

# **Cadiz Music**

presents

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of

A Julien Temple Film

# Oil City Confidential

Starring

Lee Brilleaux, Wilko Johnson,  
John B Sparkes & John Martin.

**Cinematographer – Stephen Organ**

**Archive Producer - Sam Dwyer**

**Associate Producer – George Hencken**

**Editor –Caroline Richards**

**Executive Producer – Richard England**

**Producer – Stephen Malit**

**Director – Julien Temple**

" Oil City is 100% pure below sea level, Canvey Island Noir."

Julien Temple 2009



## **Directors Statement**

Oil City Confidential is the last film in a trilogy I've made about British music culture of the '70s.

It acts as a prequel to The Filth & The Fury on the Sex Pistols and The Future Is Unwritten on Joe Strummer. They all share the same cinematic language - an irreverent and anarchic punk "rubber dagger up the bum" style of montage, mixing archive and fictive footage, which I first used in The Great Rock & Roll Swindle.

In all three films the music acts as a prism through which to examine the social and cultural conditions of the times, which gave birth to our own.

Oil City Confidential is a feature length punk noir documentary about Dr Feelgood; the story of four men in cheap suits who crashed out of Canvey Island like demented smash and grab merchants in the early '70s. Taking London by storm, they went on to sandpaper the face of rock'n'roll and leave all that came before them a burnt-out wreck.

Only now can we see them for what they truly were - four estuarine John-the-Baptists to Johnny Rotten's anti-Christ.

To illustrate this tale of meteorite rock crashing to earth, I mashed up interviews with the band, family, enemies and friends, added a little cultural flotsam and jetsam of the time - junk TV ads, music and You Tube grabs. Then cut that with classic British noir films Night In The City, Payroll and Robbery, to name a few, which give lethal insight into the hard image the band portrayed.

The Sex Pistols' and Joe Strummer's roles are well known, but Dr Feelgood played a vital role in creating the conditions for that heroic explosion during the cultural vacuum which existed immediately prior to Punk. Our history must be kept alive and this is a story I felt needed to be told.

Oil City is 100% pure below sea level, Canvey Island Noir.

## Short Synopsis

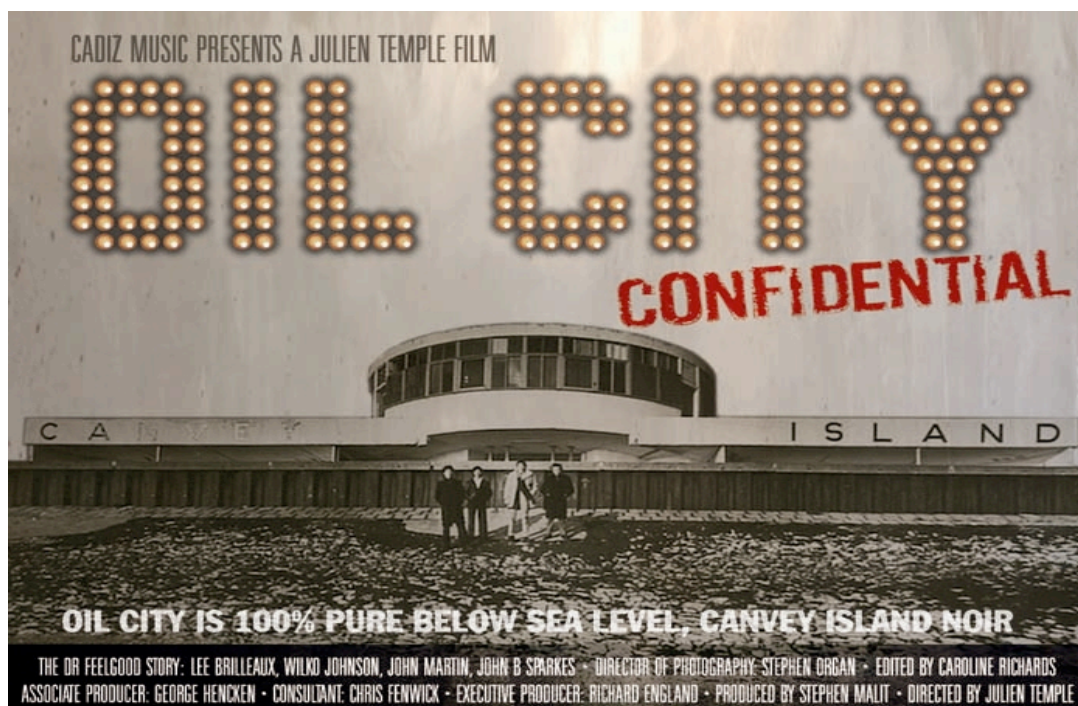
Julien Temple's **Oil City Confidential** is the last film in his trilogy on British music of the 1970s. It is a prequel to his landmark films about punk figureheads the Sex Pistols in **The Filth & The Fury** and Joe Strummer in **The Future Is Unwritten**.

