



MARTIN ATKINS
16 Days In China
MVD Visual

Rewind to the fall of 2006: it's just hours before Martin Atkins—rock drummer extraordinaire (PiL, Pigface, Killing Joke, Ministry) and founder of Invisible Records (now celebrating its 20th anniversary)—is preparing to fly to Beijing and have a look at the music scene there, and something tells him to spend a few hundred dollars on a video camera. As fate would have it, he ends up with enough raw footage to cobble together a defiantly indie, and at times stunningly hilarious, documentary of a punk scene being born, with all its ugly fits and starts. The outlying Beijing rock club D-22 provides much of the film's early focus, and while it's great to watch hard-thrashing bands like Snapline, Honey Gun and Tookoo strut their stuff, at times it's even more riveting to watch Atkins himself gradually come apart at the seams as he jumps through flaming hoops to get some of these bands (as well as a traditional Tibetan folk group, of all things) into the studio. It's also easy to feel for Atkins' hapless assistant, who gets raked over the coals on a regular basis, but in the end, this tightly edited (at 65 minutes) and thoroughly entertaining film is about the energy, freedom and universality of music in all its expressive glory.

— BILL MURPHY

What first inspired you to make the trip to Beijing?

That's a good question. In making the documentary, I think that's one of the things I worked *through*. I moved to New York City in 1983, and I remember thinking then, standing in Times Square eating a piece of pizza, at what point am I going to be shot, you know? It just seemed really crazy and insane, so maybe 25 years later, I was just looking for the adrenaline rush.

I can rationalize it and say that perhaps entrepreneurially I was looking to do my thing without a safety net, but I also had a few connections with bands who had tracks on this series I had called *Notes From The Real Underground*. One of those guys had moved from L.A. to Beijing and started emailing me saying, "It's crazy here—you've got to come." When I finally contacted a club—one of a few different venues that we were gonna be hanging out at—I became aware from the venue D-22 that they had a bunch of bands they were nurturing. They needed some equipment—they didn't have very good microphones, so I bought some for them and put myself in their hands, and it turned out to be a very good thing.

**Q&A with
MARTIN ATKINS**

You mention that D-22 reminds you of what the New York punk scene was like at CBGBs back in the day. Could you elaborate on that?

Well, I talked to Michael—one of the owners of D-22—and he said they just got tired of going to all these clubs in Beijing and saying, "This could be done better." They stopped complaining and actually *did* something, and it's great to hear about somebody doing that. So when I walked into the club, I was aware that they felt an almost parental nurturing emotion towards these bands.

And you can see that same attitude in some of the bands—their complete absorption in what they're doing, especially the guys in Snapline. They're like, "Okay, we've got this box—let's plug it in and see what happens." And what I saw was their delight in the exploration of music. I was in New York shortly after being in Beijing, and I saw a couple of bands, and they were strategizing their careers. There's no *strategizing* in Beijing—they're just doing it, and that gives you *hope*. I mean, it's all gonna get fucked up in the next couple of years—I hope it isn't, but I expect it will be—so I felt very lucky to be there, experiencing this and documenting it.