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DVD & Blu-ray Video Reviews

David Bowie – Rare and Unseen (2010)

Documentary of archival Bowie interviews fails to capture star's magnetism.

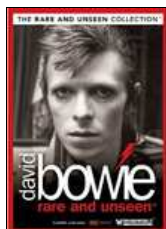
Published on December 20, 2010



David Bowie – Rare and Unseen (2010)

Interviews with David Bowie, Peter Frampton, Carlos Alomar, John Landis, Julien Temple and others
Studio: Wienerworld (Distributed by MVD Visual) MVD 5086 D [11/23/10]

Video: 16:9 Color
Audio: Dolby Digital mono
Length: 64 minutes
Rating: **



David Bowie has been one of the most compelling figures in rock and roll for nearly forty years. His career started as a middle of the road pop singer. The Christmas duet with Bing Crosby (*Little Drummer Boy*) has been an anachronistic treasure, and has been parodied this holiday season. The career of Bowie turned with the release of *Space Oddity* in 1970. The element of space disaster brought a countercultural acceptability to fans and critics. Two years later, he would be catapulted into iconic superstardom with the release of *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust and The Spiders From Mars*. The trend-shattering rock opus, detailing the appearance of the first rock and roll alien, became a definitive cultural message of the changing 1970s musical scene. The subsequent world tour, with trans-gender wardrobe, and spectacular theatrical sets, changed the genre of rock forever. Bowie would continue to evolve as a performer, reinventing his image often.

David Bowie Rare And Unseen is a documentary covering the post-Ziggy Bowie circa 1976. The first thirty minutes consists of an interview with British talk show host, Russell Harty. Conducted via satellite with Bowie in Los Angeles, there is a juxtaposition of cultural rebel and establishment in the disjointed footage. Bowie, charismatic and suave, has to tolerate the inanity of Harty's skeptical condescension in order to give some insights on his art. He indicates that the amalgamation of theater and rock and roll is a key element of his music. Bowie acknowledges the growing electronic music phenomenon (Brian Eno and Kraftwerk) as connective to his art. A later interview is dispersed in an attempt to establish a timeline and frame of reference. but there is no incisiveness. When the star is asked about rumors that he doesn't call his mother often enough, even the affable Bowie is stunned by the insipid question.

More importantly, there is a scarcity of Bowie performing. These performances were the pinnacle of creativity and relevance. The remainder of the documentary is more interesting. Peter Frampton (a classmate of Bowie), discusses some of the rehearsal strategies for a Bowie session. An impromptu interview with a younger journalist actually engages Bowie and provides some evidence of the natural charm that lies beneath the character driven personas. Unfortunately, there is no footage of quintessential Bowie performances, just five or ten second snippets. The Dolby Digital sound would have livened things up considerably. It is difficult to understand why a documentary of a musician lacks his music.



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