



[Oil City Confidential: The Story of Dr. Feelgood](#)

Julien Temple, director

[Cadiz Music](#) - CADIZDVD125 (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
(progdawg@hotmail.com)

Julien Temple's place in rock and roll filmdom was assured before he got to this outing. The director of, among a long impressive list of flicks, *The Filth & the Fury*, which chronicled The Sex Pistols, and of *The Future is Unwritten*, detailing the Clash's late Joe Strummer, has garnered a good deal of acclaim for those efforts, and this rock doc about the Dr. Feelgood band is actually a prequel to that pair. *Oil City Confidential* has already been lauded far and wide as exemplary and perhaps his best ever. More, it's being given the royal releasing treatment. Instead of those cheapshit DVDs now so prevalent on the market, where you get just the outside liner and the disc inside, nesting in a plain black plastic shell, *Oil City Confidential* sports a see-thru case with the usual frontispiece photograph and data and then an interior b&w shot of the ensemble at a barren Canvey Island seaside resort. There's also a postcard (ironically explained in the film) and a 16-page booklet with lots of photos and several short essays and the production's credits.

I needn't play upon the fact that Wilko Johnson was an original member in this ensemble, as his many fans are more than aware of that fact, nor need I re-tell the tale of the quite common presence of two major figures and their disparate personalities—Johnson and Lee Brilleaux, the group's gritty singer—presaging an inevitable split that dashed any hopes for major stardom for either, parsing the group's powers too mightily (not everyone, yknow, is a Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry, mates!). A satisfying 106 minutes, *Oil City* is an engaging tale which lays out part of the socio-cultural story of how punk came about while simultaneously standing as the first proper homage on this mess of high-spirited talented yobs.

Hey, people, all that crazy shit you saw Wilko setting out on stage all those years ago and in between? None of it is or was BS, he really is a character and provides sparkle and looniness from the opening moments of the film, more than once mindful of Goon Show tongue-in-cheekery. And talk about working class origins! Dr. Feelgood pretty much stands with Black Sabbath on that score, 'Hardscrabble' is their shared middle name. The camera work throughout the film, though, is simultaneously gorgeous, frenetic, and hilarious, can't help but hypnotize the viewer equally as much as the sense of history. The editing is crisp and snappy, and one starts to get a Ken Burns / PBS feel in terms of professionalism...except Burns would never come up with the witty excisions from old b&w movies underscoring the torrent of existential points in the band's narrative.

The real secret to the Feelgood crew, though, lies in the concert clips. Johnson is forever Johnson, on stage and off an idiosyncratic Shakespearean kind of gent, erudite comic relief and quirky brilliance wrapped in one package (Falstaff by way of Rosencrantz and Gildenstern perhaps?), while Lee Brilleaux (Lee John Collinson) is a shape-shifter and gains an extraordinary intensity once he mounts the musical rostrum. The interplay 'twixt he and Johnson is riveting, and I'm hoping to God Rockpalast is hiding away a concert of the ensemble, something they can release along with the slew of great DVDs recently making their

way to the market because Dr. Feelgood is an object lesson in how to **perform** while making music, entertaining as hell. Though there is indeed a very noir presence to *Oil City Confidential*, you don't come away from the film depressed but instead exhilarated and inspired. Wilko harbors many regrets but he needn't: we're all fucked-up monkeys, m'lad, but some shine before reality overtakes us, and he and the group most definitely fell into that lustrous category.

Oh, and though the packaging doesn't mention it—c'mon, Cadiz Music, this is a really fine release, so shout it out!—there's a great bonus interview with Brilleaux, some of which is clipped into the film proper, most of which isn't, and then a run of collected Johnson segments, including many in-film inclusions and quite a few others. I watched the entire thing just before hitting the sack and went to sleep with a very big smile on my face.

Edited by: David N. Pyles
(dnpyles@acousticmusic.com)

Copyright 2013, [Peterborough Folk Music Society](#).
This review may be reprinted with prior permission and attribution.