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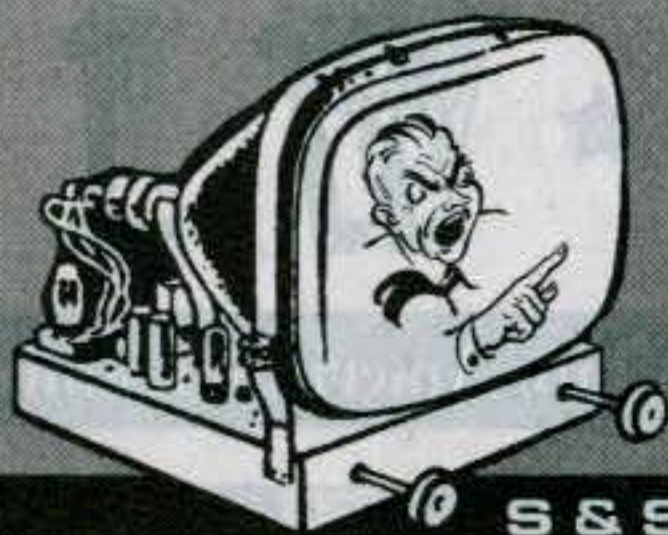
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## New York Dolls: All Dolled Up

[MVD]

### New York Doll

[Visual Entertainment]

Entertainment correspondent Joel Siegel, in a vintage clip, reporting for a local TV news broadcast in New York City:

"The music is rough, not polished. The lyrics are shouted, not sung. It's always belligerent, hostile and deafeningly loud."

On the basis of that quote, one might surmise that Siegel, looking like Gene Shalit's younger brother, was reporting on the mid-'70s punk rock explosion in England. But the year was 1972 and Siegel (the clip is included in the DVD *All Dolled Up*) was describing a fresh downtown phenomenon playing at Max's Kansas City: hometown boys The New York Dolls.

As longtime fan Morrissey points out during an interview included as a bonus feature in *New York Doll*, the Dolls — given their drug problems, deaths, limited recorded output, lack of commercial success and premature breakup — could be the unluckiest *greatest band* in history. Perhaps the only group to inspire more dysfunctional imitators and instigators while recording less music was The Sex Pistols, the centerpiece of the mid-'70s British punk explosion, who of course were directly influenced by the Dolls, McLaren even managing the Dolls in their crumbling final months prior to his conceiving the Pistols.

Even the Dolls' triumphant, if incomplete, return in 2004 proved bittersweet — founding bassist Arthur Kane passed away mere weeks after a well-received reunion performance with the band.

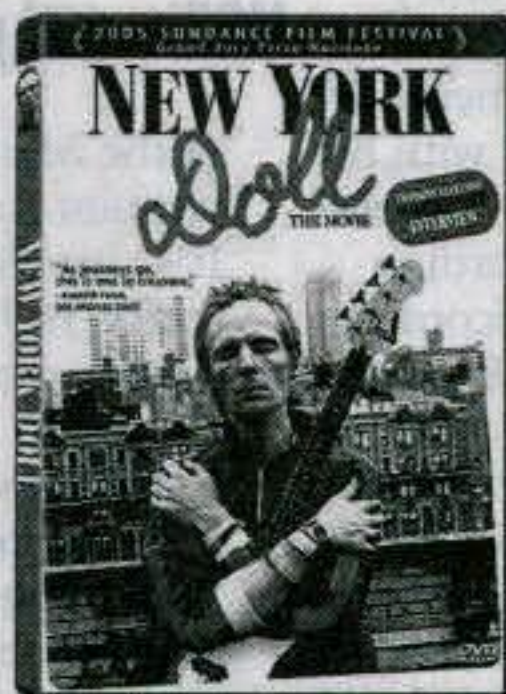
Still, they carry on. And with the release of the surprisingly strong new set, titled *One Day It Will Please Us To Remember Even This*, from the revived group anchored by surviving members David Johansen and Sylvain Sylvain, it seems like a good time to examine a pair of recent DVD's concerning New York's trashiest gutter rockers.

