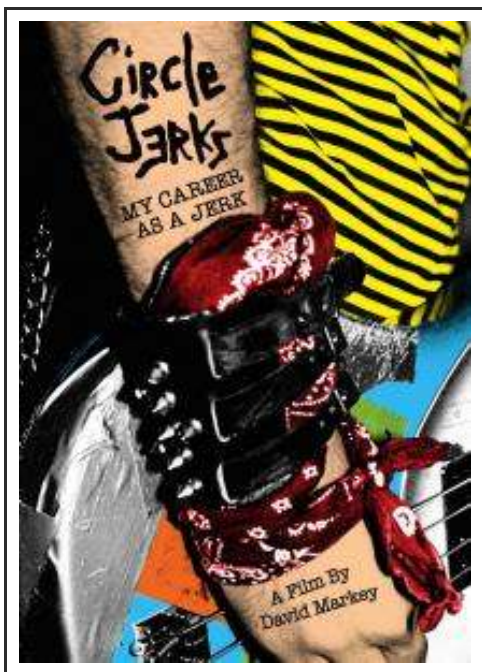


"DESTROY ALL FANBOYS!"

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Random Film of the Week: Circle Jerks: My Career As A Jerk

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To date, the best documentary on the “punk” music scene has been (and probably always will be) Penelope Spheeris’ **The Decline of Western Civilization**. Although long out of print on VHS and not available on a commercially released DVD or Blu-Ray, those fortunate enough to have seen it in theaters, on cable back when it had a brief run there or via other means can probably point out moments and performances that were raw and amazing as they captured the urgency and sometimes distressing lives of the bands and fans while examining how media and the authorities dealt with a scene they couldn’t understand. One of the few bands to survive this tumultuous time and make it into the 90’s and beyond was Circle Jerks, and director David Markey (“1991: The Year Punk Broke”, “The Slog Movie”) chronicles the band’s

history in an excellent new documentary, **Circle Jerks: My Career As A Jerk.**, available on September 25 from MVD Entertainment Group. It's a must-see for anyone at all interested in rock history as it evolved and morphed into new forms of music during the 80's and 90's.

While the film focuses primarily on the band and includes some amazing concert performances including some captured from Spheeris's seminal documentary, there are a number of interviews with band members and a handful of important figures of the time reminiscing about the L.A. punk scene and the Jerks' place in all that chaos. Considering all the arguments about freedom of speech these days, it's pretty stunning to hear about the LAPD's notorious chief, Daryl Gates, his raw hatred for the scene and how he abused his power by having his police use any convenient excuse (that usually involved instigating violence or pure overreaction in some cases) to break up shows or even put the fear of police into band members who merely wanted to head out to practice.

But this is just a small part of the Jerks' journey as Markey bounces back and forth over what seems like a few years chronicling the band's diverse lineup. Given that the band was made up of members from Black Flag, Redd Kross (formerly Red Cross until that organization's legal department came a-knockin'), there's a certain DIY aesthetic here that's admirable, but it would have been cool to have on screen notations as to when the interview segments were filmed just to know how long it took to get this project off the ground and completed. Don't expect any subtitles for the many songs here either (in case you're new to the band and want to know what's being screamed at your eardrums), nor any subtitles at all for the hearing impaired. These are more technical issues that don't impact the documentary at all, but I thought I'd bring this up if you're reading this and are thinking of snapping this up for a hearing impaired friend or relative who wants a partial Punk 101 primer.

That said, the dynamic concert footage here is fantastic and packed with the band's pure sound and Morris' outrageous energy. Despite his days of substance abuse (long over with, according to Morris), his stage presence was magnetic, especially when the crowd got involved, leaping on stage to dance and dive. There's a great performance clip where one guy hops on stage and leapfrogs off Morris' back into the crowd and the singer doesn't miss a

beat. What makes this film so compelling is the whole feeling of spontaneity missing from today's canned auto-tunes, pre-planned speechifying moments and well-rehearsed dance moves. Of course, you could say punk never was about that, but I'm sure that could be argued as the music world has pushed more into corporate skies over time and has even tainted the idea of "indie" as a scene to some.

Anyway, enough babbling from me – this doc is a knockout that leaves a satisfying yet unresolved bit to the group's future plans, as the surviving members all seem to be involved in other projects. Nevertheless, Markey has created some highly recommended viewing here, clocking in at a tidy 96 minutes, not including some great deleted scenes. Want to know how album cover art was done back then? Hear the great Henry Rollins talk about how the Jerks inspired the Washington D.C. punk music scene after a single show? These and other snippets are included and yes, are recommended (hell, they're ON the DVD, what are you going to do- NOT watch them?). Even if you're not a Circle Jerks fan, after watching this dynamic documentary, I'll bet you'll be seeking out their back catalog.

Score: A-

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