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New York Dolls - Lookin' Fine On Television (2011)



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This New York Dolls video looks rough, washed-out in places and gritty. It's shot in full-screen and it's all in black and white. It looks like it may have been recovered from a nasty trash can on lower 42nd street. You can almost smell the decay coming from it. You know what? For the New York Dolls, that's a compliment, and all of these things I've mentioned just make the film more endearing to the fans.



Review by **Bill Wolford**
Added: March 21, 2012

Interspersed between each song we get an interview snippet from members of the band. While not much light is shed on them from these little gems, you can hear the decadence of 1970's New York in their voices, their comments, and you can see it in their faces. They were a band that was made for the clubs of New York. Imagine if the Rolling Stones had formed as a loud rock/punk act in the dirty clubs of the area, and you have yourself a good idea of what the Dolls are. Lead singer David Johansen is practically a Mick Jagger clone. Big lips, big attitude, and big voice. Let's take a look at their Wikipedia entry to find out the bands history.

[Wikipedia]

Sylvain Sylvain and Billy Murcia, who went to junior high school and high school together, started playing in a band called "the Pox" in 1967. After the frontman quit, Murcia and Sylvain started a clothing business called "Truth and Soul" and Sylvain took a job at "A Different Drummer", a men's boutique that was across the street from the New York Doll Hospital, a doll repair shop. Sylvain claimed that the shop inspired the name for their future band. In 1970 they formed a band again and recruited Johnny Thunders to join on bass, though Sylvain ended up teaching him to play guitar. They called themselves the "Dolls." When Sylvain left the band to spend a few months in London, Thunders and Murcia went their separate ways.

Thunders was eventually recruited by Kane and Rick Rivets, who had been playing together in the Bronx. At Thunders' suggestion, Murcia replaced the original drummer. Thunders played lead guitar and sang for the band known as "Actress". An October 1971 rehearsal tape recorded by Rivets was released as Dawn of the Dolls. When Thunders decided that he no longer wanted to be the front man, David Johansen joined the band.

Initially, the group was composed of singer David Johansen, guitarists Johnny Thunders and Rick Rivets (who was replaced by Sylvain Sylvain after a few months), bass guitarist Arthur "Killer" Kane and drummer Billy Murcia. The original lineup's first performance was on Christmas Eve 1971 at a homeless shelter, the Endicott Hotel.

The band was influenced by vintage rhythm and blues, the early Rolling Stones, classic American girl group songs, and protopunk bands such as the MC5 and The Stooges, as well as glam rockers such as Marc Bolan. In synthesizing this wide variety of influences they created something which critic Stephen Thomas Erlewine wrote "doesn't really sound like anything that came before it. It's hard rock with a self-conscious wit, a celebration of camp and kitsch that retains a menacing, malevolent edge." The band's sound was also influenced by blues and soul, as evidenced by Johansen's blues harmonica and their choice of cover versions. Their two Mercury albums contain their covers of songs originally performed by Bo Diddley, The Drells, Sonny Boy Williamson, The Coasters and the Jay Hawks. The CD "Private World: The Complete Early Studio Demos 1972/3" includes their versions of songs by Otis Redding, Gary US Bonds, Chuck Berry, The Shangri-Las and Muddy Waters. The jazz influence was particularly important for Johansen, whose subsequent career included work with jazz man Big Jay McNeely and blues man Hubert Sumlin. Johansen is an accomplished trumpet player.

After getting a manager and attracting some music industry interest, the New York Dolls got a break when Rod Stewart invited them to open for him at a London concert. Shortly thereafter, Murcia died of accidental drowning, at age 21, after he passed out from drugs and alcohol.

