying for recording so we moved uptown & spent a couple more weeks getting better performances & mixes. People couldn’t believe that DJ played marimba, Billy played sax and it was still a punk rock record.



Side 1

The New World
We're Having Much More Fun
True Love
Poor Girl
Make the Music Go Bang
Breathless
I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts

Side 2

Devil Doll
Painting the Town Blue
Hot House
Drunk in My Past
I See Red
True Love Pt. #2

Front Cover: Exene Cervenka
Back Cover: Norm Ung
Photos: Raymond Bridges, Rick Schmidlin

Engineer: Clay Rose
Assistant Engineer: Brian Scheuble

Mixed By: Clay Rose, Ray Manzarek, and Brad Gilderman

Recorded: June 1983
Cherokee Studios, Hollywood, CA.

Electra - 60283
PHR-2008

1983

“More Fun in the New World” was the fourth and final X album to be produced by Ray Manzarek and it acts as the perfect book end to the relationship that nurtured this body of work.

At times raucous and at times elegant “More Fun” saw X in a more comfortable and celebratory mood. Perhaps as if to say, “We’ve somehow made it this far and we’re going to stop and give ourselves a pat on the back!”

The band pushed the record hard and there were television performances, heavy tour schedules and plenty of press. Their rendition of “Breathless” appeared in a major motion picture. The single “Hot House” was being pushed at radio. X had completed the transformation from punk rock poets and troubadours to hard working musicians and it showed.

Polished and confident “More Fun” embraces folk, funk, blues, Americana and rockabilly. All the while with the poise and grace that X is revered for.

After “More Fun” had been worked through it’s lifecycle, the band stopped to catch it’s breath and consider the next move. There were big changes coming and some of those changes would be wholly unexpected and in some ways even drastic.

But what else would you expect from the band who sang “This is the game, that moves as you play.”

#1 Los Angeles Times Critics Poll. (1983)

#29 Rolling Stone “The Chart.” (1983)

Reached #86 on the Billboard Top 200 Chart.



Debbie Leavitt

Billy

We were up around 100 grand budgets by that point. We had lots of press and lots of T.V. We did American Bandstand two times... nobody remembers that! We had major distribution, all kinds of things going for us and we weren't getting anywhere. What are you going to do? By '85 the punk thing was over completely, as far as I was concerned it was over in 1980.

I felt like the on the first couple of albums we were at the top of our game material wise and being rehearsed and tight and everything, but we were on tour all the time and we had to start coming up with material so fast and it's like “you have to come up with something now... do it now... come up with something now,” and that was driving me nuts. I told them after we toured for that record that I would make one more and I'll tour and support it but if it doesn't do more I'm out of the group. I gave them over a year's notice.

John

At rehearsal one night Billy said, “Why don't we just call it, More Fun in the New World?” This would be our Reagan years' state of the union address without ever mentioning his name. We felt like we were on the top of our game & free enough to play surf rock, R & B, punk rock, everything to stretch our sound and still have it sound like X. We should've changed recording engineers by this point and sadly it would be our last record with Ray. Exene looked outward to write lyrics for “The New World” and “I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts.” I told love stories with “Poor Girl” and “Hot House.” Billy and DJ powered everything. After all the years I still love these records, this music & this band. We did some great stuff & changed some things forever.

Exene

Back to a more upbeat mood, a little... “New World” has my favorite lyric of all X songs. “It was better before they voted for what's-his-name” I could have said “Reagan.” But the song stayed timeless this way. Until recently.

College radio was the greatest back then, and we had toured a lot, but there was no breakthrough commercial success. We were on American Bandstand a coupla times. It was hard to understand why the 50's and 60's had real music on the radio made by scary real musicians and songwriters, and the 80's seemed so senile in comparison. I wanted a cultural revolution. It never happened, but there's always tomorrow.

