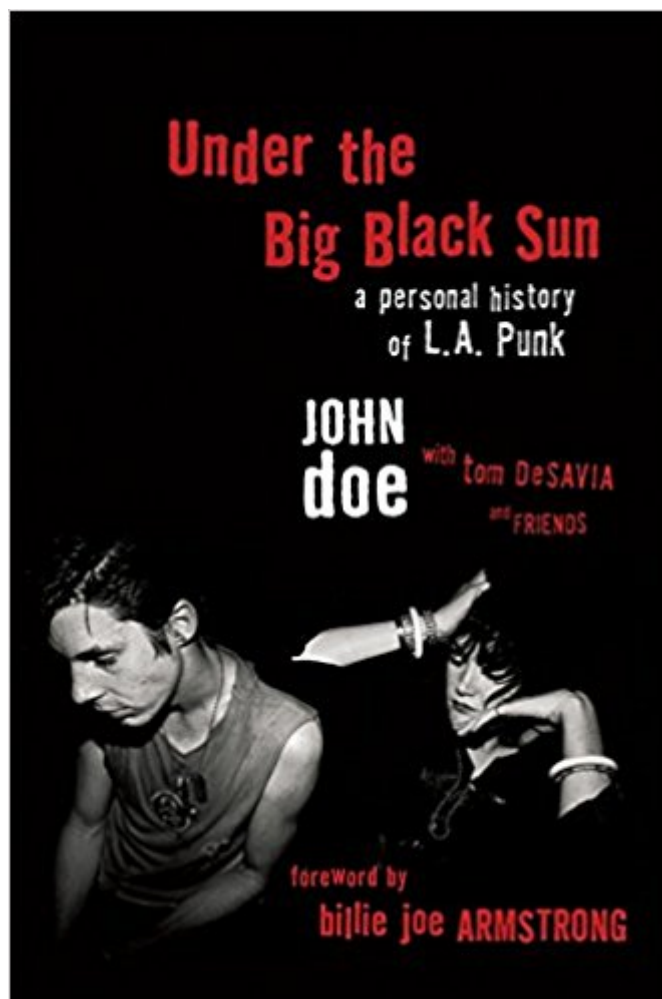


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# Under The Big Black Sun: A Personal History Of L.A. Punk



## Synopsis

Under the Big Black Sun explores the nascent Los Angeles punk rock movement and its evolution to hardcore punk as it's never been told before. Authors John Doe and Tom DeSavia have woven together an enthralling story of the legendary West Coast scene from 1977-1982 by enlisting the voices of people who were there. The book shares chapter-length tales from the authors along with personal essays from famous (and infamous) players in the scene. Additional authors include: Exene Cervenka (X), Henry Rollins (Black Flag), Mike Watt (The Minutemen), Jane Wiedlin and Charlotte Caffey (Go-Go's), Dave Alvin (The Blasters), Chris D. (The Flesh Eaters), Robert Lopez (The Zeros, El Vez), Jack Grisham (T.S.O.L.), Teresa Covarrubias (The Brat), as well as scenesters and journalists Pleasant Gehman, Kristine McKenna, and Chris Morris. Through interstitial commentary, John Doe "narrates" this journey through the land of film noir sunshine, Hollywood back alleys, and suburban sprawl, the place where he met his artistic counterparts Exene, DJ Bonebrake, and Billy Zoom and formed X, the band that became synonymous with, and in many ways defined, L.A. punk. Focusing on punk's evolutionary years, Under the Big Black Sun shares stories of friendship and love, ambition and feuds, grandiose dreams and cultural rage, all combined with the tattered, glossy sheen of pop culture weirdness that epitomized the operations of Hollywood's underbelly. Readers will travel to the clubs that defined the scene, as well as to the street corners, empty lots, apartment complexes, and squats that served as de facto salons for the musicians, artists, and fringe players that hashed out what would become punk rock in Los Angeles. L.A. punk was born from rock 'n' roll, from country and blues and Latin music, the true next step in the evolution of rock 'n' roll music. It was born of art, culture, political, and economic frustration. It spoke of a Los Angeles that existed when regionalism still reigned in the USA. It sounded like Los Angeles. For the first time, the stories and photos from this now-fabled era are presented from those on the front lines. Stories that most have never heard about the art that was born under the big black sun.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

