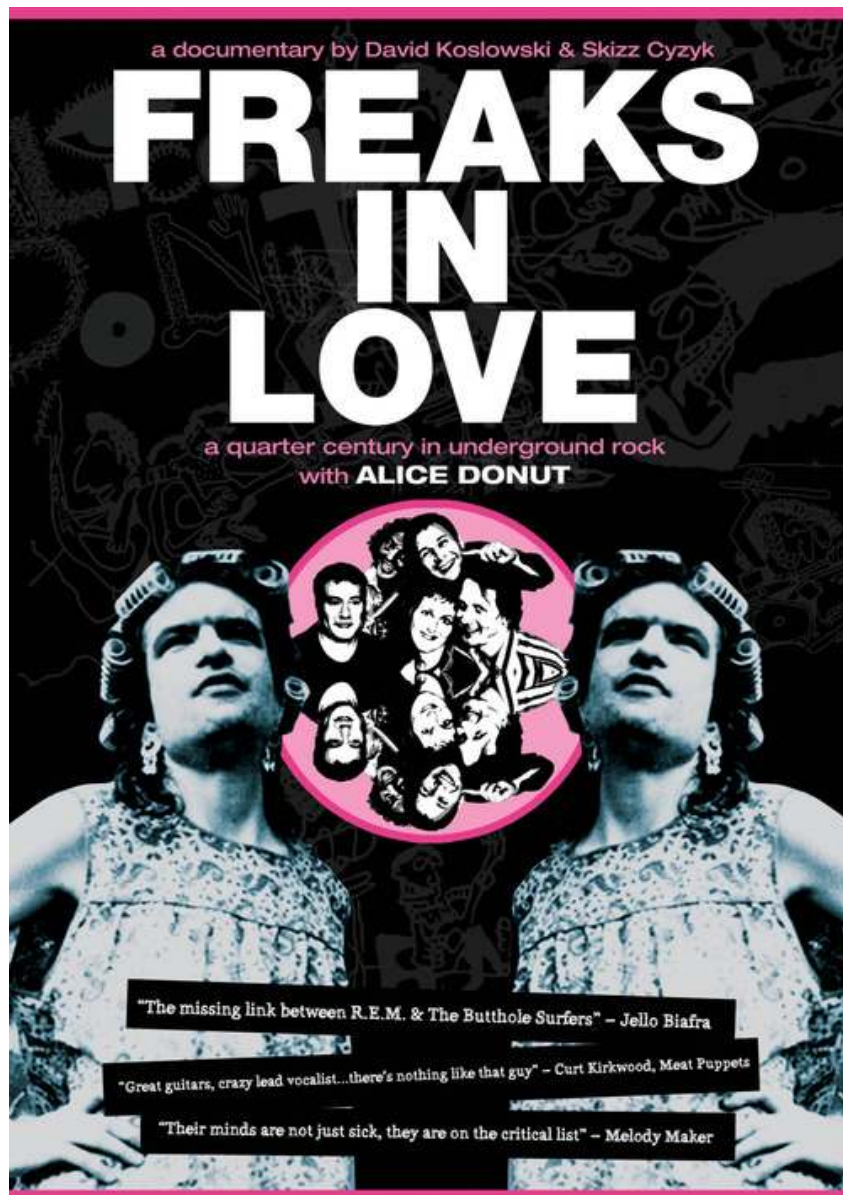
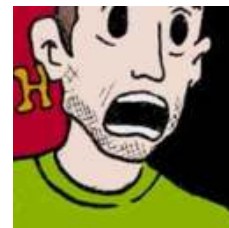


The Impaler Speaks

Freaks In Love: A Quarter Century In Underground Rock With Alice Donut

Here's my review of a documentary film that shows the world what documentary films should look (and sound) like. And what a subject! **Alice Donut**. Wow! Review written for **Mass Movement** 34, a work in progress. Links below the review.