Photographer Bob Gruen got turned on

to the Dolls close a year into their existence, and subsequently he and his wife, Nadya Beck, shot some 40 hours of black & white video footage of the group over the next three years. Edited down into a somewhat coherent document, these previously unseen tapes comprise the priceless *All Dolled Up*.

In between some pretty incredible (if low budget and obviously amateur) footage of live Dolls performances from clubs in New York, LA and San Francisco, we're treated to informal interviews, boozing 'n' carousing, hair-teasing, all manner of backstage tomfoolery, and just your all-purpose goofin' around. See, that's one thing Siegel got wrong — the Dolls weren't hostile. They just wanted to have a good time. *All* of the time. Bands hardly ever get away with this sort of behavior anymore without it coming off as obviously forced, to the point of parody, but the Dolls' inherent silliness and genuine affection for each other shine through in this footage. And while the music was in fact deafening, it was at its core just your basic revved up, Stones-influenced, blues-based rock 'n' roll. But as always, the key is *what you do with what you've got*, and the New York Dolls did a lot in a short time.

So yeah, it's a hoot to go back in time and be there as the Dolls freak out the old folks in an airport, check out the lingerie selection at Frederick's of Hollywood, cruise the New York streets dressed as gangsters atop a VW, take over Rodney Bingenheimer's glitter-rock disco, wreck a Halloween ball at the Waldorf Astoria in LA and drunkenly disrupt a swanky Bay Area restaurant. And the live clips — also included in full-length versions as a bonus feature — only reiterate what people who were there have always told us: The New York Dolls were (and remain, I can attest, having caught a show a couple years' back) one of rock 'n' roll's greatest live spectacles. An interview with Gruen by Handsome Dick Manitoba, and commentaries by Gruen, Sylvain and Johansen, are among other added features.



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## O'Connor

FROM P31 → on a couple of songs I e-mailed him and asked if he'd be interested and if he might be visiting New York the next few months. He wrote back and said 'I'll be in NY this weekend, let's go.' I picked him up, brought him to the studio, played him four songs and he picked two." Yo La Tengo's James McNew, who O'Connor knows from sharing bills with his side project Dump, plays bass on virtually the entire record with his usual blend of understated charm and glorious buzz.

**"I think traveling brings out the best in me - it's always been good for writing."**

O'Connor opened her EARL set with two brand new songs every bit *Mountain's* equals, not that the modest crowd could be expected to distinguish them from tracks of a not-yet released album. "I get bored with my older material pretty quickly,"

she admits, perhaps indirectly explaining why she bypassed "Sister," which seems poised to become a calling card. She's never undertaken a heavy touring regimen but welcomes that becoming her life for the next year. "I think traveling brings out the best in me - it's always been good for writing." O'Connor quickly offers Dylan as a staple of the van playlist, then adds Smog and Destroyer as contemporary faves - there's a logical connection, as all devote as much attention to lyrical color as to musical light.

O'Connor is not buying my premise that her low-key style is an outlier for the Matador roster, responding by rattling off a list of cohorts. "Well, there's Laura Cantrell, although I'm not as twangy. I don't think I'm that far removed from what Yo La Tengo or the New Pornographers are doing." Then, after pausing for effect, "And after all, they did used to have Liz Phair," she reminds me with a sly grin. Touché. ☺

*Jennifer will sound nothing like Liz Phair at the Georgia Theater in Athens on Sept. 28.*

