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The New York Dolls: All Dolled Up and Devo: Live 1980



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This month England's Wienerworld serve up a couple of music DVDs that feature two American acts whose names loom large in the history of rock. **The New York Dolls: All Dolled Up** is a new feature length documentary about the New York-based proto-punks. This show features some unique period performances and interviews that were shot on video by Bob Gruen and Nadya Beck. **Devo: Live 1980** finds the new wave art-rockers live in concert just as their hit *Whip It* was transforming them into a household name.



The New York Dolls: All Dolled Up

[Wienerworld](#)
 2005 / Black & White / 4:3 / 96 m.
 Starring David Johansen, Arthur Kane, Jerry Nolan, Sylvain Sylvain, Johnny Thunders, Peter Jordan, Wolfman Jack, Don Steele,

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Joel Siegel, Tony Hernandez

Cinematography Bob Gruen and Nadya Beck

Film Editor JoLynn Garnes

Original Music The New York Dolls

Produced by Bob Gruen and Rick Fuller

Written and Directed by Bob Gruen and Nadya Beck

Synopsis:

Rock photographer Bob Gruen was working with the Elephant's Memory (the New York hippie-rock outfit that backed John Lennon on his *Some Time in New York City* album) when their manager suggested that Gruen should check out one of his other acts. The act in question were the visually arresting New York Dolls (David Johansen, Arthur Kane, Jerry Nolan, Sylvain Sylvain and Johnny Thunders) and Gruen went on to become the band's photographer-in-chief. But Gruen also happened to own one of the very first portable video camera/recorder units and he and his wife Nadya Beck dutifully archived around forty hours' worth of footage of the Dolls over a three year period. Shot in black and white, it's this footage from the early 1970s that Gruen has used to construct **The New York Dolls: All Dolled Up**, a documentary that charts a pivotal moment in the history of rock. As such, you don't really have to be a fan of the band to enjoy this fascinating show: I was only familiar with a handful of the group's songs, along with their performance on the [Old Grey Whistle Test](#) DVD, but I found this documentary really engrossing.

Much has been written about how influential the New York Dolls were and the aural and visual evidence to support such assertions is presented right here. A local TV channel's 'six o'clock news report' finds a news reader accurately describing the band as a cross between the Rolling Stones and Alice Cooper: singer David Johansen is revealed to be a Mick Jagger look-alike who can out-camp Jagger while the band are seen sporting the kind of loosely feminine attire associated with the original Alice Cooper Group. But rather than being mere copyists, the Dolls are seen to take these elements and fashion them into something new: the band's image and sound does



Columns



evolve over the course of the documentary and it becomes easy to appreciate just how much the band's visual look influenced British glam rock, American glam metal, British punk rock and American punk rock/new wave. On a musical note, the performances here set the band up as precursors to a variety of later punk, new wave and heavy metal/glam metal acts too. The early '70s scene that the band generated in New York eventually gave birth to the Ramones, Blondie, Talking Heads, et al while the band's influence on British acts like the Sex Pistols and the Clash is clearly evident.



Having just one camera at their disposal meant that Gruen and Beck's options were somewhat limited when filming the band on stage and most of the live footage here is shot from one angle only. However, the tripod mounted camera is always well placed and some subtle but effective panning and zooming gets the job done in a pretty impressive manner. Fact is, there is so much going on onstage in terms of wacked-out clothing and crazy and camp rock 'n' roll posturing that worrying about camera angles and/or the lack of edit driven montages is the last thing on the viewer's mind. They may not have been the best musicians in the world but the Dolls' earnest and enthusiastic performances really do draw the viewer in. These performances do amount to an abrasive sonic assault at times but whether they're offering heavy metal cover versions of old blues and R&B numbers or presenting their own proto-punk sounding compositions, the Dolls remain an act that demand and keep the viewer's attention. The live performances here are interspersed with a variety of interview and actuality footage and much of this footage finds the video camera being used in an effective hand-held capacity.

The basic narrative arc of the documentary finds the Dolls going down a storm at the Kenny's Castaways and Max's Kansas City venues in New York before taking a tour of the West Coast to promote their debut album. Gruen and Beck are on hand to film the band enjoying a record company-financed limousine ride to the airport and the subsequently bemused and shocked reactions of the members of the public that the band encounter as they wait for their plane. Coverage of the Dolls experiencing sound check problems at the Whiskey a Go Go, shopping in a ladies' underwear store, taking in the Los Angeles night life, etc, etc, is presented here along with live footage from the Whiskey a Go Go shows. Performances at the Matrix in San Francisco and footage of the band nearly being ejected from a late night eatery are followed by a return to LA for an

appearance on *The Real Don Steele Show*. Roadie Peter Jordan stands in for bassist Arthur Kane during the West Coast shows because Arthur had an injured hand. At the San Francisco shows, Kane is on stage simply dancing and drinking while the band performs but he manages to play bass for the Don Steele showcase. Back in New York, the Dolls cause a riot when they headline a fancy dress Halloween party at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel's Grand Ballroom.

The picture quality of this release is near enough excellent. Most of the footage here is remarkably sharp and detailed given its age and the limitations of the period video technology. A small number of sequences are a little on the fuzzy side and a handful of sequences feature video drop-outs and such but, given the age and the rarity of this footage, it seems churlish to even mention these minor shortcomings. Sound quality on the live performances is near enough excellent too. The Dolls' raucous sound has been perfectly captured here for the most part. Some of the interview/actuality footage features a less-distinct sound quality but this is again connected to the technical limitations of Gruen's period equipment.

