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FEATURES

- [Party Photography](#)
- [Sled Island: Day 4](#)
- [Once Upon a Record Store](#)
- [Ariel Pink](#)

[more =>](#)

REGULARS

- [Textually Active](#)
- [Riff Raff](#)
- [Editor's Note](#)
- [Film Stripped](#)
- [Film Stripped](#)

[more =>](#)

REAL LIVE ACTION

- [Matmos](#)
- [SSRIs](#)
- [Born Ruffians](#)
- [Bowl Your Own Waste](#)
- [First Aid Kit](#)
- [Caribou](#)

[more =>](#)

UNDER REVIEW

- [Cairo](#)
- [Peter Wolf Crier](#)
- [Wintersleep](#)
- [Shane Turner Overdrive](#)
- [Male Bonding](#)
- [Radio Radio](#)

[more =>](#)

July 2010

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- [calendar](#)
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Film Stripped

Bloodied But Unbowed: An Interview with Susanne Tabata

By Sarah Charrouf



Susanne Tabata interviewing Joey Ramone, photo by Bev Davies

Susanne Tabata, the filmmaker behind Bloodied But Unbowed, the documentary about Vancouver's punk scene, sat down with me at Antisocial Skate Shop to talk about the early days in Vancouver punk. Amidst our conversations about politics, skateboarding, film making and the differences between punk then and punk now, we managed to get a few interview questions in.

Discorder: How did you get involved in the punk scene?

Susanne Tabata: I was a university student

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 at UBC and I had my own radio show on CiTR and we were very involved in promoting the music of the Vancouver punk scene ... back in those days, we used to have 45s, and in the punk scene in V it was very inexpensive to press 45s—you didn't have to have a lot of money to put out a single and a B-side. At CiTR we were very interested in what was going on in the punk scene. In addition to that, I have to be honest, we were also very interested in the sounds that were coming out of London at the time. Punk had sort of come and gone, in a way, in the markets of London and New York. But what was coming out of those areas—the biggest bang—there was a prolific amount of great music that was being released between '77 and '79, right through to '81. At CiTR we were very interested in this vinyl, there was no other forum for it. Co-op radio broadcast some of it, but we were very interested in the punk scene. I mean, Iggy Pop sat in the room at CiTR. I have that backstage pass: "Iggy Pop: SUB Ballroom." That was his dressing room, and he ate a vegetarian plate, and that was back in 1979. So yes, I was there and I was part of it. I was also involved in the first cable television show, a live variety show, where we played a lot of videos that were starting to come out of the U.K. markets. We interviewed the local bands. It was called Night Dreems.

CiTR was so important in the story because at the time, there was a concert promoting company, called Perryscope Concerts. They had set up shop in Vancouver and brought in all those bands. They brought in the Iggys and the Ramones and all that and the unknowns at the time. [Local promoter] Norman Perry used to tap into the university crowd to listen to and get a sense of what we thought what was the good music to listen to. He was a terrific ear for what the underground student population thought would be an interesting musical direction. CiTR was really influential back then.

D: Do you think that punk music then was a small subculture, where it was only a few people that made the whole scene?

ST: No way! And I don't think we ever called the Vancouver scene "the punk scene." I think it was, at the time, what was happening. It was "the scene," but for a very small minority of people. It was a small population of kids—predominantly white, overwhelmingly male—and it was an underground scene. I don't know what I would compare it to today. You'd be able to tell me what's a comparable scene that nobody pays attention to. This was a scene that nobody gave a shit about. You really have to understand, no one cared. It was very underground, but punk also became a brand. Punk, over time, became something that you

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No More Strangers is back on w/ RatTail, Kick Evrything + Winnie djs @917main (Cobalt) tonight! *about 3 days ago from HootSuite*

Our photographer & Graham rode bus together RT @Jing_Yi Nice article & photos of hilarious @grahamclark on @DiscorderMag <http://ow.ly/29oIS> *about 3 days ago from HootSuite*

actually found a section of in a record store. And then there's all the sub-genres of punk. This story that I'm doing is even before the hardcore punk. This story takes place in the late 1970s and sort of peters out in '81, '82. This is when hardcore really started to grow in southern California.

D: Can you tell us a little about the movie? Are there a lot of interviews? Who is featured in it?

ST: It is a character driven oral history of the scene. And it's driven by the people who were there, mostly musicians. Those interviews take place, of course, in present day. The essence of the energy of the piece is captured in a combination of using the music tracks of the era, along with stock footage and photographs, and a hell of a lot of work. It's been a lot of work.

D: How did you get involved in making the movie?