Freaks In Love: A Quarter Century In Underground Rock With Alice Donut (dir: David Koslowski & Skizz Cyzyk; 120db Films/DuoTone/MVD Visual)

Thanks to an ever-increasing rise in technology – and, of course, to the fact that those of us who were impressionable kids during the heyday of dozens of innovative and influential bands that more than deserve such treatment – there are a slew of independently created films documenting the careers of bands and artists that helped to shape the musical and cultural landscapes of the past three decades hitting the market these days. Within the past few years there have been films focusing on the early days of both US and UK punk/hardcore; the history of heavy metal; and on acts like Fishbone, A Tribe Called Quest, The Runaways, New York Dolls, Lemmy (Motorhead), Minutemen, Andrew Wood (Mother Love

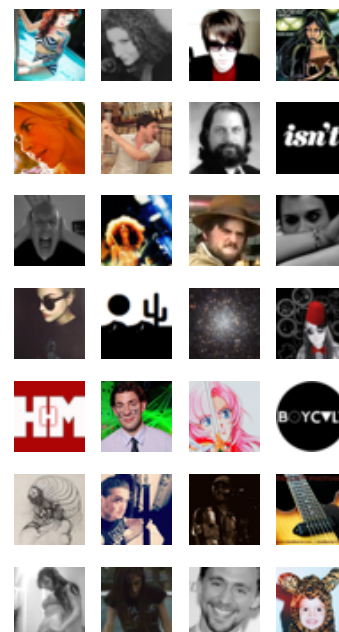
The Impaler Speaks... supporting local music worldwide, from Austin TX to the United Kingdom and everywhere else. The Impaler has been a member of the Mass Movement creative team since it was a cut-n-paste fanzine many years ago. This is a way to add some depth to the coverage I am able to provide in MM, and so much more... Support indie music. Support indie film. Support indie life.

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Bone/Malfunkshun), Betty Blowtorch, Anvil, and Rush, to name just a few. Films currently in production, making the rounds of the festival circuit, or playing in limited release focus on subjects like Big Star, Chris Whitley, The Replacements, Grant Hart (Husker Du), Bad Brains, Amphetamine Reptile Records, Rhino Records, DEVO, and Archers Of Loaf – and there are, hopefully, many more to come. All of these are completely indispensable, both as documents of what was and as guideposts for what is and what is yet to be.

Add to that list **'Freaks In Love: A Quarter Century In Underground Rock With Alice Donut'** by filmmakers **David Koslowski** and **Skizz Cyzyk**.

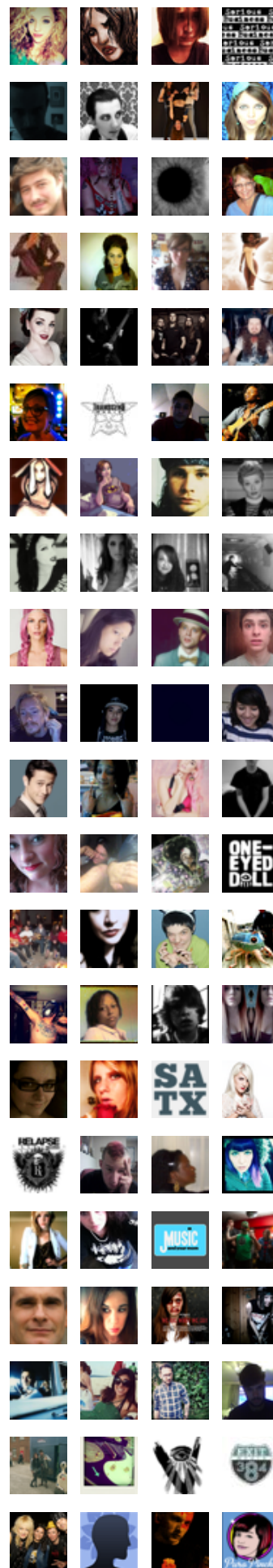
Alice Donut. How does one try to explain Alice Donut to someone who might have no experience, no history, no frame of reference for this band? Jello Biafra, legendary frontman for Dead Kennedys and head of Alternative Tentacles Records – who only needed to hear an Alice Donut demo track on San Francisco's underground radio station KSUF to precipitate flying out to New York City to sign the band in the late 1980s – did a good surface-level job of it while being interviewed for the film when he called them 'the missing link between R.E.M. and the Butthole Surfers'. Alice Donut was – and is – a punk band in the truest sense, in that they have always been an original, off-kilter, uncompromising act with an innate do-it-yourself ethos. Alice Donut also was – and is – a pop band in that their songs are engaging, melodic, and unforgettable. They fit in well on Alternative Tentacles, which released the band's first 6 albums plus a bunch of EPs and singles, and also recently released their latest album, 'Ten Glorious Animals'. They also fit in well on Howler Records – a label founded by on-again/off-again Alice Donut guitarist David Giffen (not 'Geffen'!) that also has released records by fuzz-rock kings Bad Wizard among others – which released the band's post-hiatus catalog and also is handling the digital distribution for 'Ten Glorious Animals'.

