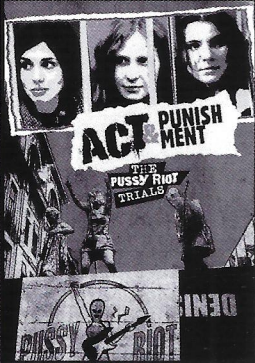


DVD REVIEWS

"ACT & PUNISHMENT: THE PUSSY RIOT TRIALS". (MVD)

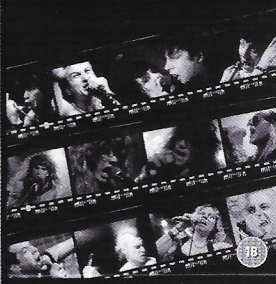


Pussy Riot have done nothing if not capture the public's imagination since footage of their "Punk Prayer" demonstration was broadcast around the globe! I'm aware that a major documentary has already been put together on the group, though I haven't seen it, so this piece here is in essence my first concrete exposure to them and their story

(outside of the media hysteria that's been built up around them of course). "Act & Punishment: The Pussy Riot Trials" does precisely what the title would imply and acts as a level-headed counterpart to all the drama. Dispelling slick graphics and editing, it gets down to brass tacks with a cast of talking heads, including the three women at the centre of the trial. There's a useful account of Russia's political history and the social climate which gave rise to the art collective Voina, from which Pussy Riot would later emerge. Debates take place around their earlier protests and the often muted response they received from the authorities. Their "Punk Prayer" routine was comparatively tame when set against other demonstrations they had engaged in and something of a non-event. Indeed the band members themselves considered it far from their best work. I wasn't even aware that there was no music being played at the time (this was later added by media sources for greater effect). The movie then leads us through their trial and sheds ample light on the Russian justice system, blasphemy laws and so forth. There're essentially three components to the trial – religious, political and artistic and the film examines the relationship between all three. I should stress that all interviews are conducted in Russian, with optional English subtitles, and perhaps elements were lost in translation, but it felt a little disjointed in parts and not always easy to follow. This is the kind of documentary I'll need to re-watch with the benefit of having familiarised myself with the case a little more to fully understand it. To its credit "Act & Punishment: The Pussy Riot Trials" is a refreshing departure from the sensationalism surrounding the group and there is great value in allowing viewers to examine the details of a trial, free from media manipulation. I found it fascinating the volume of courtroom footage that was not widely broadcast on global television at the time, in particular the statements from each of the three women, which provide fuller clarity about their acts and the rationale for taking such steps to address what are legitimate social and political concerns. This film does what any good documentary should and makes me want to learn more about the Pussy Riot story. (MVD ENTERTAINMENT GROUP: 203 WINDSOR ROAD, POTTSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA, PA 19464, U.S.A.)

"THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION COLLECTION". (SECOND SIGHT)

THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION COLLECTION

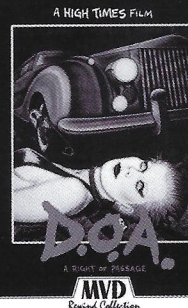


I vividly remember the first time I saw any of the Decline films. It was "Part II: The Metal Years" and a VHS recording from the BBC was doing the rounds in our school. This was the late 80's or maybe even the very early 90's and as aspiring Punk Rockers, when our turn came, we watched it with much derision and laughter. Later I learned that the original "Decline Of Western Civilisation" had in fact been released