LA Weekly, 7/28/16; A collection of essays by a fraternity of key members of L.A.'s early punk scene between 1977 and 1982, before any of them experienced major-label interest and mainstream success; Stories of hardscrabble living, house parties and shambolic shows; Includes loads of photos and vintage gig fliers. —Scanner Zine, 7/25/16; Each chapter works in its own right, focusing on a specialized area from each writer. As a collection, they create a comprehensive narrative that takes in all of those early LA legends; All of John Doe's pieces read like a noir film; his writing is incredibly stylized, panoramic and informative; This is the most complete and in-depth look at that initial LA Punk scene yet; Doe has collected a group of people who actually know how to write and write with flair; An informative and exciting book; It's deftly written, beautifully presented and makes the reader yearn for a time machine. —Red Dirt Report, 7/25/16; [In] Under the Big Black Sun, we get a truckload of stories, mixed in with haphazard memories and hilarious situations, set against the angsty punk scene of Greater Los Angeles circa 1977-82, before everything was MTV-ized and sanitized for your protection; Offers a quick, 249-page peek into a scene that was so important to the music that would follow. A bloody good read. —SLUG Magazine, May 2016; Filled with the rich personal histories from participants of the L.A. punk movement, Under The Big Black Sun shares L.A.'s history with the world; Through these tales, the enticing history of the first-wave era comes alive with each turn of the page; [A] thorough exploration of the ins and outs of the L.A. scene; Well worth the read; An essential collection that explores a punk era that was rich, interesting and above all, unapologetically honest. —Phoenix New Times, 5/6/16; Chronicles the rough-and-tumble punk jungle of the L.A. underground scene that exploded between 1977 and 1982. Pretty heady stuff. —Ground Control, 5/6/16; Under The Big Black Sun breaks tradition and presents a different kind of story in so doing; Like a brilliant mosaic, each piece fits together; In the end, what proves to be the coolest thing about Under The Big Black Sun is

the fact that, no matter what tone the author employs for his or her contribution (be it heavy or dark or direct or folksy or sweet or sassy etc.), the tie that binds them all together is how obviously each of them adored their scene and how faithfully they wish to preserve it in this book. That love holds Under The Big Black Sun together and renders it a complete and satisfying read. —Vegas Seven, 6/14/16; Under the Big Black Sun captures a bit of a shining moment before mass media took over, where the underground was something you had to dig for. —Austin Chronicle, 6/17/16; A book as special as the scene it anthologizes. —Waterbury Republican-American, 6/19/16; All of the familiar names are here, as well as hundreds of bands many readers will wish they could have witnessed in person. —Exclaim.ca, 6/21/16; Punk rock can save your life, if it doesn't kill you first. That's the notion tying together Under the Big Black Sun: A Personal History of L.A. Punk, a collection of oral histories, war stories and elegies; If it reads like a whirlwind pastiche of different styles and tones, that's because that's the way the scene really was. Besides, there's real delight in reading about the wild and often unstable alliances forged between bands desperate to make it in unforgiving L.A.; Valuable for not only giving us a glimpse into what punk rock looked like and sounded like, but also what it felt like. —Music News, 6/20/16; Chronicles the early years of the frequently bleak and gritty scene through various contributors who were front and center; A brisk read; 24 unflinchingly real chapters. —Esquire.com, 4/26/16; The new book from punk icon John Doe offers a history of the overlooked music scene; For anyone who thinks that punk rock was limited to the famed scenes in London and New York, Under the Big Black Sun offers hard evidence that the L.A. scene was just as important; and perhaps created an even greater, lasting impact; A great story about the underappreciated music that came out of the City of Angels during that golden period of 1977-1982. —The A.V. Club, 4/25/16; Under The Big Black Sun opens up L.A.'s punk-rock underbelly; Culled from the personal remembrances of roughly a dozen of the city's most prized punk-rock figures, the book digs deep into the ugly, dangerous, but nonetheless fraternal nature of the burgeoning L.A. punk scene of the late '70s and early '80s. From Hollywood over to East L.A. and south to San Pedro and Huntington Beach, Under The Big Black Sun covers the scene's considerable sprawl, from the sketchy clubs and apartment dwellings to the bands and the drug and booze-fueled chaos that followed them; The dirt dished on the bands and the music is great, but the book wisely casts a wider net to capture broader aspects of early L.A. punk culture; You-had-to-be-there style storytelling. —Praise for Under the Big Black Sun Vogue.com, 2/28/16; A candid look at one of rock's most exciting scenes. —Publishers Weekly, 4/4/16; Doe,

