

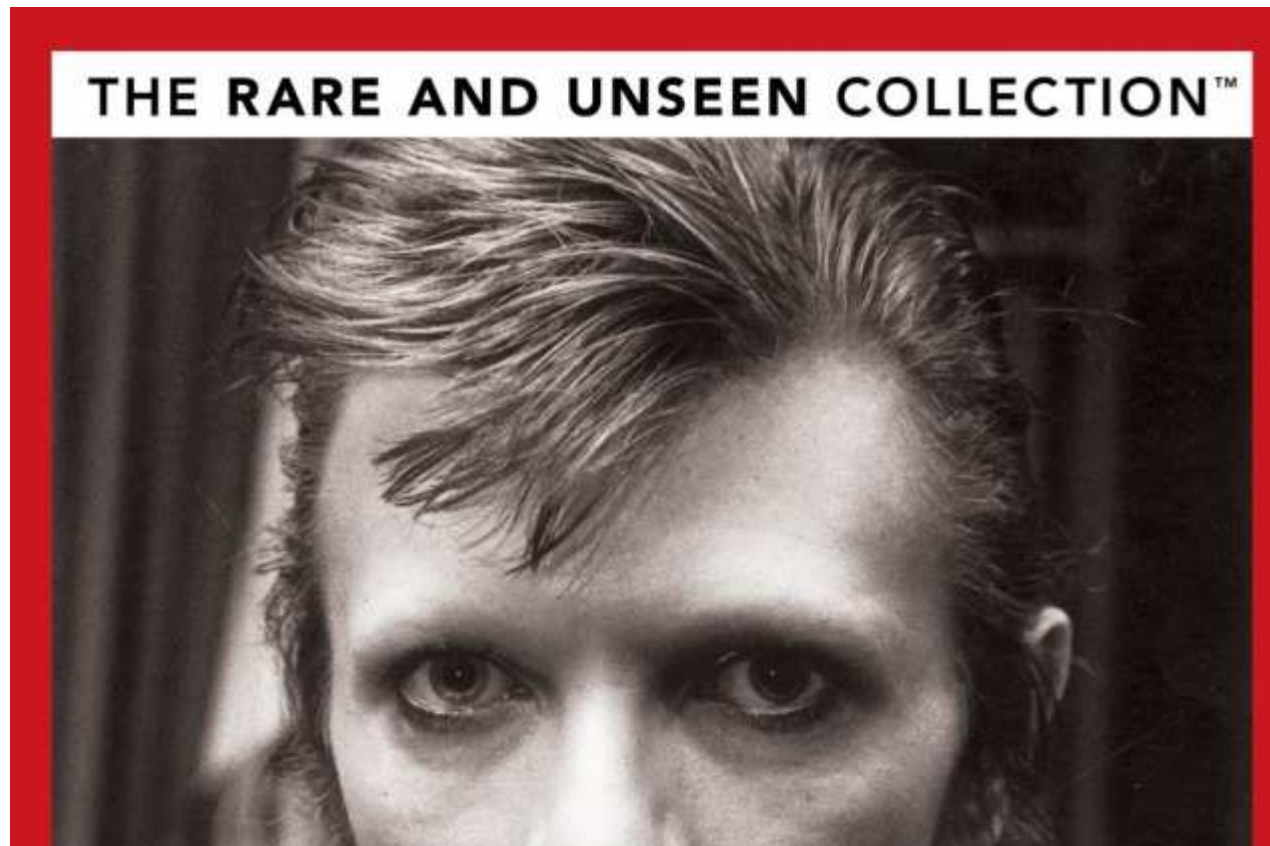
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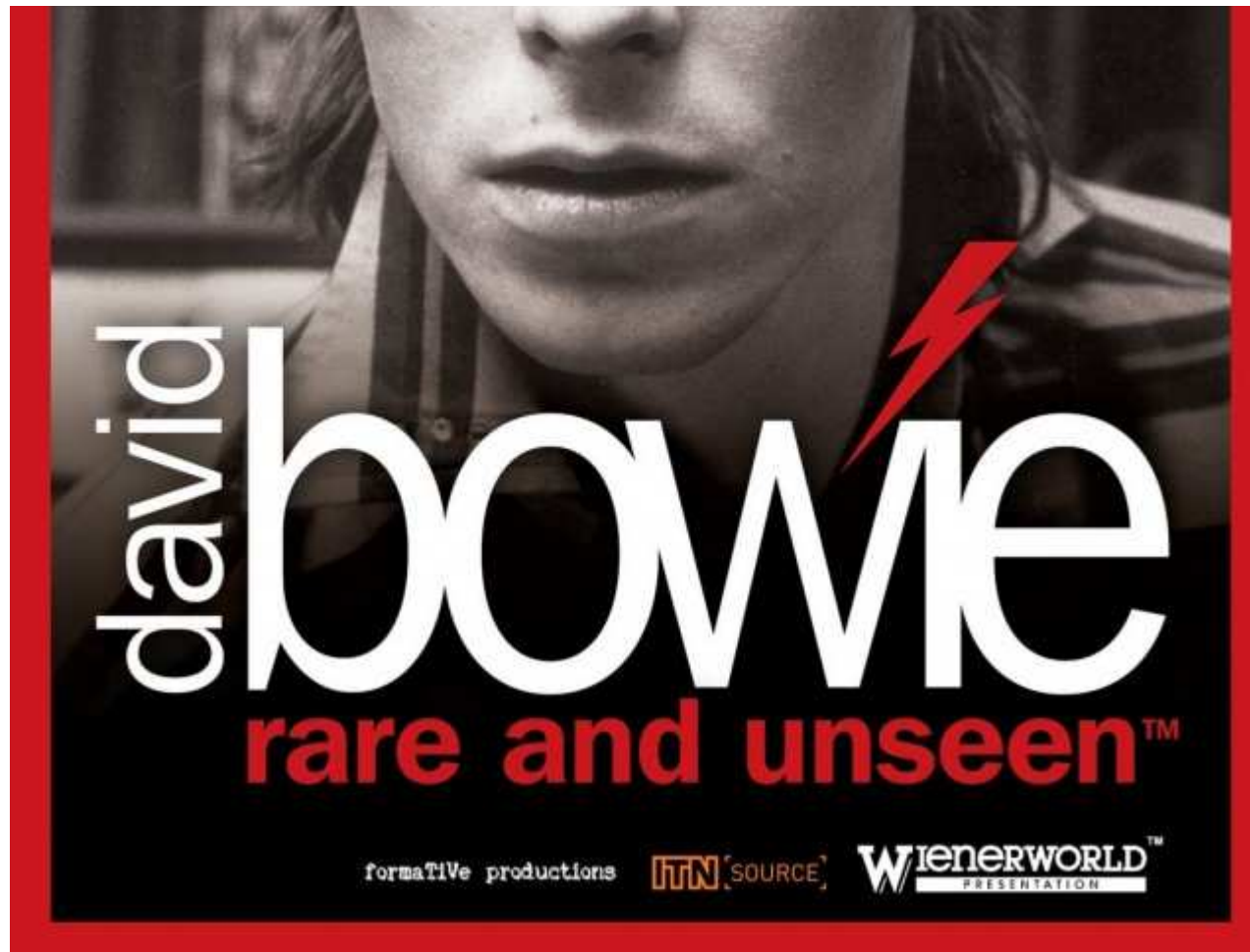
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DVD Review: "David Bowie, Rare and Unseen"