DJ

At that point we were talking about “what are we doing wrong” and “what could we do to get played on the radio,” because we were playing to the same fans. We weren't that odd but I think that because we had the moniker of “punk rock” that held us back in that way but that also made us more mythical as time went on. “More Fun” was expansive thematically - it reflected the tons of touring we were doing, particularly through the United States.

Gary Leonard





accolades

Tommy Stinson The Replacements

"From the moment I first saw X, John Doe was instantly my idol. He looked great, he sang great, and he played great. The Replacements toured with them on and off throughout the 80's and they will always be an important part of my life.

I was listening to Los Angeles the other day and it sounds as great as it did 30 years ago."

Mike McCready Pearl Jam

"It has been an honor to watch X every night on our tours together. They are a true American band with iconic status...the perfect collection of cool punk rock music with the literary sense and style of John Steinbeck.

Exene Cervenka and John Doe have painted the American Dream - blood red, white, black and blue. With colorful imagery of love, desperation, and life, their songs take me on a journey every time I hear them.

DJ Bonebrake is one of the greatest drummers around. Billy Zoom has one of the great right hands in rock guitar and excellent leads too.

I went and saw them a few years back in San Diego and what I saw that night was magical and dangerous still. X just makes me happy and I feel grateful to be able to know them as friends. Thanks X!"

Penelope Spheeris Director

"1977. Time to tear down the old and bring in the new. I'll never forget the first time I saw X. The music was purely original, like nothing I'd ever heard before. They borrowed from no one. They ripped-off no one.

Four amazing musicians who magically came together and created a totally unique sound. To us they were L.A. royalty. They set themselves apart from the other punk bands of the time because their music was more melodic, the poetic lyrics more personal, and the performance more visceral and intuitive without being affected or artificial.

John and Exene's lyrics provoked deep thought and tumultuous emotion.

X was one-of-a-kind, totally distinct from other bands, yet they fit in perfectly with the massive and explosive Los Angeles punk rock movement. Exene's unique, inventive style has been embraced and mirrored by fashion aficionados for decades. Their longevity is well deserved, their originality carries on, and their signature sound has now stolen the hearts of an entirely new generation of fans."

Eddie Vedder Pearl Jam

"Every member of the band X is a master of their craft. Whether guitar, bass and drums, or poetry, songwriting and singing...each element is being looked after by an inspired genius. To have individuals with such massive talent all in one group is something incredibly rare. I've been gleanig energy, hope and information from their records for decades. It makes no sense to me that they never became one of the biggest American bands ever."

Phil Alvin The Blasters

"X had the Blasters open for them countless times. After the shows we would drink and laugh until sunrise. We've been roused by the police and danced to Zydeco music. X got the Blasters on their record label and ate Sunday dinner with my parents. Great band - Great friends."

Jason Fine Rolling Stone

"I saw X play about a dozen times in high school, and, for me, a lot of those shows involved some pretty epic misadventures. One time, I "borrowed" my dad's Honda Prelude and drove eight hours from Orange County to see an X show at a club called the Devil House in Tucson. Before the show I met a bunch of punks in the parking lot - mohawk-and-safety-pin-through-the-nose type punks - and they invited me to a ratty apartment complex near the club to party. They were drinking Coors (which seemed very un-punk to me) and cutting each other with a pocket knife. One dude had a kitten on his shoulder, and another guy was flicking lit matches at its tail. I remember thinking these idiots had it all wrong - this isn't what punk's about. Punk isn't nihilism and violence and destruction and drinking right-wing beer. Punk is freedom and passion and joy. It's remaking the rules -- defining something real, un-ironic, un-hypocritical. At least that's what I thought punk was about - and I learned that from X.

X didn't pose. X stood for something: truth. Even in the early days they were so fucking good, a big rolling freight train of electricity and emotion, menacing but human, with songs about love and lust and Los Angeles that spoke for the ages. Each time I saw them they got better - more daring, more precise. Unlike so many punk bands they were not afraid to be great. When I got home from Tucson the next day, my dad was surprisingly cool about me stealing his car - he just wondered why I'd drive 16 hours to see a punk band. I told him this wasn't just a punk band, it was X - the best band I'd ever seen. I was 16 then. Thirty years later I still feel the same way."

