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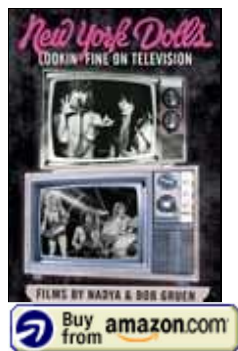
DVD & Blu-ray Reviews

New York Dolls: Lookin' Fine on Television

Sloppy, menacing and visceral: it's the New York Dolls.



Published on December 19, 2011



New York Dolls: Lookin' Fine on Television

Studio: MVD Visual MVD5272D

Video: 1.33:1 for 4:3, B&W

Audio: Dolby Stereo

Extras: 8-minute 1976 interview with David Johansen and Johnny Thunders

Length: 71:27

Rating: **1/2

Punk and hard rock would probably be much different if it had not been for The New York Dolls. In the early 1970s, the androgynous proto-punk group helped lay the foundation for the later success of many acts which turned hard rock and punk music, fashion and attitude into reality. If it had not been for the Dolls, Malcolm McLaren might not have had the inclination to manage the Sex Pistols and evolve outrage into gilded publicity (McLaren briefly tried to manage the New York Dolls and learned first-hand what kind of adversarial promotions backfired). If it had not been for the Dolls, a young fan named Steven Patrick Morrissey might not have established The Smiths, one of England's best indie rock outfits. Certainly the larger-than-life Kiss absorbed more than a few things from the New York Dolls. The list goes on.

The full story of The New York Dolls and how they combined girl group pop, Rolling Stones-esque swagger and Bowie/T. Rex glam rock into what would later be hailed as punk has been told elsewhere. The film *All Dolled Up* (2005), for example, explains how the Dolls were formed and their enduring appeal and legacy. The *Live from Royal Festival Hall 2004* DVD showcases a reunion performance at England's Meltdown Festival, and goes a long way in proving what a great live band the Dolls could still be. And interested people can also still purchase two detailed biographies, *Trash! The Complete New York Dolls* and *The New York Dolls: Too Much Too Soon*.

New York Dolls: Lookin' Fine on Television is basically an appendage to *All Dolled Up*. Both movies extensively use black and white video footage shot by famed rock music photographer Bob Gruen and his wife Nadya Beck. *All Dolled Up* was edited and paced like a documentary. *Lookin' Fine on Television* is rougher, rawer and viscerally captures the Dolls' crash-and-bash energy. Fifteen live performances are edited together from bits and pieces from multiple club and concert dates (including a notorious Halloween program at New York City's Waldorf-Astoria ballroom), so no one tune is a true representation of the band's visual aspect, although viewers do get treated to the Dolls' blustering attitude and forcefully coarse sonic blast. Interview segments are spliced between most songs, many featuring singer David Johansen, who is an engaging, low-rent raconteur.

The audio and video are atrociously bad. The sound is akin to what someone would get if a microphone was thrust over the heads of a beer-swilling audience (which is probably not far from what occurred). The pictorial quality is typical for the results of a cheap early-1970s video camera. Considering the age of both audio and video sources, however, the condition is in decent, archival shape. Ironically, this slash-and-burn characteristic intensifies the Dolls' malevolent and menacing mannerism: no doubt this reflects just how noisy and reckless the band really was on stage. On the plus side, there is a treasure trove of fans' favorite tracks, such as "Personality Crisis," "Frankenstein" and two versions of "Jet Boy," all of which are played with sloppy vengeance and manic glee. Johansen frequently sings like a man possessed while guitarist Johnny Thunders throws off one muscled riff after another. The pummeling bass and drums add to the sleazy solidarity. The group often seems ready to fall

apart on stage, but that is also authentic to their mythic standing.

While some MVD releases have few extras, this DVD has two likable elements. First, viewers can use the menu button to zoom to specific songs and thus skip some of the interview segments. Also, there is a short, bonus impromptu conversation between Johansen, Thunders and rock music journalist Lisa Robinson, held in 1976 outside seedy punk venue CBGB's, soon after Johansen and Thunders had left the Dolls and a fresh breed of punk artists were changing the American musical landscape. Overall, *New York Dolls: Lookin' Fine on Television* is for hardcore devotees only. Others who are just curious might pass on this and look elsewhere.

–Doug Simpson

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