frontman for X, has gathered the testimonies of punk's progenitors in L.A., a scene only rivaled by those of New York and London for fecundity and influence. —Q Magazine, June 2016; An excellent dissection of the unique cultural and sexual plurality of the LA scene; Compelling reading. —Library Journal, 4/15/16; [A] fascinating collection of essays. —Rolling Stone, 5/5/16; The true story of the Los Angeles punk scene; A set of vivid personal essays; The most artist-centered look yet at a scene that helped define the future of a music whose rallying cry was 'no future.' —John Evans, co-owner of California's Diesel: A Bookstore, on NPR's All Things Considered, 7/22/16; A great and generous memoir of L.A. punk. —Booklist, 7/21/16; An entertaining, firsthand history that should appeal to punk fans everywhere. —Record Collector, May 2016; A great read for anyone with even a passing interest in the U.S. underground of the time. —Music Aficionado, 5/6/16; Really takes the reader back to the time punk broke in the L.A. —Lincoln Journal Star, 5/14/16; Filled with candid, well written pieces; As valuable as a historical record as it is an innovative recounting of the scene. —Bookforum, 5/12/16; Shin[es] a light on a legendary but largely unexamined corner of the West Coast counterculture; Nostalgic fans of LA punk will learn amazing things. —Chicago Tribune, 5/31/16; A chronicle of the influential LA punk scene from 1977 to 1982, a first-hand story told by many of the musicians who lived it; The book captures a scruffy and rebellious era where a new breed of musicians flourished in cheap apartments, dive bars and music clubs. It was an underground scene that thrived on word of mouth before the advent of cellphones and the internet. Nearly 40 years on, that heady cultural time continues to influence music and fashion. —San Francisco Chronicle, 6/1/16; Written with immediacy and brio, the book is suffused with the heady feeling of finding your tribe. —Philadelphia Inquirer, 6/5/16; The music that emerged from the Los Angeles punk rock scene of the late 1970s and early '80s resisted easy categorization; It's an era skillfully recounted in Under the Big Black Sun. —PopMatters, 4/25/16; A series of essays in which each voice shines; These aren't Rolling Stone profiles that have been sanitized to protect us from the truth, they're the real conversations that you'd have with this gang if any of them were your friends; The memories, some of them anyway, are here too for us to sort through and feel something akin to being there. What more could we want? —RollingStone.com, 5/10/16; A welcome diversion from the typical punk history books, which are often narratives or oral histories. —Punk Rock Theory, 5/20/16; A personal history of LA punk, told by the people who were there; Together they paint a picture of a scene that was ugly, dangerous and came with sketchy clubs and lots of

