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Sixteen Days in China: A Documentary by Martin Atkins Review

by Kevin Wierzbicki

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The name Martin Atkins may not immediately ring a bell but he is in fact a long-tenured stalwart of the punk/post-punk underground scene. The drummer first came to notoriety as a member of Public Image Ltd. but he's also been behind the kit with Killing Joke, Nine Inch Nails, Ministry and with his own band, Pigface.

This documentary follows Atkins around Beijing for sixteen days as he attempts to reach two goals; sign Chinese bands to his Invisible Records label and to record material for his *China Dub Soundsystem* project.

The film does an excellent job at showing what Atkins was up against as he deals with the language barrier and various predicaments like studios with inadequate equipment and taxi drivers taking him to the wrong address. Atkins is especially frustrated because he foresaw these difficulties and sent an advance woman over to smooth the way, only to find out upon his arrival that she had done very little in the way of preparation.

A dozen or so bands showcase for Atkins and just about all of them are very good and this puts everyone in a better mood until it comes out that none of them want to sign recording contracts. In the end Atkins leaves the country having signed three bands and having recorded music with Chinese master drummers (three young women) and Tibetan singers for his *China Dub Soundsystem* album.

The underground scene in Beijing is surprisingly extensive and the film shows performances from acts like Hang on the Box, Snapline, Joyside and PK-14 among many others. Atkins has a dry and sometimes acidic sense of humor but it's always tempered by his experience and wisdom; that personality trait ties a neat little bow onto this very enjoyable film.

CD Info and Links

Sixteen Days in China: A Documentary by Martin Atkins
Rating: 😊😊😊😊

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