But what does all of this mean? What the hell is Alice Donut really all about?

'Freaks In Love' answers those questions as well as any rock 'n' roll documentary ever could. The film runs in a standard narrative format, for the most part, starting with the band's origins in New York City circa 1985/86. At the time, frontman Tomas Antona, bassist Ted Houghton, and guitarist David Giffen, who met as students at Columbia University, formed the Sea Beasts. By late 1986/early 1987, the Sea Beasts had added drummer Stephen Moses and guitarist Tom Meltzer to the fold and morphed into Alice Donut. Meltzer soon left to pursue other interests and was replaced by guitarist Michael Jung. Houghton departed in 1990 and was replaced by Sissi Schulmeister. Giffen was unable to tour consistently at the time, so Richard Marshall was brought in on guitar during the first half of the 1990s. At first glance, the seeming instability of the band might appear problematic. Interviews with all the band members and other key figures – including Jello Biafra, Curt Kirkwood (Meat Puppets), Chet Mazur (who Alice Donut fans will recognize from album covers, videos, and live performances), Mindy Weisberger (who directed many of the band's videos), and several management and promotions people who worked with the band (through Alternative Tentacles, underground radio, or directly) – are interwoven with clips of performances and music videos, home movies of off-stage antics, and a barrage of still photos to tell the tale of the band and prove otherwise. Alice Donut is a family like any other family. They've had their share of conflict, but at the end of the day they forgive and forget. That's another reason why Alice Donut is not the average band, and another reason why this film is such a crucial part of their legacy and of the cumulative legacy of so-called 'alternative' music in general.

'23 years, 10 albums... we're just about to explode....' This statement expressed by Antona onstage during a 2009 show, and included in the film, sums up Alice Donut pretty well. It speaks to the history of the band as well as to the attitude and sense of humor that has been an integral part of the band from the start. This is a band that made their own way. They booked their own shows, drove themselves around the country in a small van, headlined their own shows for small crowds rather than glom onto a more popular act in order to play in front of larger audiences in the US (barring a brief stint opening for Blind Melon, with Meat Puppets also in support, well after the cult of Alice Donut was firmly established), quickly figured out the importance of the European market and got themselves over there as often as they could, wrote and recorded music that they wanted to hear with no outside interference, created their own world of artistic expression with visual accoutrements that matched their sonic sensibilities. To co-opt a saying attributed (at least in song) to an older member of New York's artistic community, Alice Donut did it their way. Always. And they still do.

As a DVD release, **'Freaks In Love'** ranks high on the **'buy or die'** list. This is a film that can be viewed and enjoyed over and over again. The interviews are well cut and interesting, and all of the subjects are well chosen; the performance footage (how about a clip of the band doing an instrumental version of Fugazi's 'Repeater', with drummer Stephen Moses replicating Ian MacKaye's vocals with a



trombone?!?), the video clips, and the still-photo montages are outstanding; the direction is superb, with the film flowing in an engaging fashion from the beginning to the aw-man-I-can't-believe-it's-really-over end. Additionally, the bonus features – which include two handfuls of incredible full-song performances from throughout the band's career, deleted scenes, and more – are more than just supplementary tidbits for fans, they are essential pieces of the Alice Donut puzzle. And in terms of essentiality, the 'soundtrack' for the film – not really a soundtrack, but a compilation of tracks chosen by the fans which was released to coincide with the DVD release and shares the same name, 'Freaks In Love' – is nothing short of a must-have item, with 26 remixed/remastered tracks spanning the past 25 years. Some deluxe versions of the DVD were packaged with the 2-CD set, but the music is easily found on its own, in both CD and digital formats.

The Impaler's verdict: Being an Alice Donut fan means dealing with a lot of scrunched-up faces muttering 'Who?!' when the subject of must-hear music comes up. It also means never having to say you're sorry, as **'Freaks In Love'** proves in a bold and boisterous way, because this band – **Alice Donut** – is **untouchable, enduring, and just plain GREAT.**

The Impaler @impalerspeaks

Links: [Alice Donut official](#) * [Freaks In Love official](#) * [Alice Donut on Twitter](#) * [MVD Visual official](#) * [MVD on Twitter](#) * [120db Films official](#) * [Mass Movement](#)

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