Once back in New York, the Dolls auditioned drummers, including Marc Bell (who would go on to play with Richard Hell and Ramones under the stage name "Marky Ramone") and Jerry Nolan, a friend of the band. They selected Nolan, and after US Mercury Records' A&R man Paul Nelson signed them, they began sessions for their debut album. New York Dolls was produced by former The Nazz guitarist Todd Rundgren, who had become a successful pop singer and producer, with his #5 Billboard hit, Hello It's Me. In an interview in Creem magazine, Rundgren says he barely touched the recording; everybody was debating how to do the mix. Sales were sluggish, especially in middle US, and a Stereo Review magazine reviewer in 1973 compared the Dolls' guitar playing to the sound of lawnmowers. New York Dolls in 1973

America's mass rock audience's reaction to the Dolls was mixed. In a Creem magazine poll, they were elected both best and worst new group of 1973. The Dolls also toured Europe, and, while appearing on UK television, host Bob Harris of the BBC's Old Grey Whistle Test derided the group as "mock rock," comparing them unfavorably to the Rolling Stones.

For their next album, Too Much Too Soon, the quintet hired producer George "Shadow" Morton, whose productions for the Shangri-Las and other girl-groups in the mid-1960s had been among the band's favorites. Mercury dropped the Dolls not long after the second album. In 1975, foundering in drug abuse and interpersonal conflicts, the band split up. During their last weeks together Malcolm McLaren helped with management. He got the band red leather outfits to wear on stage and a communist flag as backdrop. The Dolls did a 5-concert tour of New York - one gig for each New York district - supported by new band Television that included Tom

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Verlaine and Richard Hell. Their last show in New York was at The Shoram, in Quogue, New York, with Spider on drums.

The McLaren-era Dolls were captured in a live set released by Fan Club records in 1982, Red Patent Leather. Production is credited to Sylvain Sylvain, with former manager Marty Thau credited as executive producer. Due to Kane being unable to play that night, roadie Peter Jordan played bass and was credited with having played "second bass". Jordan had played with the Dolls often, when Kane was too inebriated to play. He was the Dolls' bass player after Thunders and Nolan left, until their final dissolution.

[Wikipedia]

The sound on this disc is a fairly rough mono. While this would be substandard in most cases, it seems to fit with the Dolls image, and I wouldn't expect it any other way. What they lacked in talent they more than made up with in attitude and just plain guts. They were they kind of band that could make aspiring musicians think, "If they can do it, I'll have a shot too". The video looks as if it might have been taken from several different early career shows. Here's the tracklisting for the DVD.

1. Jet Boy
2. Personality Crisis
3. Human Being
4. Bad Detective
5. Subway Train
6. Trash
7. Vietnamese Baby
8. Lookin' For A Kiss
9. Who Are The Mystery Girls
10. Private World
11. Babylon
12. Frankenstein
13. Chatterbox
14. Jet Boy

As a bonus extra, you get an ultra rare 1976 interview with David Johansen and Johnny Thunders by Lisa Robinson.

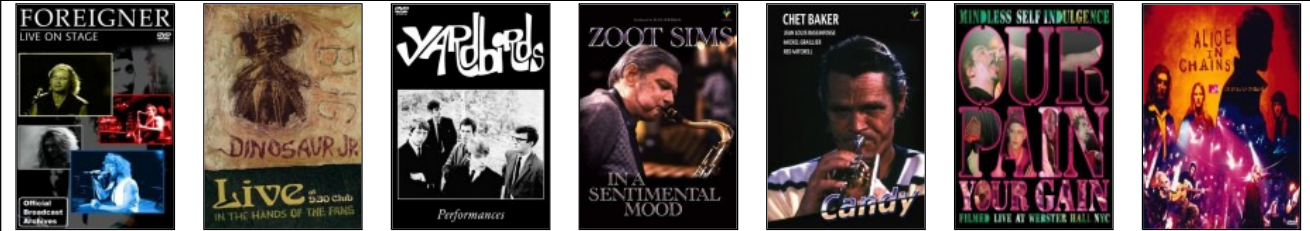
Grab this hot and sweaty concert while you can. You'll be feeling dirty after the show!

8/10.



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