## Every Pixel Tells A Story

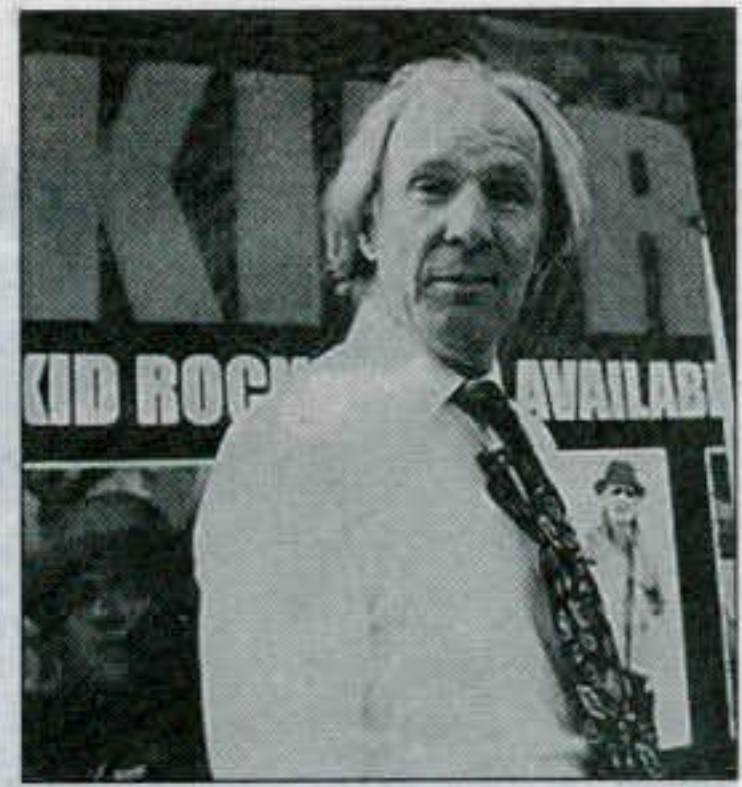
FROM P28 → Every time Arthur Kane speaks to Gruen's camera in *All Dolled Up* (which isn't much), you can barely make out the mumblytongue blabbering out of his mouth. Three decades later, when we catch up with him in the documentary *New York Doll*, he still doesn't seem like the brightest bulb on the block, but he is, by this point, an incredibly sympathetic figure.

The years following the Dolls' breakup in 1975 were not kind to "Killer" Kane. As he watched his onetime bandmates - and primarily Johansen - go on to success with their own musical (and other) ventures, Kane's attempts to stay in the music biz sputtered. He dropped out of the public eye and his drinking escalated, eventually prompting his wife to leave him. In 1989, in an intoxicated rage, he leaped out of a third-story kitchen window, shattering a kneecap and his left elbow. During his year-long physical therapy and a stint in AA, he converted to Mormonism, going sober and eventually getting a job at the church's Family Center library in Los Angeles.

The Mormon community is where young filmmaker Greg Whiteley meets this soft-spoken, sad and lonely man, devout in his newfound religion but still longing to revisit his glory days. "You can't talk to Arthur for longer than 30 seconds without him bringing up the fact that he was once in a band called The New York Dolls," Whiteley mentions in a brief interview included as one of *New York Dolls* DVD bonus features.

After introducing Kane and giving a brief history of the Dolls and the members' subsequent highs and lows, the bulk of Whiteley's film focuses on Kane's 30-year dream of getting The New York Dolls back together actually coming to pass. In curating 2004's *Meltdown* festival in London, Morrissey asked the three surviving Dolls to reunite (guitarist Johnny Thunders and drummer Jerry Nolan had died in '91 and '92, respectively, while original drummer Billy Murcia croaked back in '72), and to everyone's surprise, they all agreed.

Kane, not having played in



The late, great Arthur "Killer" Kane

years, has to buy back his old guitars from a pawnshop before he can go to rehearsal. Never having much money, he remarks upon entering his London hotel suite that "they have more stuff in this room than I have in my apartment!" This thought is soon contrasted by an auditorium of delirious fans cheering on the band's comeback. Kane himself is both excited and apprehensive about the reunion - his seriousness about his religion clashes with Johansen's lighting up a smoke and joking around about it. It's hard to repress both chuckles and tears as, just before the band hits the stage, Kane prays, thanking God on behalf of The New York Dolls "for this great blessing," and asking that "the spirits of Billy, Johnny and Jerry be with us this evening."

It is, by all accounts, the greatest day of Arthur Kane's adult life. The following Monday morning he's back in LA on a bus, wearing a tie, on his way to work. Only three weeks later, he was diagnosed with leukemia, and died within hours at age 55. A tragic, sudden and unintended end, but you feel a sense of consolation knowing that his ultimate dream had been realized.

Taken together, these two films give a great bookend of a band's trajectory - from the crazy times of the under-appreciated heyday, through the often mundane offstage life that follows, building to a reunion that becomes a validation of sorts in front of the later generations inspired by the group in the years since. As for what's left of The New York Dolls, let's wish them some much deserved *good luck* in their current revival. —Jeff Clark

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