Rather than being standard 'rockumentaries', Julien uses the music as a prism through which he examines the social and cultural conditions of the times. The films share his characteristic cinematic language - an irreverent and anarchic style of montage of archive and fictive footage which he pioneered in **The Great Rock & Roll Swindle**

The Sex Pistols' and Joe Strummer's roles are well known, but Dr Feelgood, who are the subject of **Oil City Confidential**, played a vital role in creating those conditions for that cultural explosion and is a story that is as yet untold.

**Oil City Confidential** is a film noir feature length documentary and about Dr Feelgood; it's the story of four men in cheap suits who crashed out of Canvey Island in the early '70s, sandpapered the face of rock'n'roll and left all that came before a burnt-out ruin, four estuarine John-the-Baptists to Johnny Rotten's anti-Christ.

Cannibalizing the visual flotsam and jetsam of our society, welding into an emotionally engaging and humorous whole, **Oil City Confidential** sets out to explore this unique time, place and social landscape - all of which was responsible for shaping the identity of the band and which, more than any other, defined the strange cultural vacuum which existed before the coming of punk rock.



## Long Synopsis

Oil City Confidential springs from the imaginary swamps of the Thames Delta, the bleak psycho-geography of Canvey Island - a submarine wasteland somewhere off the edge of Essex and addresses a part of English music heritage that has so far remained largely unexplored, a link between the Kinks and the Pistols.

Reclaimed mudflat and traditional unmarked burial ground of East End villains, Canvey is like nowhere else in England. The vast storage tanks and burning towers of its oil refineries loom above decaying holiday chalets and light up the underside of the clouds with a deep Miltonic glow.

Four boys, Lee, Wilko, Sparko & Figure, grew up on the island just after a Biblical flood devastated the island in 1953 and went on to put Canvey on the map and created a mythic version of their birthplace - Oil City - through the worldwide success of their songs.

Starting as a gang of childhood friends on the crumbling, flood ravished resort of Canvey, a Thames delta Island only accessible by a single swing bridge, boyhood fantasies are brought to life by their own amazing maps of their imagined lands.

In the woods they were listening to the the blues of Howling Wolf and Jonny Lee Hooker and started copying that music using any instruments they could lay their hands on. By the time they were 12 they had a professional Jug band, playing outside the Islands' pubs and drinking clubs (they were too young to enter) making the equivalent of a grown man's wage playing by the playing the blues in their very own delta.



With the grit and determination etched into the souls of Canveyites and inspired by the Shadows and Eddie Kidd and the Pirates, they graduated from the jug band touring Kent and Essex, into a fully electric teenage band in 1971, naming themselves after the Willie Perry song - Dr Feelgood.

At a time when popular music was dominated by the glitz of Sweet and Gary Glitter or drum solos courtesy of Yes and Genesis, the totally self taught and created Feelgoods took to the Essex pub rock circuit like armed raiders out of the bleak dead-end of Canvey Island, returning to their hideaway after each raid.

As Dr Feelgood played their first London gig, at the Islington Hope & Anchor in 1973, their look and sound were totally other. They were outsiders, they had haircuts, and suits that stuck out a mile amid a sea of velvet and loon pants.

Playing their own stripped-down form of R & B, they blew the scene apart with a blinding stage show, guitarist Wilko whizzing and skittering across the stage like a spider with a machine gun, singer Lee Brilleaux always the gentleman – but with a look that could kill at 20 paces - Figure and Sparko playing the hard men in the shadows.

They were no means pretty, and didn't try to be. With no fancy stage lights, no banks of amps, none of the showbiz glitz of their contemporaries, it was the incendiary energy between Lee and Wilko that stopped the audiences in their tracks – and this incendiary energy ultimately contributed to the band's demise.

Bookings flooded in and old Jug band member Chris Fenwick returned from acting school to become the manager. Soon they were off on never ending tours, honing their craft on adventures such as the 50 date "Speeding through Europe" tours of pubs and clubs, readying for the next attack.

They made the cover of the influential NME before they had a record deal.