ST: It's not my first documentary. I've done two other subculture pieces. One is on women's skateboarding, Skate Girl. Prior to that, the Canadian surfing documentary, 49 Degrees, which is about the West Coast story, not the East Coast story.

I basically went through a big upheaval in my life. It caused me to go through my scrapbooks and I stopped at this one scrapbook I had collected while I was a university student, which had all these pictures of CiTR and these interviews I had done. I thought "Wow, this was a really interesting time." Concurrent to that, about three years ago, Bev Davies was doing a show at the Jem Gallery-144 Punk Rock Photographs. I met her at the Modernettes gig. I brought my camera and I just started shooting all the people who showed up and thought, "This is a really great story." I mean, it's a great music scene. So that's how it started. I had thought originally that the best story would be one that is character driven, so I was looking for strong personalities to tell the story. I think I found them. Locally we've featured Art Bergmann, Gerry Barad, Brian Goble, Mike Graham, Joe ["Shithead"] Keithly of course, from D.O.A., Randy Rampage, Zippy Pinhead, all the Pointed Sticks, Buck Cherry, the Dishrags and some other people. As far as names: Henry Rollins. I don't know if you guys know ... Do you know who Henry Rollins is?

D: Yes.

ST: I just don't know who people know anymore. Keith Morris from the Circle Jerks- and he is the original singer in Black Flag. Duff McKagen from Guns & Roses.

D: You mentioned the hardcore scene. So the film caps off when the hardcore scene started?

ST: Yeah. Intuitively, instinctively and through their own creative forces, the Subhumans and D.O.A. had their own sound. Those sounds were part of the punk scene; they weren't the punk scene. The scene was really eclectic. It involved many different sounds. Sounds that we would call pop or New Wave. Maybe even post-punk, but the history in music is that punk in Vancouver was influenced by the U.K. By 1981, 1982, the centre of punk had shifted from England to southern California. Out of that Huntington Beach area, if you had been there you definitely know where a lot of the driving personality comes out of that area, that's what happened. The sound of punk changed. Certainly due to Joe Keithly's determination and dogged persistence, most of the other bands in Vancouver packed it up, and D.O.A. kept going and that sort of is where the story leaves off if you will: with a tribute to the birth, the life, the death of the original punk scene. Are you going to come and see it?

D: Of course, yeah. I'm actually really excited about it.

ST: Really, because it's so old. I was actually thinking what the average person in the early 20s—what's relevant to your age group? I don't expect you to like the music. And I don't expect you to be enamoured with any of the characters necessarily in the film. But I think that what my objective would be for the younger audience to walk away with is certainly a sense of what a scene is and what your relevance in the scene is. That scene was certainly relevant to me. It's probably not relevant to you. It's probably historically interesting. I just believe that if you can tell a really good story and you can access different age groups, which was my goal, I didn't target this for your age, and I didn't target it for my age group. It's meant for everybody.

D: I want to ask you about the local scene today, if you're involved in it and how do you view it?

ST: I'm not involved in it. But I've been to different gigs. I still know people that are tied into it. I appreciate it's going on, but I've got really little time to take it in. It's not my scene anymore. It's your scene, it's not my scene. I see it's valid, I see it's vital. I see the energy. I've been to some of the Cobalt shows. I'm really interested to know what punk means today, because when we were doing it, and I wasn't doing it, I was watching it. It was really not accepted in the mainstream. This was the

underclass.

D: Can you tell us a little bit about females in the punk scene?

ST: Back in the late '70s, the attitudes toward women in general were so different than they are now. What women had to put up with to be artists, musicians, journalists or aspiring professionals in the music industry is quite a bit different than it is today. We touch on that a little bit in the film. You'll get it. There was one band who was all female, the Dishrags. Their story comes out a little bit. I think it'll be quite enlightening. The punk scene in Vancouver at the time was a mixture of the young white suburban kids that were coming in to make music, and it was fused with the Vancouver art school scene. That group of people was very much male and female, and they tended to be a little bit older than a lot of the punks that had come in from the suburbs. But as far as the music, was it inclusive? No, I don't think it was. It was more male driven. The Dishrags will tell you. They were allowed to go on the battle of the bands as a backup band. They weren't allowed to enter as a band because they were girls. Things did change. The punk era was a door breaking, pivotal point in rock music. It was overtly sexist in those days, I would say. Even in a punk scene that was quite inclusive, there could be, on the music level, some sense of that sexism.

Bloodied But Unbowed: Uncut will be shown May 13 at 8 p.m. at the Granville 7 theatre as part of DOXA. There will also be a television version of the film which will be shown on the Knowledge Network.

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stabata

Posted May 2, 2010 at 4:28 pm | [Permalink](#)

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