



All Dolled Up: A New York Dolls Story (Bob Gruen and Nadya Beck, USA 2005, 120mins)

In a career that has spanned over 30 years, renowned rock photographer Bob Gruen shot some of the most iconic images of some of the most legendary and commercially successful musicians and rock bands of the 1970's. Among the glittering constellation of superstars spilling out of his awe-inspiring portfolio were everyone from Bob Dylan and John Lennon to the Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen. But Gruen also focused his lens on the bands that graced the smaller and grittier stages of New York's CBGBs and Max's Kansas City – bands that would later become legendary in their own right, not least among which were the New York Dolls, that is, David Johansen (vocals), Johnny Thunders (guitar), Sylvain Sylvain (guitar), Arthur Kane (bass), and Billy Murcia (drums) who, with their eclectic blend of glam, girlie-pop, and blues-inspired sound inspired countless musicians and etched a significant contribution to the emerging punk and new wave scenes. Despite achieving only limited success during their relatively brief collaboration, they have recently come to be hailed as a pioneering group who would become direct influences on musicians such as Morrissey, and bands from the Sex Pistols and the Clash to Motley Crue and Guns 'n' Roses.

In the very early 1970's, Bob Gruen got hold of an early model video recorder and began to use it to film the bands he was photographing and socialising with at the time. One of his earliest subjects was the New York Dolls (whom Gruen met in 1972), and he and his then wife, Nadya Beck, shot over forty hours of footage of the Dolls during their heyday. All Dolled Up is the culmination of that experience.

The film is not so much a documentary as it is a compilation of the numerous early performances he shot of the Dolls in clubs ranging from Max's and Kenny's Castaways in New York to the Whisky A Go-Go in LA. The documentary elements are, in effect, the interview by Handsome Dick Manitoba (of Dictators notoriety) and the commentary tracks by David Johansen, Sylvain Sylvain and Bob Gruen. Much of the footage is black/white, and, with the primitive sound capability of early video coupled with the equally primitive audio effects in the clubs where he filmed the band, there is a raw, authentic quality to the film. Yet, despite capturing the essence of the time, complete with footage of the performances, interviews and backstage banter, the film feels curiously static; no one element stands out from the next, and aside from some colour episodes interjected between the black and white, there is little movement or cadence. Ultimately you come away with the feeling that Gruen's true forte lies with still photography, where, in utter contrast to his film work, his subjects really come to life.

Still, All Dolled Up is an indispensable source for any Dolls fan and for anyone with any interest in one of the most important periods in musical history of all time.

Bonus material:

- Full performances of 12 songs
- Deluxe 16-page photo booklet
- Extensive Bob Gruen photo gallery with narrative
- Interview with Bob Gruen by Handsome Dick Manitoba
- Commentary tracks by David Johansen, Sylvain Sylvain and Bob Gruen

Review by Erica Rosen