drugs, but where at the same time there was room for friendship, love and big dreams; Paints a surprisingly clear story of what must have been hazy days for all those involved. —Media Mikes, 5/18/16; Written by X vocalist/bassist John Doe along with help from Tom DeSavia and laundry list of who's who from the late '70s and early '80s L.A. punk scene. For the first time in one place the true story of a scene often overlooked is told in all of its gritty and grimy detail by none other than those who experienced it and by those who helped create it. This is not your typical memoir however as this book tells not only of how the scene began and developed but also how it went on to change music forever; John Doe does a great job recounting his stories from this era with vivid detail and truthfulness that make you want to keep turning the page; [A] captivating story; Full of rare photos that by themselves are worth the price of the book; From cover to cover Doe and DeSavia and crew nail it. —Spectrum Culture, 7/7/16; The West Coast's answer to the seminal New York punk history, Please Kill Me; Help[s] paint a more complete picture of just what it was like to live and create in that climate; Under the Big Black Sun serves as the definitive statement on the richly diverse, unfairly overlooked Los Angeles punk scene. —Blurt Online, 7/1/16; Did the world really need one more book about Punk Rock?... Yes. Yes, it did... There are bookshelves crammed with tomes about Punk Rock and plenty of those deal with the L.A. punk scene of the late '70s. But few are as refreshingly personal as John Doe's Under the Big Black Sun. —San Francisco Book Review, 7/17/16; Told by those who lived it, those who sparked it, those who thrived there, and those who suffered there, Under the Big Black Sun is as personal a history as you're bound to find, exploring the evolution of punk in all its forms; This is a front row seat to the joy and mayhem; With voices like Jane Wiedlin, Henry Rollins, John Doe, and Exene Cervenka, among many others, this is punk brought to life, ugly and beautiful and vibrant and mean all at once. —Austin American-Statesman, 7/16/16; Does was wise to get a few different voices in here; it gives Under the Big Black Sun a pleasing emotional heft. —Examiner.com, 5/3/16; A fascinating, first-person account of professional gigging and groupie-dom in the late 1970s and early '80s; Doe's descent into the dark tumult of southern California in the post-Carter years is as seedy and unsterile as it is musically and historically significant; Doe effectively Sharpies an X on our hands for reentry into a world most of us probably never knew, into a labyrinth of alleyways and urine-besotted staircases populated by society's fringe-dwellers; the talented outcasts and intellectuals longing to carve their own niche into the urban fabric; it's all here, really, in its glorious repugnance: The intoxication, self-mutilation and promiscuity, the battered amplifiers and eyeliner, the

outrageous exploits in brick-and-mortar meccas that would be shuttered after skinheads and hardcore thugs started yanking fixtures off the restroom walls. In *Under the Big Black Sun*, punk's unsung forefathers (and mothers) finally have their say, and we emerge smelling of cigarette smoke and alcohol, ears ringing. "While X led the way, the L.A. punk scene had a distinctive voice all its own. With contributions from those who were there, this is a time capsule of music, politics and personal freedom." Indie 88 "A juggernaut of reminiscence from an eclectic cast of Cali punk characters." *The Observer* (UK), "The Best Music Books of 2016"

John Doe has worked as a roofer, an aluminum siding mechanic, a manager of poetry readings, a musician, and an actor. He met Exene Cervenka at the Venice poetry workshop in 1976 and started working with Billy Zoom around the same time. When DJ Bonebrake joined X in mid-1977, the lineup was complete. As one of the last original punk rock bands standing, they continue to tour, most recently with Blondie and Pearl Jam in front of stadium-sized crowds and audiences born after the band's formation. He has recorded eight solo records with numerous renowned singers and musicians and as an actor has appeared in over fifty films and television productions, including *Road House*, *Great Balls of Fire*, *Boogie Nights*, and *Roswell*. He currently tours as both a solo artist and with X. Doe lives north of San Francisco. Tom DeSavia is currently head of creative services for SONGS Music Publishing and is based in Los Angeles, California. Prior to joining SONGS, DeSavia did lengthy stints as both a publisher and record label A&R man, as well as many years running pop membership for ASCAP. He currently serves on the West Coast board of the Songwriter's Hall of Fame and previously served on the board of directors for both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS). A native of Southern California, Tom began his career as a music journalist.

By the time news of the LA Punk scene reached me, it was long over. Technically, it was only about five years over, but it felt like it was ages gone and I had missed something truly unique. As John Doe's book handily illustrates in the form of personal narratives by the West Coast's main punk instigators, I certainly had. Back in 1986, I watched the film *Decline of Western Civilization* and listened to Black Flag and X relentlessly, wishing I could reanimate that vibrant scene. I was seventeen years old, a drummer in a punk-influenced garage band, but there was no way to travel time. Living in a white, middle-class suburb, perhaps more than anything else, I wanted authenticity. I wanted desperately to be desperate. I was magnetized by the images and sounds of punk. Though I managed to catch a few great bands such as D.O.A. and the

