



Public Image Limited Live at Rockpalast 1983 (2012)

John Lydon's post-Sex Pistols band plays an incendiary show in Germany.

Musicians: John Lydon, vocals; Joseph Guida, guitar; Louis Bernardi, bass; Arthur Stead, keyboards; Martin Atkins, drums

Director: Christian Wagner

TrackList: Public Image I, Annalisa, Religion, Memories, Flowers of Romance, Solitaire, Chant, Anarchy in the UK, (This Is Not A) Love Song, Low Life, Under the House, Bad Life, Public Image II

Studio: MIG Music 90427 DVD

Video: 4:3 color

Audio: English PCM Stereo

Extras: Interview with Rockpalast host Alan Bangs, Rehearsals of "Annalisa" and "Chant"

Length: 72 minutes

Rating: ***

By the time Public Image Limited played Bochum, Germany on the Rockpalast TV show, the only remaining member from the band's original line-up was John Lydon. Created by Lydon and his friends Keith Levene and Jah Wobble (John Wardle) after the Sex Pistols' ugly break-up, the band was everything the Pistols weren't: experimental, arty, and influenced by a wide variety of genres, including dub reggae, German kosmiche music, and even prog rock. The band's records were willfully difficult and far darker and stranger than any classic punk band.

After 1981's *The Flowers of Romance* album, both Levene and Wobble were gone from the band, leaving only drummer Martin Atkins, a relatively new member of PiL, as Lydon's main collaborator. Besides Lydon and Atkins, the rest of the band playing in Bochum is made up of session musicians who play their parts faithfully, but clearly lack Levene and Wobble's passion and off-kilter sense of rhythm. The whole notion of professional session musicians playing experimental post-punk music seems silly, creating a bizarre situation in which the band sounds muscular and tight, but not the least bit menacing or tense. Whether the band is playing "Religion" from PiL's first album or "Under the House" from *The Flowers of Romance*, it all sounds basically the same.

Ultimately, Lydon's unhinged vocal performance and presence are the only thing that makes the Rockpalast show seem in any way edgy. Stalking the stage with a half-irritated, half-exhilarated look, Lydon seems to be unsure whether he hates or loves the German audience. At one point, Lydon, returning for a second encore with the band (after only playing for thirty-five minutes!), screams "Shut up!" at the crowd chanting for more, but then quickly seems embarrassed by his own outburst. This awkwardness is mirrored in a bonus feature interview Lydon gives to Rockpalast host Alan Bangs. While on the surface his answers seem somewhat enthusiastic and positive (at least for Lydon), there is an undercurrent of tension and irritation, whether he is talking about his move to New York, his role in the 1980s Italian grindhouse movie *Cop Killer*, or the band's future.

As a document of Public Image Limited as they stood in 1983, this DVD is great. The stereo mix is good, if slightly bass and drum heavy, and the camera work rightly focuses mostly on Lydon. However, as a larger representation of the band's strengths and unique sound, the concert in Bochum leaves a lot to be desired.

—Daniel Krow