



I'm Now: The Story of Mudhoney (2012)

Studio: *King of Hearts Productions KOH-03 [12/12/12]*

Directors: *Ryan Short, Adam Pease*

Video: *1.77:1 for 16:9 color and B&W*

Audio: *English Dolby 2.0*

Extras: *"I'm Now" music video; 13-minute film footage from recent Europe, Japan and Brazil tours*

Length: *101 minutes*

Rating: *****

A quarter of a century is a lengthy stay for any band. When Seattle's Mudhoney formed in 1988, few even in the Pacific Northwest knew or cared about the group. Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden may have helped put a hipster generation into flannel shirts, but Mudhoney made the '90s grunge rock movement achievable: the group was the first success on the fledgling Sub Pop record label, and Mudhoney began the groundswell which briefly put Seattle on the worldwide, alt-rock map. When the band came together, Mudhoney's sweaty, beer-stoked jumble of punk brashness, heavy metal mettle and garage rock roughness did not have a name. Before long, the musical stew became known as grunge. And Mudhoney went from local cult item to semi-legendary status. Here it is, 25 years later and Mudhoney is still here (like many other bands), touring and releasing new material.

The 2012 documentary, *I'm Now: The Story of Mudhoney*, is literally just that. This is the tale of four friends who combined fuzzy distortion pedals, a devotion to proto-punksters such as Iggy & the Stooges, and a passion for non-stop energy, and went from playing in basements to performing in stadiums, and somehow kept going, well beyond the minor blips of trendiness which doomed other likeminded artists. No band erupts out of nowhere. The film includes a *de rigueur* conceptual narrative which traces how Mudhoney was fashioned from the ashes of forgettable outfits (Mr. Epp) and groundbreaking ones (the Melvins; and Green River, which begat both Mudhoney and Mother Love Bone, which in turn birthed Pearl Jam); how the name was cribbed from one of Russ Meyer's infamous exploitation flicks. And why Mudhoney's initial, 1988 7-inch 45-RPM singles ("Sweet Young Thing Ain't Sweet No More," backed with "Touch Me I'm Sick") are now considered to have been a major portent of the Seattle sound and became anthems of the era.

Amid the history is a plethora of rare archival footage, photos and other ephemera. The documentary is the usual *mélange* of talking heads (from former tour managers to music journalists, and from fellow musicians to Mudhoney members themselves) and assorted live material. The interview segments, while elucidating, are nevertheless colorless when compared to Mudhoney's exciting concert scenes, which are often appetizing but too short, at least by fan standards. Mudhoney's saga, though, is also that of grunge rock's rise and fall, the upswing of Sub Pop (Mudhoney put the label into the black when Sub Pop was struggling), and the growth of the Seattle-area alternative rock landscape. Amid practically clichéd road tales and personal issues (customary trapping such as heavy drink intake, drug addiction, record company woes, et al), there is a parallel chronicle of '90s rock and the changes which occurred in music and youth culture during that time frame, though that transformation is more finely detailed in the 1996 documentary, *Hype!*, which should be required viewing for anyone interested in what happened in Seattle (and elsewhere). But *I'm Now* is missing a dramatic arc: there are no emotional moments which provide audiences something compelling, no vivid humanistic hook.

One thing which comes across throughout is a sense of warped humor and a strong party vibe, which pervaded Mudhoney's music, conversations with media figures, and day-to-day life. "Let's just have a really good time," is how

Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore describes Mudhoney's philosophy. Band members had an insinuating irreverence, even when poking fun at other alt-rock bands or themselves. Another solid point made during the film is Mudhoney's sustained stance as outsiders: even at the height of popularity, the band did not compromise on identity, sound or creative vision, and maintained some modicum of accomplishment even though they were barely ever in the musical or cultural mainstream.

The DVD bonuses include a music video for the 2008 song "I'm Now," with clips from the documentary; and an unfocused, 13-minute tour medley (from Europe, Japan and Brazil jaunts), with tidbits of recent live performances (some with bootleg-quality sound) mixed with backstage shenanigans and interview fragments. There is also a hidden Easter egg: a very short live excerpt from Australia (viewers will need to click on the distortion pedal on the DVD's selection scenes page). The bonuses are neither essential nor especially noteworthy. For enthusiasts, *I'm Now: The Story of Mudhoney* would make a good double bill with *Mudhoney: Live in Berlin, 1988* (which came out in November, 2012), and captures Mudhoney in prime full-throttle concert mode, just before the first Mudhoney EP was issued.

—Doug Simpson

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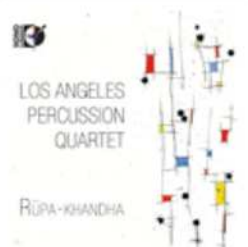
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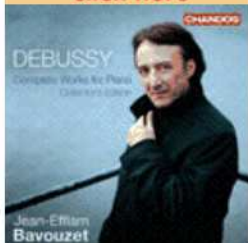
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