

FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

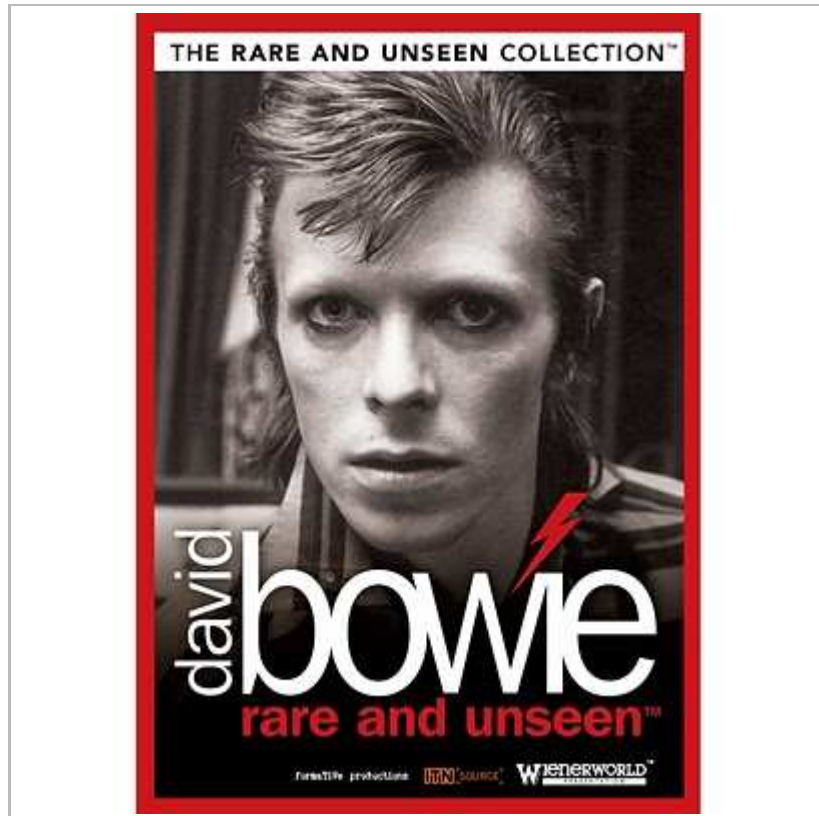
Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7, 2011

DVD Review: David Bowie: Rare and Unseen

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Images from the Internet



David Bowie: Rare and Unseen
 Wienerworld Presentations, 2010
 64 minutes, USD \$14.95
 Produced by Paul Clark
 Wienerworld.com
 MVDvisual.com

As I have admitted before on this blog, I was never inspired by David Jone... I mean Ziggy Stardu... I mean Bowie. It seems as though I always knew people who were since the early '70s, but his voice and style(s) always left me kind of cold. Oh, I really wanted to like his stuff, and I went out of my way to listen to his incarnations at various times in my life, but nada. This has also been true for Roxy Music, for

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos
 c/o 62 Timber Ridge Rd,
 Commack, NY 11725. From 1977-88, I used to publish a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). And the beat goes on.

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example, so it's not just him.

Lee Black Childers, MainMan photographer and publicist (etc.), has famously said a number of times, including for a *FFanzeen* interview during the early 1980s, that Bowie's genius is knowing what to, well let just say borrow. While he always seemed to be able to twist something into his own vision, he also never really *originated* a thing. But the same could be said for Elvis, I guess (do I need to hide my address now?).

However, possibly *because* I'm not intrigued by the man who I once dissed to his face in the late '70s when he was the biggest rock star in the world, and not just because I applied for a position as his personal assistant in the early 1980s (if I remember the date right) and did not get it (the person who *did* get the job is still doing it), I'm still interested in what makes him tick, and just *why* he is so popular. I've read some books and have seen a few documentaries on the man, but of course, he's *Mr. Enigma*, which is part of his public persona. And that's what he admits to being, as he is known to say that he is not a rock singer, but someone playing/acting a rock singer. Even on the back of this DVD, there is the quote by Bowie stating, "I'm always amazed that people take what I say seriously. I don't even take what I am seriously."