years earlier, depicted the L.A. Punk scene and was frequently considered the best of its kind. Huh?? I spent the best part of the next decade attempting to track down a copy, which proved unfeasible given the rarity of the film and the fact that copies regularly changed hands for obscene amounts of money. In the later 90's I stumbled upon Garage Video in Boston's Alston Mall – a semi-legal space that housed weirdo stores specialising in everything countercultural that oftentimes doubled as living quarters for those working there. Garage Video offered rental tapes from the proprietor's personal VHS library of obscure titles. Amidst his stash of B-movie horrors and general transgressive features I eyed a copy of "The Decline Of Western Civilisation". For a nominal sum an agreement was reached whereby I could finally possess my very own copy of the movie, as the owner was assured it had at-last been earmarked for official release later that year and he no longer needed this old battered copy he kept on his shelf. Of course that release never came to pass and it's taken until now for this series of films to secure an authorized issue. A lot of work went into ensuring this got done right and director Penelope Spheeris has overseen much, if not all, of the process. I must say it feels good to finally hold a legit version of this in my hands, having worked through so many copies of variable quality across several formats these last twenty years. The third and final film in the series passed many people by in 1998, myself included, and focused on the Gutter Punks of Los Angeles. This was primarily due to distribution problems, but I did eventually catch up on the film in the early 2000's, again through a dodgy bootleg copy. This 4-disc DVD box-set contains just about everything imaginable relating to the three films and will, I expect, be regarded as the full and final statement on the trilogy. Watching them all again here, back-to-back, enables the viewer to track and trace the development of American youth culture over the course of a couple of decades. There're commonalities to be found, but perhaps less than one might imagine. The nihilism and anti-commercial bent of the first film is starkly offset by the career aspirations of "The Metal Years". By the time we reach "Part III", perhaps the bleakest of the bunch, Punk Rock has once again reared its head, only this time the youth appear even more desolate and alienated from society than they had done in 1979/80. Spheeris is renowned for her snappy editing, which features prominently throughout each movie. She is, more than anything else, a fan of both Heavy Metal and Punk Rock and there is nothing voyeuristic about her approach – she's very much in the thick of it! There's not a lot to be said about these exceptional films that hasn't been said before, and it's unlikely at this stage that anyone would denounce their significance. What you may be interested in learning about however are the swatches of extras that accompany the box-set. There're a number of informative interviews with the director, including one conducted by Henry Rollins. Also, that indispensable Black Flag interview is here in its entirety and there's some additional Fear footage that I enjoyed. The 40-page booklet is also highly readable and reevaluates the series with the benefit of time and distance. So, this is it; the ultimate "Decline Of Western Civilisation" anthology we've waited so long for and evidently no home should be without a copy!

(www.secondsightfilms.co.uk)

"D.O.A.: A RITE OF PASSAGE". (MVD)



Good news for fans of this cult Punk film on the Sex Pistols tour of the States in 1978. It's been a long time coming, but MVD have finally secured the rights to issue it as a DVD/Blue Ray combo. Commissioned by High Times magazine editor Tom Forcade, filmmaker Lech Kowalski set out with the aim of

documenting the Sex Pistols in America. Armed with a 16mm camera, Kowalski headed south to Atlanta for the first date of the tour, only to be met by Warner Bros. personnel (who had by some accounts hijacked control of the tour) refusing to grant him access to either the gigs themselves or any interviews with the band members. Left with little choice, Kowalski employs guerrilla-styled tactics to gain admittance and shoots as much footage as he can from the crowd with his handheld camera. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, the Pistols were on their last legs and Kowalski's tapes became the sole tangible visual account of their time in America. As he pursued the band on their seven-date visit, Kowalski took the time to interview the American audiences, which later proved an essential component to the film, as it contextualised the impact the Sex Pistols had on American society and afforded viewers the opportunity to consider the band through other sets of eyes. Once the tour concluded in San Francisco, Kowalski came to the realization that he had nowhere near enough material to comprise a full-length documentary. He then hits on the idea of flying to London on the promise of an interview with Sid and Nancy, but finds Sid is an incoherent mess by this time, due to advanced heroin addiction. Sid nonetheless consents to the interview, slumped on a bed with Nancy, in a semi-conscious state. While in London Kowalski captures what he can of the Punk scene there, shooting X-Ray Spex, Generation X, Sham 69 and the unforgettable Terri And The Idiots. He also checks in with a number of British establishment figures, who provide their own damning account of Punk Rock, illustrating equivalent abhorrence to their American counterparts. As a companion piece to "D.O.A.: A Rite Of Passage" there is a illuminating new full-length feature included here, that sets the full backdrop to the film and puts the record straight on the various question marks which have arisen with the passage of time. While some of the footage from "D.O.A.: A Rite Of Passage" did resurface in Julien Temple's 1996 documentary "The Filth and The Fury", this is the source right here and its imperative that it be viewed in its entirety. Goes without saying, an essential pick-up! (MVD ENTERTAINMENT GROUP: 203 WINDSOR ROAD, POTTSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA, PA 19464, U.S.A.)