Posted on [December 7, 2010](#) by [Austin Music Entertainment](#)

Occasionally Austin Music + Entertainment will get a cool, unusual arrival its office. While this DVD has little connection to Austin, it's worth taking a look at if for no other reason than it's fun to write about David Bowie.





The quote on the back of the *David Bowie: Rare and Unseen* DVD reads "I'm always amazed that people take what I say seriously. I don't even take what I am seriously." Those words are from the Thin White Duke himself, and the line is indicative of this collection of interview footage's final impact. The Bowie line is funny and witty and eloquent. However, it has little bearing on the actual content of the hour-long program. The interviews, assembled from different time frames during Bowie's 4-decade career, presents the viewers with an artist who is totally and serious about his art and aware of who he is. Because most of the DVD is made up of Bowie's own words, it provides an enticing glimpse into the thought process of one of music's most enigmatic and

irreplaceable stars. When the credits roll, the audience is left with the perception that Bowie understands his place in the music firmament far better than the editors and marketing people who put the interviews together.

The DVD starts with the best of its footage, a 1976 TV interview between (via satellite) Bowie and British talk show host Russell Harty. Harty is the classic stereotype of the uptight, out-of-touch, pompous media personality throughout the interview. He seems to regard Bowie as a novelty, despite the fact that at this point it was clear that the artist was no flash in the pan. Bowie announces his "return" tour to England (on the back of one of his best albums, *Station to Station*), but Harty is more interested in what crazy costume Bowie might come in. At one point Harty says David's hair "looks like something out of *Straw Dogs*," to which Bowie – who has almost definitely seen *Straw Dogs* - responds with appropriate befuddlement to the nonsensical comment.

Harty's interview takes up the the most time out of the interview segments and is the richest content on the disc. Bowie is obviously a bit irritated with Harty's obtuseness at first, but soon transitions to bemusedly playing with Harty's repeatedly irrelevant questioning. When Harty hilariously wonders if Bowie will "have to make a whole new scene for himself" because new bands (in 1976) like The Bay City Rollers (yeah, great classic group there) have popped up in Bowie's brief absence from the UK, David responds with a blunt "no." There's also an incredibly bizarre question along the lines of "if you admit you're not a very good musician, then why are you coming back on tour?" Bowie continually punctures Harty's fatuousness but is never cruel to the man. Interesting historical point: it is well-known that in 1976 Bowie was in the midst of a severe cocaine habit. His gaunt appearance in the archival footage makes it all the more obvious. However, it is Harty who comes off as the more oblivious of the two. At no point in the interview does Harty get below the surface about Bowie's newest project (the title *Station to Station* never even comes up) or his then-recent starring role in Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. "Are you still on this extra-terrestrial kick, David?"

Other, less interesting footage finds Bowie in 1999 talking in his band Tin Machine's recording studio. He looks back on his career and talks about how working "now" is different than working in the early days. Bowie is funny and engaging throughout but this footage doesn't have the satirical quality of the Harty interview. There is also rehearsal and interview footage with Bowie and guitarists Carlos Alomar and Peter Frampton as they gear up for a mid-80's tour for one of Bowie's lesser-known albums. Finally there is a very entertaining interview given by the incredibly tall music journalist Janet Street Porter as David walks around backstage before a gig. Bowie is excited and clearly enjoys the company of this beautiful, very exotic-looking woman. Porter, for her part, practically wears a sign around her neck saying "I'm really quite attracted to you, David Bowie!" Bowie is totally aware of the dynamic and as he leaves the interview to play the concert you can tell he and Porter are probably going to meet up again afterwards with fewer cameras around.

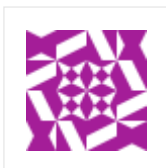
The best things about *David Bowie: Rare and Unseen* all involve being able to watch Bowie be interviewed. All the worst things about the DVD involve anything that is not Bowie being interviewed. For one, the footage is amassed together with little rhyme or reason. There is not much of a pace or flow from one sequence to the next. Interspersed within the interviews are still photographs with Bowie's music playing over them, which would be great if they were the actual classic recordings and not some sound-alike on acoustic guitar. The singer tries his best to duplicate Bowie's vocals, but it just doesn't work and is a continual false note every time the device is used. The "Life on Mars" attempt is particularly upsetting. It undercuts the "rare and unseen" nature of this exclusive DVD when Wienerworld Presentation can't even get the rights to Bowie's songs. The only time you actually see Bowie perform is during the mid-80's sound check. Even though it is not a familiar song, it's still better than the imitations that litter the run time.

Worst of all, though, is that footage is actually repeated during the course of the DVD. Twice John Landis and Julien Temple turn up with soundbites about working with David the actor, and twice they say the exact same

thing. Two times we see the same ugly footage lifted from D.A. Pennebaker's forgettable *Ziggy Stardust* concert film, and twice do we get Bowie's story of doing "something involving music and theatre" and the accompanying photos of avant-garde artist Lindsay Kemp and Bowie performing in Kemp's production. The second time 'round has sound, at least. It feels like they were putting the DVD together, found some additional footage and then just threw it in without checking the final edit for repeated segments.

If this DVD wasn't about one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, it wouldn't be worth watching. But David Bowie himself makes up for the haphazard nature of the DVD presentation and awful music tangents. This is a rental for Bowie fans and only an owner if you're a Bowie completist.

Final Grade: *** (out of five)



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