Effigies, I knew these shows were vapor trails of a fading scene. The screaming jet had already flown over. Despite the fact I am rapidly approaching the half-century mark, this excellent book brought back adolescent longings for a music or societal revolution. Apparently I still haven't shaken the urge to chuck the job, disconnect from square society and give the world the artistic equivalent of my middle finger. However brief, there was a period where a primal scream emitted from the West Coast and highly original art was produced by brave and restless souls who had the audacity to reject all the lies and stupidity society asked them to swallow, to do things their way and never take no for an answer. I'm glad this book is here to hammer down a bit more of this important time period in musical and cultural history. The band names may be unfamiliar to future generations since most of them were gone in the blink of an eye, but here is a document of some true pioneers who committed art with the ruthlessness of career criminals. They should be celebrated as much for their unique contribution to music as for their uncompromising and often intentional maladjustment to the norm.

I have both the book and the audiobook, and can say the audiobook is fantastic! All the different chapter authors reading their own sections and recounting their times in this great era. Highly recommended!

It's hard to be truly objective about this book, since I was a part (though peripherally in a less-popular sub-scene) of its contents. But still, I very much enjoyed the different voices and perspectives of (very) good friends, people that I knew, had perhaps met, or had only heard about, and their take on a time that now seems like a curious dream to me. John Doe's between-chapter stories paint him as a Rod Serling-like observer and commentator, though unlike Mr. Serling, John and Exene and their merry crew were integral actors in the stories he and the contributors write about. Their recollections are true to the time and spirit of that era, and bring to life a cultural and musical moment that, though it shone brightly (or darkly, depending on your point of view), lasted too briefly before splintering and adsorbing into the larger cultural and musical fundament. I read it all in one sitting and felt at once nostalgic and melancholy. It's very good.

If you are wanting to see the more realistic side of what a young rock band goes through on their climb to the top, this book is a great read. Written by some of the most interesting musical artists from the west coast music scene this series of essays helps paint a wonderfully grimy and often insightful developing music scene. Fun, evocative and often hilarious, this book lets us peek back



into our youth and see the music we loved with new eyes. Includes an essay by the great Dave Alvin, (A personal favorite of mine) that lets you know that fitting in and being cool seemed just as alien to the people on stage as it was to the people in the audience. Fun, wild and just great to read. thanks John Doe for putting this together.

If you were around back in the day (L.A. in the late 70s) going to punk shows & eating "Ugly Fries" at Oki-Dog's afterward then this book is for you, X is one of the greatest punk bands of all time & this is John Doe's story about those crazy years! So just shut up & read it all ready.

Get the audiobook....6 CD's read by the contributors (Mike Watt and Chris D. have exceptional entries). Took it on a road trip and listened to all 6 hours without stopping. Mesmerizing. If you have even the most passing interest in LA punk, this is a must have. The interconnectedness of such greatness is mind blowing.

I received this book in the mail a week ago and read it in about 5 days. John Doe is my all time favorite singer and X is my favorite band. I was born in 1973 and lived in Michigan before we moved to Texas in 1981. I missed the scene obviously and enjoyed experiencing it with the stories and photos in this book. My favorite chapters are written by Dave Alvin, Charlotte from the Go Gos, and the final chapter by John Doe. If you are a music fan this is a must read. I hope this publicity from the book helps X get into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame where they deserve to be! Reviewed by Brandon Kline Austin, Texas

"Under the Big Black Sun" is the "Just Kids" of the LA punk scene of the late '70s-early '80s. Insightful, heartfelt and often funny reminiscences from some of the key players and observers of the birth of the most dynamic musical explosion to hit the Sunset Strip (and Chinatown, and Echo Park, etc.) since The Doors, Buffalo Springfield and Love. I especially enjoyed Charlotte Caffey's chapter on writing some of the Go-Go's early hits and Dave Alvin looking death in the face of 5,000 Black Flag fans (which may not have been as scary of playing as the opening act for Queen around the same time). John Doe does a great job pulling it all together with his thoughtful overviews.

Here's hoping that this thoroughly entertaining volume is a warm-up for an official autobiography of his own band, X.

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