Finally in 1974 they signed to United Artists and recording the songs they had played a thousand times was a piece of cake. Released against the current fad for stereo in "Glorious Mono" with a cover shot on Canvey, *Down By The Jetty* was an instant classic. Songs like "She does it right", "Roxette" and "All through the City" were fresh, new and exciting

Continuing the never ending transit van touring, now with support bands including Jools Holland, appearances on national TV were fitted in were they could and without hardly a day off, the next album was due for recording. Again they swiftly recorded an albums worth of songs gleamed from their well practiced live catalog.

This second album *Malpractice* was released in Mono, had numerous references to Canvey and featured a cover shot of the band on the Island, it contained the hits "Coming Back Home", "Riot in Cell Block 9" and "Back In The Night".

Through constantly touring they played to most of the musicians of the time and more importantly, countless young wannabees like Glen Matlock, the original Sex Pistol who wrote all their songs, the young Canvey singer Alison Moyet, and the late great Joe Strummer, who explains on film how he cut his hair off and changed his band after watching the Feelgoods in Ladbroke Grove in 1974.

United Artists was keen to exploit their new heroes and as the band were touring Europe for the next few months *Stupidity* a live album, was released and reached No 1 in the UK and across Europe, giving ever more radio and television exposure to the band.



At that time Clem Burke of Blondie, returned from a summer in London to host a homecoming party in Lower East Side New York - Down By The Jetty never left the turntable, they just played side A followed by side B, over and over to all of movers in the New York music scene.



All this success was noticed by the American labels and yet more live dates were arranged, followed by a bidding war between record companies. CBS won out and flew the band over for a showcase their first release in America in a small New York club to, the live album Malpractice.

Tour manager Jake Riveria (later to launch Stiff records with a loan from the band) got the unknown Ramones to open the show, their debut outside of CBGB's, and the place was packed with Lou Reed, Andy Warhol and the cream of the 1975 New York set.

However back at the Gramercy Park Hotel all was not going to plan. Wilko, the bands flawed genius, was alienated by the drinking lifestyle of the rest of the band - he preferred other types of social and recreation kicks - stared exhausted out of the window as the band enjoyed the whirl of constant touring.

The next album was already late and the band were scheduled enter the recording studio straight from New York. Wilko had a number of songs already written but was to be in conflict with his on stage partner Lee. Tension grew as both Wilco's lover and wife attended the session - Wilko snapped and left the band.

The incendiary energy that made Dr Feelgood so cathartically energetic after 5 years of non stop touring blew them apart. That, and the drugs. And the alcohol.

The stars of the film are the members of Dr Feelgood:

**Lee Brilleaux – Lead singer:** Sadly passed away, Lee was a life-long apostle for the Blues, he acted out GBH on stage over three decades until his untimely death in 1994. An Essex Jekyll and Hyde. Always the gentleman, but with a look that could maim at 20 paces.

**Wilko Johnson - Lead / Rhythm guitar:** Professor of medieval English, old Icelandic speaker and Johnny Kidd and the Pirates fanatic. He is now an astronomy obsessed recluse and natural candidate to succeed Patrick Moore on “The Sky at Night”, who stays at home and travels the universe on a giant computer screen. Occasionally leaves the house at dusk to play to devoted fans around the world.

**The Big Figure – Drummer:** As solid and enigmatic a presence as his name implies. The only one of the Feelgoods to have left Canvey, he now lives the life of a gourmand in France.

**Sparko – bass guitar: The joker of the band.** In the Feelgood’s heyday, he bestrode the stage in his Irish navvy wedding suit and dodgy stack-heels. Now works 9 – 5 as a maintenance man on Canvey Island making sure the Feelgood property portfolio doesn’t spring any leaks.

**Chris Fenwick - manager:** boyhood friend, pantomime star and manager of Dr Feelgood from the beginning. He still lives on Canvey, owner of Canvey’s only hotel, and is reviving his acting career started in his teens. He has just finished a 6-week tour as Badger in a production of Wind in The Willows. He continues to manage Dr Feelgood.

Contributors include: Family, friends and foes plus Joe Strummer, Jools Holland, Alison Moyet, Clem Burke, Andy Gill, Richard Hell, Will Birch, Nigel Kerr, Glen Matlock.

## Selected Crew

Cinematographer	Stephen Organ	<a href="http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3326667/">http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3326667/</a>
Archive Producer	Sam Dwyer	<a href="http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1583125/">http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1583125/</a>
Associate Producer	George Hencken	<a href="http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3329948/">http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3329948/</a>
Editor	Caroline Richards	<a href="http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2775167/">http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2775167/</a>
Executive Producer	Richard England	
Producer	Stephen Malit	<a href="http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0539750/">http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0539750/</a>
Director	Julien Temple	<a href="http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0854697/">http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0854697/</a>

