

REVIEW

Music DVD Review: Happy Mondays - *Live in Barcelona*

August 22, 2006

Modern Pea Pod

This DVD made me throw up a little in my mouth when I watched it. I know. I know. Happy Mondays have this huge cult following; I've even done research on it to see how there could possibly be more than two people who admire this music and this "band" legitimately. But it's true. They're out there. I don't understand the music, I don't see any talent, or hear any for that matter, and I'm awestruck that these musicians can actually sell tickets to a concert.

Granted, music isn't cerebral - I shouldn't have to understand it to like it. But this music leaves me confused and bored, devoid of any of the true feelings of which one would hope to experience at least a tinge while listening to music; especially live music from supposedly euphonious icons. And because of the fact that I can't wrap any part of my brain, heart or soul around this music, I hate it. I vilify it. It's human nature to berate what we don't understand, and I'm just reacting naturally to what I believe is a group of talentless schmoes who've probably made most of their money on acid-damaged post-era hippies who have too much money to waste.

But anyway, I watched this dour DVD, and I thought that there might be a glimmer of hope, that maybe there was some entertaining aspect to be found. And there was. There's a silver lining to every cloud, and folks, I'm glad to say that I've found it on this otherwise horrible waste of iridescent plastic. The DVD contains more than an hour of live music from a 2004 December concert in Barcelona, and there's no question I hated it. But one of the upsides of having bonus material on these discs is that sometimes you might find a little gem, and I did.

There's an hour and a half interview with the group's lead singer, entitled "A Pint with Shaun." I'll tell you right now, don't bother to derive any sort of practical information from this friendly interview, just lay back and enjoy the slurred speech and long tirades of Shaun Ryder. The interview takes place in some sort of brightly lit pub-in-the-making, so occasionally there's this guy in the background working on stuff or just walking around. It's a little distracting, but it just adds to the completely unprofessional and jovial feel of the segment. Also, someone's cell phone rings for about a full minute at one point, but again, it just adds to the interview's character.

And it's great: Shaun reveals the history of the band, and explains in great detail arguments with his brother concerning touring and who came up with the group's name. It's long, so be prepared to roll your eyes a bit at the sheer length, and probably skip through a lot of it, but the absurdity of this extra feature made the whole disc a little easier to bear.

Of course, "A Pint with Shaun" is not the focus of the DVD, but I wish it was, for the brunt of *Live in Barcelona* is too ludicrous to even be deemed a headlining feature. In short, it's the worst live music I've heard in quite a while. Ryder emits absolutely no energy; he just remains onstage like a blob of drunken, sweaty marshmallow, stringing together random bits of lyric while foreign back-up vocals blare, supporting nothing. New wave sound effect cut through the performance like light-sabers at a geeky kid's 13th birthday party, and show-stealer (and apparent audience favorite) Bez prances around onstage in a spider-like jig, shaking his token maracas. Lucky guy. He even gets to fondle some hyper-fan during "Hallelujah," obviously too delirious with the fact that she spent hard-earned money to see this awful catastrophe of a performance to realize that her breasts are being filmed for hundreds of weird Happy Mondays fans to go giddy over.

I got mixed feelings even from the DVD's bonus material, which constitutes a picture gallery, sound check footage, the interview with Ryder, and a short biography of the group. The picture gallery, which I expected to be a collection of all sorts of photos from the band maybe from over the years or something, is merely a small collection of stills from the live performance I just watched.

The 12-minute-long sound check footage was kind of neat - you even get to see some ass crack from one of the guitarists as he bends over. I learned that the maraca man doesn't rehearse with his maracas, but instead with a can of soda, and Ryder has even less energy during warmup than he does during the performance, if that's at all possible. Meanwhile, the biography portion is just a voiceover by some random guy named Mike Bayberry, who blathers a bit about the history and gives you some interesting details on the group. For instance, I had no idea that Bez called his creepy lurking jig a "Fuck You War Dance," or that Happy Mondays' lyrics have been compared to T.S. Eliot poems. Bayberry also lets you in on where band members are today, which is also nice to know.

In the end, to best sum up how I felt about this DVD, I would like to recite a poem of my own:

*"Happy Mondays, Happy Mondays, how I long to never hear,
Happy Mondays, Happy Mondays, how you hurt my ear.
Don't watch this DVD unless you're in for a pathetic laugh,*

For the 'brilliant' performance is a decrepit piece of crap."

Reviewed by Laura Misjak

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i don't really get them either... but at least thrills n pills goes beyond the "had to be there" feeling i get from the rest of their stuff.

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