

MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

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people, including the film's audiences don't understand why Kane became a Mormon. Most people are too polite to say anything about it so Johansen is playing the necessary role of being the one to make fun of his religion to his face. So they compromised and removed a bit where he says what the only commandment he hasn't broken is. That way people would think Johansen may have murdered someone. (www.onepotatoproductions.com/NewYorkDoll/index.html)

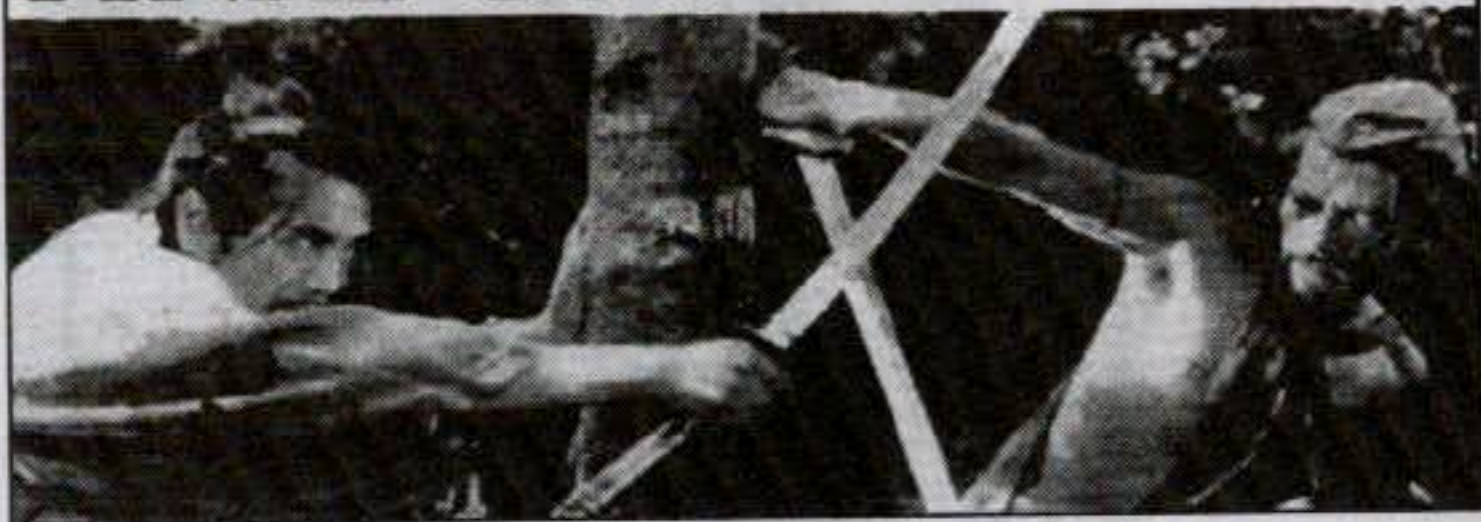
A lot of people complained that *New York Doll* didn't have enough live footage of the band. I honestly didn't notice since the film was so engrossing. Luckily there is also a live documentary film about the New York Dolls called *All Dolled Up*. It is available on DVD for those of you who will be complaining because you won't be able to see the previously mentioned films.

Bob Gruen and his ex-wife Nadya Beck filmed over 40 hours of footage of the New York Dolls. At least, that's what the DVD case says, but listening to Gruen's commentary, he admits that Beck is the one who shot most of the video. Since Gruen is a photographer, he was busy taking still pictures.

If you ever want to see what the Dolls were like on stage and off, *All Dolled Up* is the film for you. Gruen and Beck film the New York Dolls all over New York and follow them when they go to Los Angeles and San Francisco. Watching the band go to the airport and board an airplane is just one of the many amazing scenes you get to witness. I like to notice all the small details like while in the limo on the way to the airport Arthur Kane and Sylvain Sylvain drink Pabst while the others drink Colt 45. Hmmm, interesting.

It was also cool seeing the footage at Rodney's English Disco. I always thought the place was smaller. There is a piece on the Dolls from a New York newscast done by Joel Siegel who I know as the guy who always says "the feel good film of the year" in movie ads. Someone backstage in Los Angeles asks Johansen if they are going to San Francisco next. When, he says yes, she tells him that she doesn't like San Francisco. "People are too serious there." That got a big laugh. (www.newyorkdollsdvd.com)

FINAL CUT BY STEVEN SPINALI



ROCK'N'ROLL BABYLON

New York Doll is less a rock'n'roll history than a bittersweet swan song to the band's unlikeliest hero. As a member of the Dolls, Arthur "Killer" Kane was remembered primarily for his well-placed bass lines, but as other members went on greater fortune (or early death, as fate had it), Kane found himself with a series of obscure bands leaving behind the detritus of failure. What's to be done if you're a dedicated rocker with nowhere to play?

