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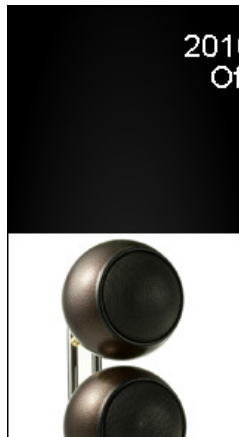
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Live From Tokyo

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Review by [Kurt Dahlke](#) | posted September 28, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

Live From Tokyo:

Rapturous rhythm and skronk does the best it can at an impossible task. Director Lewis Rapkin rides the shuttles of steel, mixing, matching, not much fading; weaving a narrative as meaningless as it is subjective. In other words: protean and eternal. You say you want to know what goes on for underground music in Tokyo? That happened over and over again a long time ago and it's done now. Rapkin's documentary squeals up as close to the edge as possible. You gaze into the abyss and your head starts bobbing. There's no looking back, only going forward.

81 minutes of interviews, attempts to make sense of Tokyo and what it does to people there pushing music into the future. And music, lots of music, mostly music filmed at various underground clubs dotting the megacity. Performance videos interspersed with gorgeous shots of the city that's literally inside a Pachinko machine - colorful blinking lights, signs and shiny things in the most overloaded city in the world.

Watch the document if you want to understand, but know that for many indie Japanese, music is everything in a blender. The voraciousness of modern Japanese culture (or Japanese culture in general - one of the greatest appropriation cultures ever) means musicians pick and choose anything, change it, improve it. Japanese musicians speak about this, about why they do it, about the sorry state of the music industry in Japan and abroad. Gaijin (foreigners) hit those notes too; musicians and label owners, anyone wanting to work unfettered by the notion of trying to innovate, since to simply be working in Tokyo means you're automatically on some esoteric wave far ahead of and evading everyone else.

The music? How daring are you? Kitschy girl groups give way to Yoko Ono-style screeching. Dual improvisation drummers influence huge visual art projected on a screen, providing your hallucinations for you. A masked man plays something like a cross between a lightsaber and a Theremin. Garage Rock mixes with Hip-Hop, and pretty much universally are the beats. Metronomic, hypnotic in the service of hardcore sound or bleeps and bleeps that would make Stereolab blush.

No, you can't get a handle on it, but Rapkin tries to show you where the handles are, if you care to try. It's not a music documentary, though of course that's exactly what it is. You can track the names of every band shown - even the clubs they in which they play, and the prefectures in which the clubs reside. You might even be able to get a subway ticket, but I didn't attempt it. What it is, is a holy mash-up of [Koyaanisqatsi](#) and [Enter the Void](#), (very [Enter the Void](#)) which will wash your eyes in neon luxury, will hook your spine to the universal cord (chord) pulling your head back and forth. It's music - sound-bites, edits, breaks. And you call yourself a music fan, so you need it.

The DVD

Video:

Live From Tokyo comes in a 1.78:1 anamorphic transfer which comes features lots of dark and grainy footage from Tokyo nightclubs. A variety of compression artifacts appear; edge enhancement, aliasing, digital distortion - kind-of fits the



CONTENT

★★★★★

VIDEO

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AUDIO

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