Jack Rabid The Big Takeover

"Thirty five years on, punk rock seems like it devolved into a rote, paint by numbers, dulled, machine stamped formula. But when it first hit like the Hindenburg, the greatest bands in fact, were actually hot musicians - like X.

They were the American band everyone pretty much agreed on. The first four albums took off like rockets in the underground I remember, transcending the sadly starting-to-narrow punk tag, because it encapsulated the original '77 outbreak's greatest strengths.

One... boy could they play! Billy Zoom's '80's inspired post-rockabilly riffs ripped through every club or hall that I saw them at (to this day), and that rhythm section of John Doe and D.J. Bonebrake was flat out relentless - fast and yet heavy.

Two... They had the fierce intelligence and raw, unfiltered poetic smarts we flat out demanded then. Exene Cervenka and Doe's lyrics delivered in their frenzied, yelped, stridently harmonic/anti-harmonic singing were like reading a Raymond Chandler novel, and it put the lie for the 1000th time to the media meme that punks were dumb, bored, lazy wastrels.

To this day they are a flat out national treasure."

Joe Keithley D.O.A.

"We played our first show in L.A. with X in early '79 at a roller rink in a really wasted area of Hollywood. It was an adventurous bill, we had never heard of X at that time, but I was struck by the weaving melodies and their solid, solid rhythm. It was rock, but it was so far gone, it just had this different kind of cool, that spun your head so many times that a chiropractor was soon in dire need.

Not long after that, X asked DOA to open for them for 5 shows over a weekend at the Starwood in Hollywood. We drove from Canada for 30 hours straight in an old piece of crap to make the first show by maybe an hour. X blew the doors off that sordid old dump all 5 shows. Every show was packed with Hollywood celebrities, wannabes and punks in the know. D.O.A. played well, but it was second fiddle stuff, because that weekend was really an announcement to the world that X was ready to take the crown as America's best rock band. They were in the same league as the New York Dolls, The Stooges and the MC5. Completely amazing.

Alas, like the Ramones, they did not get their total due and pitifully inferior bands were 10 times as popular, but they were and remain the real shit..... You know, I don't miss the old days but I miss witnessing historical events like that. Long live X."

Jeff Ament Pearl Jam

"A few years ago, some friends and I created some alternate criteria for what would make up a great American band -- musicianship, lyrics, originality, live performance, three consecutive great records and nothing in the later years that might soil the band's reputation.

X made the top five of everybody's list of Greatest American Bands."

Dave Alvin The Blasters

"X was the middle band on a curious triple bill of Black Randy and The Metro Squad and Arthur J and The Gold Cups at The Whiskey the first time I saw them in Feb or March of '78. I'd had a few beers and while watching them I had the sort of thought that you have after a few beers. "This band is fuckin' amazing. They're like having great sex with a really smart person."

I think I was impressed by the complex variety of musical, poetic and cultural influences and references that X displayed even in those early raw days.

Few bands in L.A. or even New York or London, were as lyrically intense or musically surprising and no one came close to their uniquely haunting yet tough harmonies.

From that distant night in '78 through years of friendship, beers and countless wild gigs, through all their brilliant, influential and always adventurous albums, from X generously helping out my band The Blasters (and so many other groups) with support, advice and much needed shows, from my rollicking days with John, Exene and DJ in The Knitters and my cherished time as a member of X, right up to the last time I saw them perform 2 months ago (so damn many nights since that first show at The Whiskey), my opinion of X has not changed at all."



Billy Zoom



John Doe



DJ Bonebrake



Paul Dugre

Produced by Ray Manzarek

Original Band Artwork By Exene Cervenka

Masterpiece Collection Executive Producers:
X & Steve Kravac

Photography

The Producers gratefully acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of the photographers to this collection

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Los Angeles, Under the Big Black Sun and Wild Gift

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Lacquer Cutting: Dave Cheppa for
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