But I've come not to bury Bowie, but discuss this DVD focused on a man who has definitely made some monumental imprints on not just music, but popular culture as well.

This collection definitely has a concept, more than the other *Rare and Unseen* programs I have - ah - seen. There are a few sometimes complete long segments are broken up into parts where there are further interviews from other periods of his career. For example, the disc starts with a British television interview for *The Russell Harty Show* (his demeanor is reminiscent of Tom Snyder's *Tomorrow Show*. It's sort of a cantankerous take with Harty in the studio and Bowie interviewed via satellite from Burbank (California), circa 1975 (i.e., he mentions a tour starting in 1976). Harty obviously has no compassion for Bowie as he teases, mocks, baits, and tries to corner him. Bowie, however, also seems to not really care about Harty, and still manages to effectively promote his own agenda (one of Bowie's specialties) while seeming more bemused than anything else, as they talk over each other (thanks, again, to satellite delay) about work, fashion, and the yet-unfinished film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

The whole interview is about 20 minutes (as stated within the context of the sparring), but lasts much longer on this DVD as cuts of more recent interviews are interwoven, including one that looks like it came from a music channel (with dippy "stylistic" camerawork), that shows off Bowie's new set of teeth (and it certainly looks like that is not the *only* "work" he's had done), while promoting the *Earthling* tour in 1997. The editing job is nicely done, as the newer pieces reflect what was discussed with Harty.

I do have to add that in these (relatively) much later bits, Bowie

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seems much more relaxed than anywhere else on the entire disc, and actually comes across as warm and charming, hardly the view some have of him of being some kind of fascist leader of a bizarre army of fans (yes, I know of some who firmly believe that). Part of that is fanned by his obvious contempt for managers of musician. There is definitely a level of happy negativity as he goes on to stress that while he doesn't recommend recreational drugs, he believes they helped him.

In separate bits, there are clips of interviews with two film directors who have worked with Bowie in film projects, Julian Temple and John Landis. These are a bit fluffy and fawning, but still give some additional shadow to the picture of Bowie's career.

A third segment is from the British interview program from the early 1980s, promoting Bowie's "Day-In Day-Out" (from the *Never Let Me Down* release), which follows Bowie as he enters a Berlin venue for a gig with an uncomfortable and fawning interviewer who towers over him. He is quick to dismiss her and the program continues with some clips of his rehearsal of a cover of Iggy's "Bang Bang" and "China Girl," and interviews with guitarists Peter Frampton and (American) Carlos Alomar, who do not bite the hand that is feeding them. In a backstage interview at the same arena, he discusses fans who dress like him, and the upcoming *Just a Gigolo* film.

Dispersed through all these interviews are extremely short clips of some of his music videos and live performances. At the end of the DVD is amusingly long textual caveat of why the producers believe it's legal to show these musical bits without compensation. There was no music on the other *Rare and Unseen* series (John Lennon, Rolling Stones) I have seen, only images of performances.

Missing from these clips are Angela Bowie (only mentioned once in passing, as she is off somewhere looking for a house for them to occupy), Mick Jagger's collaboration on their horrific cover of "Dancing in the Street," his stint on Broadway in *The Elephant Man* (which I was hoping would be here), the mind-numbing and cringe-worthy Christmas paring of Bowie with Bing, his relationship with Iman, his infatuation with Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, and other possibly tasty bits.

So, do I know more about Bowie having watched this? Hmm, not really, but I would like to emphasize that being he is essentially a suit that he wears in public, most likely only those whose orbit surrounds him daily can have an inkling, that is no surprise. But there is a lot of fun in this release, and fan or not, it's an engaging time capsule in the history of the Thin White Duke.

Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [12:01 AM](#) 

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