This release boasts a number of good quality extra features. One section of the disc allows twelve full live performances to be accessed while another section features Bob Gruen being interviewed by Dick Manitoba. A photo gallery runs for a staggering 53 minutes and Gruen provides a commentary track which he uses to explain the history and personal significance of every photograph. Gruen also offers some fascinating reminiscences here. The documentary itself is supported by commentary tracks from Gruen and the two surviving members of the New York Dolls, David Johansen and Sylvain Sylvain. All in all, this should prove to be a surprisingly entertaining and important release for anybody who has an interest in the history of popular music.



Devo: Live 1980

[Wienerworld](#)

1980 / Colour / 4:3 / 75 m.

Starring Bob Casale, Gerald V. Casale, Bob

Mothersbaugh,
Mark
Mothersbaugh,
Alan Myers
Cinematography Joe
Reis
Film Editors Mike
Varga and Geoff
Falasca
Original Music Devo
Produced by Joe Reis

Directed by Joe Reis

Synopsis:

The only Devo tracks that I'm really familiar with are the band's monster hit *Whip It* and their slightly less well-known cover of *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. *Whip It* was a world-wide smash that soon attained classic status and its ubiquitous promo-video made for intriguing viewing: featuring the band clad in their trademark energy dome hats and wacked-out outfits, and seemingly set within a stylized picture of picket-fenced suburban bliss, the video projected a weird David Lynch-like impression that something very strange was happening in small town America. That same disturbing impression surfaces on a number of occasions during the course of the live concert presented on this DVD. The show was recorded in Petaluma while the band (Bob Casale, Gerald V. Casale, Bob Mothersbaugh, Mark Mothersbaugh and Alan Myers) were promoting their *Freedom of Choice* album and the unusually angular, spiky and sub-avant-garde nature of the songs performed here ultimately means that Devo's music isn't as immediate or as accessible as that of, say, the New York Dolls. That said, the concert presented on this DVD still remains a reasonably interesting experience.

The band had a reputation for delivering fairly crazed live performances and there's plenty of evidence to support that reputation here. The first thing the viewer notices is the unusual way that the stage has been arranged: the drums are to the front left of the stage while a keyboard installation acts as a balance at the front right of the stage. The rear of the stage is occupied by a back-line which consists of a guitarist and two more keyboard installations. Each band member moves into the vacant space left in the centre of the stage when it's their turn to deliver a song's lead vocals and they retreat back to their starting position at the song's end. For the first part

of the show, the band sport their energy dome headgear and matching overalls and the space in the centre of the stage is home to plenty of frenetic action and sub psycho-drama-like shenanigans. But the viewer's attention rarely rests on the stage's centre for long: it seems that nobody in this band can keep still and each band member continually throws crazy shapes and indulges in tightly choreographed but eccentric dance routines while they play. Five giant columns of light are present behind each band member and these allow weird silhouette effects to be produced.

A pause in the proceedings sees the band changing into matching black t-shirts and shorts, along with matching red socks and knee pads. A raised platform is installed at the back of the stage and the light columns are removed and replaced with a backdrop that allows bizarre lighting effects to be projected upon it. The two rear keyboards are dispensed with in favour of a second guitar and a bass guitar and the three back line musicians take their place on the raised platform. The songs become less electronic and more rock-like here but the band's approach remains quite spiky and sub-avant-garde. At one point the band slip into black plastic ponchos that each have a giant luminous letter D, E, V or O on the front. For the show's finale a very disturbing, seemingly *Eraserhead*-inspired, short film is projected onto the backdrop before an equally disturbing piece of rock theatre unfolds on stage. The show ends with footage of the band solemnly saluting the *Devo Corporate Anthem*.

This is a pretty wild show that must have been physically demanding for the band. But although there's a lot of frenetic physical activity involved, the band turn in a tight musical performance. Effective use of stage lights and costumes help to keep the show interesting too. One or two songs sound like they might have controversial lyrical content but I'm guessing that Devo were the kind of Dada-esque, art-rock-types that might purposefully set out to provoke both thought and outrage in equal measure: kind of straddling the dividing line between the progressive and the puerile. The show itself is nicely captured from a number of interesting angles: close-ups, medium shots and long shots are all employed and edited together in a largely effective manner.

Given the show's age, the picture quality here is pretty much excellent. No complaints about the

sound quality for a show of this vintage either. Extras include two live songs by the band posing as Dove - The Band of Love and a trailer for another live DVD, *Devo Live in the Land of the Rising Sun*. This is a flipper disc of sorts - the flip side of the disc is a CD that features an audio only presentation of the same concert.

On a scale of Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor,
The New York Dolls: All Dolled Up rates:

Movie: Excellent -

Video: Excellent -

Sound: Excellent -

Supplements: 16 page photo booklet, full performances of twelve songs, Bob Gruen photo gallery with commentary, Bob Gruen interview and commentary tracks from Bob Gruen, David Johansen and Sylvain Sylvain

Devo: Live 1980 rates:

Movie: Good

Video: Excellent -

Sound: Excellent -

Supplements: Two live tracks by Dove - The Band of Love and a trailer

Packaging: Separate releases in Keep cases

Reviewed: March 16, 2006

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