



Public Image Limited

STAFF

Live at Rockpalast 1983 DVD (2012)

WDR/ MIG

Reviewer Rating:

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Love him or hate him, John Lydon does exactly what John Lydon wants. Sometimes that involves him doing things that are the very definition of "punk" and sometimes that involves him manifesting the antithesis of "punk." Sometimes that involves him phoning in a high paying gig and sometimes that involves him just completely kicking out the jams. Luckily, on Public Image Limited's *Live At Rockpalast 1983* Lydon is at his most engaged and most complex.

Live at Rockpalast 1983 documents PIL at a most unique time in its career. Lydon had fired all members but drummer Martin Atkins, filled the slots with session musicians and then embarked on a European tour. Paradoxically, while a "session musician" tour usually features muzak versions of a band's catalogue, here, not only does the band tear through jagged, speedy renditions of tunes from PIL's first three albums, but there is an added emphasis on Lydon, who seems more engaged than almost ever before.

But, Lydon's form of engagement is most peculiar. Often in punk, frontmen are described as being in a constant frenzy of wild-eyed energy, a la H.R. circa 1981, or as being uncaring, and completely out of touch with the audience, al H.R. circa 2011. Lydon starts the performance in his usual manic self, issuing biting snipes, but while maintaining a tight contact with the music, putting his unique yelp to its most striking effect. But then, midway through the concert, Lydon starts to drift away from the mic, letting it hang by his side. He seems to stare at something that no one else can see, interacts with it and then returns to the music. This happens numerous times through the show. Is Lydon on another level or just easily distracted? While its odd, when he returns to the mic he has even more vigor. The puzzle of Lydon seems to shift with every new document.

While the songs are performed in direct, charging versions, the real treat of this set is the cover of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK." PIL rarely, and only briefly, covered the Pistols, and here, it could be argued that the PIL version trumps the live Pistols version. With the Pistols, Lydon would purposefully sing off mic and seem to put no emphasis behind the words. But here, as the song is supported by a unique keyboard tapestry, Lydon puts extra emphasis on the words that hit home. "Anarchist" becomes "A-NAR-KISTT." "Antichrist" becomes "AAAA-NTI-CRRRRISTT!" (complete with rolled 'R'.)

As is his wont, shortly following this tour, Lydon sacked the touring band and re-formed PIL yet again, making this document most unique. Luckily for us, at the time, specifically Oct. 31, 1983, what Lydon wanted to do converged exactly with what fans would want some 30 years later.

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