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Wednesday, 31 August 2005

Devo - Live 1980

Written by Chris Manson



Those of us who know them only from videos, albums, and appearances on late night television will be surprised to see Devo rocking hard on Live 1980. By the time this concert is over, Mark Mothersbaugh has worked himself into a frenzy, delivering a "Gut Feeling/Slap Your Mammy" that is almost punk in its ferociousness. And for all their robotic gestures and studio perfection—not to mention a certain amount of wimpiness--Devo had an honest-to-gosh drummer and a noisy guitar player.

Visually, this isn't the impeccably shot and edited performance video their great concept clips would suggest. Still, this 75-minute show offers an entertaining and occasionally revelatory look at some true new-wave (no-wave?) originals at the peak of their popularity.

Many of your favorites are here. I still get a kick out of "Smart Patrol/Mr. DNA." Always good for a laugh in its studio version, the concert rendition benefits from a lyric change--"altruistic pervert" becomes "altruistic asshole." Each selection begins with the title superimposed, just in case you '80s kids want to pretend you don't remember. The Akron, Ohio band recorded a couple of good albums after Freedom of Choice (from which most of this repertoire is drawn, including their sole top-20 hit "Whip It"), so this isn't quite an overview. Fans and ex-fans--I stopped listening after their godawful cover of "Are You Experienced" from 1984's Shout--will be sufficiently entertained, while newcomers are advised to grab a copy of Devo's Greatest Hits CD.

The DVD is presented in both stereo and 5.1 surround, with a couple of "alternate" mixes that sound a little bass-heavy. Still, it's way above average considering the primitive technology available 25 years ago. Unfortunately, there are no credits, and I swear I can't recall the other band members' names. The bonus tracks—two live performances by Devo's alter ego, "Dove the Band of Love"—are pleasing, and a promo clip for a Japanese concert DVD features a considerably older (but still energetic) incarnation of the spud boys.



Honorable Mentions



Epic Soundtracks
Good Things



Johnathan Rice
Trouble Is Real



Jacqui Naylor
Live East/West: Birdland/Yoshi's



The Love Hall
Tryst
Songs of Misfortune



Bosque Brown
Plays Mara Lee Miller



Johnny Cash
Live at Montreux 1994



Alanis Morissette
Jagged Little Pill Acoustic



An Angle
We Can Breathe Under Alcohol



The CD side of this DualDisc is another story. Without the visuals, the kooky costumes, and the front man bouncing all over the stage, the music is sloppy at best and ponderous at worst. In other words, useless except as a beer coaster.

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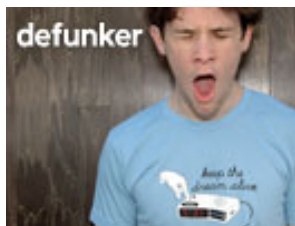


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