

THE PUNK SINGER

Tracing the Trajectory of Riot Grrrl Kathleen Hanna

Kathleen Hanna, lead singer of the punk band Bikini Kill and dance-punk trio Le Tigre, rose to national attention as the voice of the riot grrrl movement, becoming one of the most famously outspoken icons of the third-wave feminist movement of the 1990s and early aughts.

The documentary feature *The Punk Singer*, directed by Sini Anderson and shot by cinematographers Jennie Jedry and Moira Morel, details Hanna's story as cultural lightning rod and private citizen, including her marriage to Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz and her decision, in 2005, to stop performing.

The Punk Singer premiered earlier this year at the SXSW Film Festival, where it was picked up for distribution by Sundance Selects/IFC Films. The film saw a limited theatrical release beginning in November. With virtually no budget, production was achieved largely through donations of equipment and expertise. The film consists of interviews and archival footage, including live band performances. Interviews and B-roll footage were captured using a combination of Panasonic AG-HVX200 and AG-HPX170 cameras outfitted with Letus adapters and a set of Zeiss Compact Prime lenses.

"We shot on the HVX and HPX because, at the time, they were the best HD prosumer cameras on the market," Morel says. "The



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Kathleen Hanna in *The Punk Singer*

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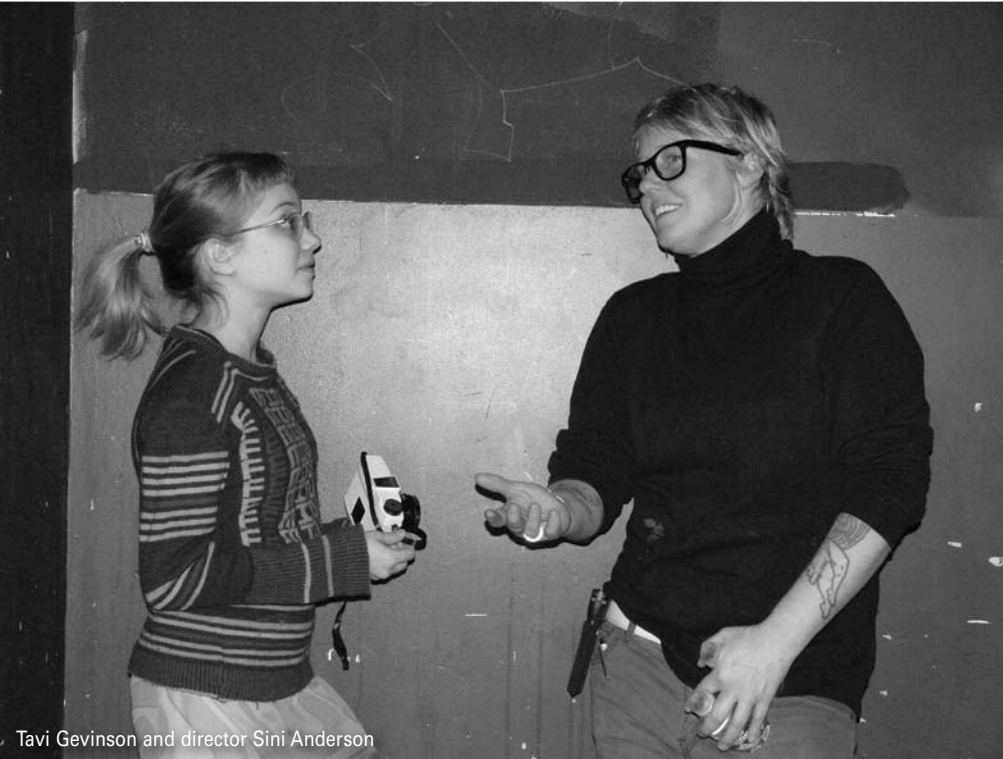


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Tavi Gevinson and director Sini Anderson



Director of photography Jennie Jeddry



Director of photography Moira Morel



Kathleen Hanna

color space, latitude and lenses were perfect for what we were doing, and the XLR inputs for the microphones made it so much easier to capture and monitor sound while we were shooting—something that the [Canon EOS] 5D and 7D couldn't match. Also, both of those cameras were capable of shooting 1080, which we knew we needed if the film was ever to be projected on the big screen."

The Panasonic cameras were augmented by Canon EOS 5D and 7D SLR cameras to shoot a tribute concert at the Knitting Factory in

"She has this really large fan base underground, but there are still so many people who don't know who she is. We wanted to present her in a way that makes her accessible to everybody."
—Moira Morel, director of photography, *The Punk Singer*

December 2010, where 20 bands turned out to cover songs from Kathleen Hanna's extensive catalog. Funding for postproduction—roughly \$68,000—was raised on Kickstarter, almost entirely with small donations consisting of \$20, \$50 and \$200.

"It would have been a lot more challenging had we not had so many generous people around us," says Jeddry, who employed a borrowed lighting kit for the project, "but a lot of people really wanted to see this happen."

To help organize the material, the director

worked closely with the two DPs to create separate looks for each season as they followed Hanna with their cameras over the course of a year, starting in 2010. “Kathleen is a very private person to begin with, so having to follow her around with cameras—it wasn’t always easy,” Morel recounts. “But she was game. She was great about it and we had a really great time.”

Choosing a palette for spring consisting of light greens, pastels and greys, Morel captured beautiful scenery in the Olympia and Portland regions of the Pacific Northwest to use as establishing shots. Those sequences contrast with the super-bright and saturated footage acquired during the summer months. For sequences shot in the fall, including some of Hanna’s more intimate revelations, Jeddry took advantage of the slanted autumn sunlight outside, supplemented with a fire inside that had to be maintained at an even level throughout the lengthy shoot.

“I did boost the lighting with a daylight-balanced Kino Flo and Chimera-type Eco Lite, along with some bounces on the inside,” Jeddry recounts. “In addition to the lighting—some of which was natural, some of which was lit—we had these color palettes, and that really helped divide the sections.”

“We talked a lot, more than I usually get to talk on projects, and we really delved into how we wanted to tell this

story,” Jeddry continues. “Kathleen dictated a lot of it because of the content and what she was saying, but Sini also had so many aesthetic ideas she wanted us to run with. She trusted us, and she also had a lot of ideas. Those two things are a good combination.”

“Kathleen embodies so much in terms of the feminist movement and also pop culture, and she’s a personal hero as well,” Morel concludes.

“Ultimately the goal was to capture her stories in a beautiful and truthful way that would translate on screen for the audience—particularly for those people who don’t already know her and what she’s about. She has this really large fan base underground, but there are still so many people who don’t know who she is. We wanted to present her in a way that makes her accessible to everybody.” **dv**



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