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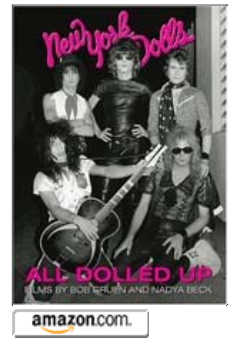
NEW YORK DOLLS

All Dolled Up [DVD]
 (Music Video Distributors)

Rating: 6
 US release date: 6 December 2005
 UK release date: 30 January 2006

by **Charlotte Robinson**

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Bob Gruen is to rock photography what the Beatles are to rock music, one of the best, a cornerstone artist in the field. While Gruen shot some of the most commercially successful rock musicians in the '70s, like John Lennon, Led Zeppelin, and the Rolling Stones, he was also open-minded enough to see something in the scruffy bands playing CBGB and Max's Kansas City in New York, many of whom went on to become legends in their own right. Less well known is the fact that Gruen owned a very early model video recorder and used it to film the bands he was socializing with and photographing. One of his earliest subjects was the New York Dolls, whom Gruen met in 1972. Gruen and then-wife Nadya Beck logged over 40 hours of film of the Dolls, and from this footage comes the new documentary *All Dolled Up*.

The Dolls have achieved legendary status despite limited success during their time together. After becoming a sensation in their native New York, David Johansen (vocals), Johnny Thunders (guitar), Sylvain Sylvain (guitar), Arthur Kane (bass), and Billy Murcia (drums) were juggling offers from several record labels when tragedy struck in 1972. During their first trip to England, where they opened for the Rod Stewart-led Faces, Murcia died after a drug overdose. It could have meant the end of the band, and it did somewhat curb the industry's enthusiasm for them, but the Dolls soldiered on, replacing Murcia with Jerry Nolan. They eventually inked a deal with Mercury Records and recorded two albums for the label, a 1973 eponymous debut, and 1974's *Too Much Too Soon*. Neither sold well, and many have complained that the albums didn't capture the raw energy of the band's live performances.

The Dolls did make their mark, though, inspiring countless musicians and setting the stage for punk and new wave with their blend of girl-group, glam, and blues influences. Unfortunately, before they had time to enjoy any of the rewards that might have come their way, the Dolls self-destructed. Kane became an alcoholic, Thunders and Nolan developed serious heroin habits (both died in the early '90s), and Sylvain and Johansen got fed up with the challenges of playing with junkies. They went their separate ways in 1975. The last couple of years have seen a renewal of interest in the Dolls. Johansen, Sylvain, and Kane reunited for 2004's *Meltdown Festival* at the behest of Morrissey. The show was recorded and released as a CD and DVD, and although Kane died of leukemia shortly after the reunion, Johansen and Sylvain embarked on a tour under the Dolls' name. This year, Kane was the subject of the acclaimed documentary *New York Doll*, and a live show he, Thunders, and Nolan did in 1987 was released as the DVD *You Can't Put Your Arms Around a Memory*.

For those who aren't already familiar with the Dolls, this back story will be necessary because *All Dolled Up* does not cover the band's history. Rather, the documentary is more akin to historical documents like *Let It Be* or *Gimme Shelter*, providing a glimpse inside a band's life at a particular moment in time. The uninitiated

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RATINGS KEY

10 - The Best of the Best. Transcendent, essentially perfect, important.
9 - Very Nearly Perfect. A superlative example of music of any form, a pinnacle of an artist's achievement.
8 - Excellent. Among the best work of the given artist, or among the best in the given genre.
7 - Damn Good. Stands out and is definitely worth purchasing, though it has some flaws.

6 - Good. Enjoyable and should be of interest to fans of the artist or genre, but has specific weaknesses.

5 - Average. Decent, but will probably appeal to fans of the artist the most.

4 - Unexceptional. Truly a mixed bag, with some highlights, but not enough to distinguish itself from similar material.

3 - Weak. Bland, with little to distinguish it or recommend it, even to fans of their particular artist or genre.

2 - Seriously Flawed. Contains major flaws which significantly limit appreciation.

1 - Terrible. So poorly written / performed / produced that it is an embarrassment to the genre and the artist.

may wonder: Who's the blond constantly making out with Thunders? Why is Arthur Kane's hand in a cast? Why are the Dolls dressed as gangsters in the opening and closing scenes? It is only by viewing the bonus materials on the disc, including an interview with Gruen conducted by the Dictators' Handsome Dick Manitoba, commentaries with Johansen and Sylvain, and a Gruen-narrated photo gallery, that you get a clear idea of what you are watching.

In a nutshell, Gruen filmed the Dolls at clubs in their hometown of New York City, then accompanied them to dates in Los Angeles and San Francisco, where they played in clubs and on TV shows, partied at DJ Rodney Bingenheimer's short-lived English disco, shopped at Frederick's of Hollywood, hung out with groupies, and generally acted the part of rock stars. Largely devoid of context as it is, this footage probably won't be of interest to anyone who isn't already a fan of the Dolls, but to them this DVD will be indispensable.

There are comical scenes like the backstage party that is threatened when someone yells, "Put out your pot!" because he saw someone at the door with a gun who "didn't look like one of us". We see Johansen mock a stoned wannabe groupie when she tells him he's her "favorite": "I just heard you tell Arthur he's your favorite!" Gruen and Johansen face off in a game of Pong. Journalist Lisa Robinson interviews Johansen as he lounges by the hotel pool. There's an oddly touching scene in which Thunders' family says goodbye to him at the airport. Watching the New York Dolls at sound checks, backstage, in cars, at airports and photo shoots, we see that much of the day-to-day existence of a working band is dull and lonely.

All the same, the Dolls inject life into most of the situations in which they find themselves. Gruen cleverly shows not only the Dolls, but others' reactions to them. While their music and androgynous looks seem tame by today's standards, the Dolls were outrageous for their day, as Gruen's footage reminds us. His shots of the horrified faces of middle-aged, polyester-clad women as they set eyes on the Dolls are priceless, as is the inclusion of news stories about the band, particularly one in which a clueless Joel Siegel calls them "a cross between the Rolling Stones and Alice Cooper". Later, a middle-aged man who saw the piece introduces himself to Jerry Nolan at the airport and is shocked to find that the laidback drummer is not "angry" like the newsman said.

Although it is often entertaining, with no linear structure and a running time of 95 minutes, the main program of *All Dolled Up* will only be essential viewing to Doll diehards. Still, the bonus materials, especially the 12 live tracks included in their entirety, provide another reason to recommend the disc. Filmed at various clubs in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, the live footage proves what many have said along: you had to see the Dolls live to really understand their importance. Check out the exuberant performance of "Pills" at the infamous Club 82 "drag show" and a blistering take on "Jet Boy" at the Whisky a Go Go and you'll find the band's magic hard to deny.

— 6 January 2006

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Kate Bush
Bush Chemists
Camping 2
Johnny Cash
Rosanne Cash
Cave
Chamillionaire
The Chap
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Clapan
The Clientele
Clor
Constantines
The Crimea
Danger Doom
Diana Darby
The Darkness
The Dead Science
The Deadly Snakes
Deep Purple
Deerhoof
Digable Planets
Stephen Duffy
Early Man
El Presidente
Ennem
The Ex
The Fall
Faunts
Floetry
Jason Forrest
Franz Ferdinand
Friends of Dean
Martinez
Bill Frisell
Delia Gonzalez & Gavin Russom
Kevin Gordon
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