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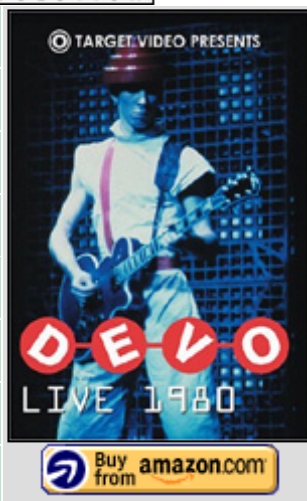
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MUSIC REVIEWS



artist:	DEVO
album:	Live 1980
format:	DualDisc
label:	Music Video Distributors
release year:	2005
performance:	7
sound:	3
reviewed by:	Bryan Dailey



Looking back 25 years later at DEVO, what sticks in my mind the most isn't the red spud energy hats or the legless white uniform space suits. It is the numbers of bands who have since driven down the alternative rock road that DEVO paved. Like Frank Zappa before them, DEVO took "weird" rock and turned it into something people would actually listen to on the radio. From legendary alt rockers like Oingo Boingo and the B-52's to modern-day punkers like Green Day and The Offspring, these groups all owe a little thanks to DEVO for having the guts to make quirky pop music and not be apologetic about it.

The closest thing to a direct modern copy of DEVO comes by way of the Aquabats, a group of zany ska rockers who dress up as superheroes and turn their live show into a live action comic book. They had their 15 minutes of fame with the minor hit "Superrad," but while watching this DEVO disc, I can't help but think back to seeing the Aquabats live.

There was no MTV yet at the time of this recording. To see bands perform live, you'd have to stay up late and catch them on shows like "Don Kirshner's Rock Concert" or "Saturday Night Live." Now that there are so many non-music-related TV shows on MTV and MTV2, you rarely ever get to see to see any live concert performances, let alone an entire show start to finish. This DualDisc contains a full-length concert video from the August 17, 1980 performance by DEVO at the Phoenix Theater in Petaluma, California. It has a Dolby Digital 5.1 mix on the DVD side, as well as some bonus concert footage, and the CD side has a 16-bit stereo version of the same concert.

DEVO wastes no time getting to the classic that everyone knows, "Whip It."

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At the time, it was just an up-and-coming hit that was starting to make waves at alternative rock radio, played by DJs like the legendary Rodney Bingenheimer at KROQ in Los Angeles. It is the standout song both sonically and musically on this disc, but this is to not say there aren't other gems in this loosely recorded, spontaneous live performance.

One of my personal favorite tracks is their loose interpretation of the Rolling Stones' hit song "Satisfaction." As DEVO dances around the stage in their robotic style, Mark Mothersbaugh, the consummate geek, sings Mick Jagger's lyrics in a way that is so utterly different than the Stones version that the less musically aware would never know it was a cover song. I personally have a hate/hate relationship with the Rolling Stones (hate their old songs/ hate their new ones), so to hear a completely different take on a Stones tune is something I welcome wholeheartedly.

The intro to the disc features a "Star Wars"-type scroll of text explaining that DEVO, short for devolution, the opposite of evolution, were created to battle the neo-conservative, religious oppression from the likes of the Reagan administration. Who knew DEVO was so political? Also, did they realize Reagan didn't take office until January '81 and this was recorded in 1980? But that's nitpicking now, isn't it?

This is by no means any kind of video reference disc. The picture quality is mediocre at best, as very shoddy equipment was used to record the show; the budget was obviously small. But the important thing is, someone was there to record it. It's grainy and dark, but you can see the signature DEVO clothes, the red hats, white suits and funky stage antics that Mothersbaugh and his cronies from Ohio dreamed up.

Nothing DEVO does is that spectacular from a musical standpoint and much of the songwriting sounds pretty simple, sophomoric even, by today's standards, but it was groundbreaking at the time. Cheesy pop music ballads had been all but perfected in the late '70s by bands like Air Supply, Bread and The Carpenters. DEVO was a big kick in the pants for pop music and a segue into New Wave, using tinges of both disco and punk rock in their sound. The concert contains 21 songs, most of which I was not that familiar with, other than their other hit "Girl U Want," though "Secret Agent Man" is a Johnny Rivers number you might know from many a spy movie. This disc is an interesting look back at DEVO in their raw prime that any fans of alternative rock should check out. Their show is as much a visual spectacle, with the costume changes and stage antics, as it is a sonic assault on the The Man and The Establishment.

Sound

Let me come right out and tell you: this disc does not sound very good. It is an old recording and the mix is sporadic. The sequenced keyboard parts at some points are buried in the mix and at others they come leaping out of the soundstage so much they obliterate the vocals. It's akin to being at a garage band practice and moving towards the mike. It seems as if the producers were working with tracks that were already mixed down to stereo, or at least had groups of premixed tracks so they couldn't control the relative volumes of certain groups of instruments. There is some separation in the rears on the 5.1 DVD Dolby Digital mix, but nothing like the dedicated DVD-Audio mixes that modern recordings feature. But the poor audio quality doesn't break the disc – think of this as more of a history lesson, a fascinating, quirky yet valuable window into the past.



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