



Circle Jerks
My Career as a Jerk [DVD] (2012)
 MVD

Reviewer Rating:

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One of the main problems with documentaries is that they either come too late or too early. Either, the band has been broken up for years and are long past their golden years, creating a documentary that is glossed with warped memory, or the band is still active and the documentary is bent by the band's current goals, rather than what the band *is*. Dave Markey's bio of the Circle Jerks, *My Career as a Jerk*, comes at just the perfect time. Although the band hasn't officially broken up, they only ceased functioning three or so years ago, meaning the interviewees' memories are still fresh, but they're not concerned with protecting the future or image of the band... which is good, because the Jerks do talk trash, but they also talk about the important stuff too.

Markey made a name for himself by capturing indie rock just as it broke to the mainstream with *1991: The Year Punk Broke* and his skills are put to equal use here. Markey is able to capture the Circle Jerks as contemporary living figures, while also maintaining a reverence and truthful eye towards their history. That's not an easy feat, but Markey's job is made easier by the refreshing openness of the band members.

Of course, CJ lead vocalist Keith Morris is something of a punk rock Dean Martin when it comes to recounting the facts. He's not shy in naming names and calling out other people's bullshit, but, he takes equal time in calling out his own bullshit, all while frequently taking detours that seem to have nothing to do with the topic at hand. The effect of which, is that, much like Dino's tales of mischief, even though Morris may have been the bad guy in some situations, you side with him because he describes the conflict in such an honest and humorous manner.

By contrast, CJ lead guitarist Greg Hetson is somewhat more reserved. One doesn't get the impression that he's holding back, but rather, that he'd like to remember CJ on better terms than Morris, who has little reserve praising the highs and lamenting the lows. The contrast is particularly interesting in that the documentary seems to make the argument that the fracture of the group began when Hetson chose to join Bad Religion, thus relegating CJ to a part time band.

But, although the drama is fun, it's not the most important part. A documentary shouldn't just be gossip, but it should serve as a history lesson as well, and that's where *My Career as a Jerk* succeeds. Too often documentaries on legendary bands focus *too much* on the "legendary aspect" and at the end, all you are left with is a bunch of people talking about how much they liked a

certain band, but without any real inside information.

Thankfully, this documentary focuses on the core band members and has them recount, step by step, from the band's formation, to its height, to its prolonged breakup. Although other notable punks do show up to praise the group, mainly we get info from the Jerks themselves. So, the film almost feels like you are sitting in a room with Morris, Hetson, bassist Zander Schloss and drummer Lucky Lehrer, and get to ask them, "Give me the whole story of the Circle Jerks."

And they don't hold back, spending equal time on the basic facts which most fans probably know and random factoids which were largely unknown until now. Did you know that Flea was a Circle Jerk? Did you know that Greg Hetson once kicked Chuck Biscuits in the balls? Did you know that Keith Morris almost *died* from diabetes?

My Career as a Jerk works because it's laudatory, and also slightly libelous. The facts come from the horses' mouths about the band's career. But, perhaps the most surprising thing from the documentary, despite that it's plainly obvious, is that as hard as they tried, it's impossible to actually make a career out of being a Jerk. What is equally as surprising, and not as obvious, is that some members are sad about that, and some seem downright gleeful.

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