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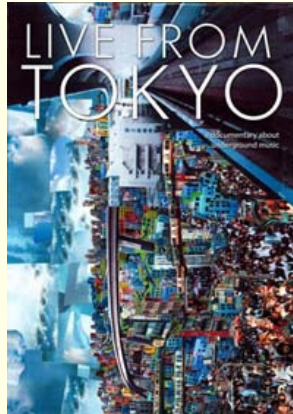
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STRANGE THINGS ARE HAPPENING

LIVE FROM TOKYO

DVD. Good Charamel / MVD.



It's long been established that even the most unlikely Western acts can become, as the cliché goes, 'big in Japan', but it's pretty rare for the cultural trade to be reversed. Only a handful of Japanese artists have had even the most cursory level of success in Europe or the US, thanks in part to the genre-bending approach of much Japanese music, and in part to the fact that anti-Asian attitudes still seems to be fairly acceptable among people who would be the first to complain about racism of any other sort.

Lewis Rapkin's rather excellent documentary **Live From Tokyo** is, therefore, an essential and fascinating look at the thriving, remarkable and exciting underground music scene in Tokyo. Taking a free-flowing approach, Rapkin mixes imagery of Tokyo's

neon landscapes with live footage and interviews with bands and solo performers who are at the cutting edge of musical innovation. It's long been acknowledged that Japanese popular music is a strange and inevitable hybrid of Western musical influences and home grown cultural obsessions, and the result is quite often a fascinating mix of styles that blur genres. Of course, Japanese artists have long been at the forefront of experimental, noise and electronic music with performers like Merzbow, and the acts seem here, almost certainly unfamiliar to all but the most dedicated Western viewer, are carrying on that fine tradition. Names like D.V.D, Makato Oshiro, Sexy-Synthesiser, Nissennenmondai and Tenniscoats might not be on your ipod right now, but if you are a fan of experimental music, you'll certainly want to seek them out after watching this.

The documentary takes in all aspects of Japanese music today – from the sheer costs of performing (venues routinely charge bands to play), to the threats and opportunities of the internet and the musical influences that drive the artists. Mixing live footage with snippets of animation, the film shares the visual dynamics that many of the artists featured use, and is as visually arresting as it is informative.

Coming complete with a download code for the soundtrack album, this is an excellent introduction to new music and a thoroughly enjoyable documentary to boot. If you are looking to widen your musical boundaries, it's an excellent place to begin. Need another reason to buy it? A portion of the proceeds from the sale DVD and soundtrack album will be donated to the Red Cross Tsunami Relief fund in Japan.

DAVID FLINT


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