Kane was fully aware of the Dolls' deep influence on other bands, and perceived rock'n'roll in almost archetypal terms. In fact, he even saw something mythical in his relationship to the band's origins; a latter-day King Arthur, he saw his guitar as a kind of Excalibur, a weapon in the arsenal to save rock'n'roll from encroaching mediocrities like Jethro Tull and ELO.

Kane was increasingly bitter over the unfairness of it all. What brought it all to a head was seeing front-man David Johansen playing a bit part as a cabby in a Bill Murray movie. Arthur Kane jumped out of a third-floor window, hitting bottom on a number of levels at once.

as Kane's official groupies, even though they hadn't heard a note of the Dolls' music.

New York Doll is notable as much for its strong filmmaking as for its uncanny ability to be in the right place at the right time. When former Smiths' vocalist Morrissey calls Kane about a New York Dolls reunion, none of them could know that the taciturn bassist would succumb to leukemia within the year. The omnipresent camera runs as Kane makes a curious transformation from a cloistered Mormon librarian to wizened rocker, though he frequently seems out of place in his revived role. Then again, he gives the general impression of being out of place in the world—unlike his more flamboyant group members. On stage, fellow survivors David Johansen and Sylv Sylvain dub him "the last great rock'n'roll statue."

Living in a cheap one-room apartment, Kane gets one of his guitars out of the pawnshop. (He'd been paying monthly fees to the shop for years, when for a little bit more money, he could have simply claimed the instrument; the idea to redeem them never seem to have crossed his mind.) And now he has to prepare himself for that reunion, and a chance to meet Johansen and Sylv Sylvain again after more than 20 years. With death having claimed much of the band, Kane saw it as a means to mend old bridges...and maybe recapture some past glory.

As you might have already guessed, *New York Doll* is hardly your preferred source for a definitive band history; some may even feel annoyed on its concentration on Kane's post-conversion life. But life clearly had more than its share of pathos, and offers an oblique light on a rocker who followed a different path. Commentary by Chrissie Hynde, Tony Jones of Generation X, Bob Geldof, and other rock luminaries give historical weight to the documentary. Kane's life comes off as a vain grasp for a modest bit of fame.

New York Doll is more a traditional documentary in form, but *All Dolled Up* is closer to a concert film.

When it comes to proto-punk, I've always been more a Stooges than Dolls fan. But I think it can be argued that the Dolls had an even stronger influence on later punk rock. Before the Ramones were a band, they were electrified by NY's premier rockers, and for a short time even flitted with glam fashion before adopting their classic torn Levi's and leather jacket look.

While da Boys would soon eclipse both bands in output and influence, the New York Dolls were a unique and aggressive presence during their short existence. Thankfully, photographer Bob Gruen and Nadya, his wife, were smart enough to film live footage of the band, capturing the band during their peak. Sound quality varies, but somehow it doesn't really matter with a band like the Dolls.

Gruen followed the band on tour, documenting performances at famous clubs like Max's Kansas City and the Whisky-A-Go-Go (as well as well as a few other smaller, less famous venues). Forty hours of live footage was whittled down to the almost two hours in this film.

The Dolls' raucous, defiant style clearly set the basic sound for bands like the MC5 and Sex Pistols—a fact that becomes more obvious the longer you listen. Their glam trappings would remain a part of rock'n'roll, at least on the fringe, and elements of their garage-y sound can still be heard.

After seeing *All Dolled Up*, you may end up feeling that your old Dolls LPs don't quite represent the band in their full glory. Personally, I never had a chance to see them live; but when you hear a tune like "Personality Crisis" played by a bunch of men in drag and makeup, their statement suddenly has a whole lot more punch.

(SF fans were luckier in that they had the Outrageous Beauty Pageant, a Friday night act that preceded the nightly bill of punk bands. Musically, it wasn't very good, but their Dolls-ish image and desire to shock gave you insight into the New York Dolls' aesthetic of rock'n'roll rebellion—even to the point of playing their songs. Similarly, the New York Dolls were the image of rock's most isolated outcasts.)