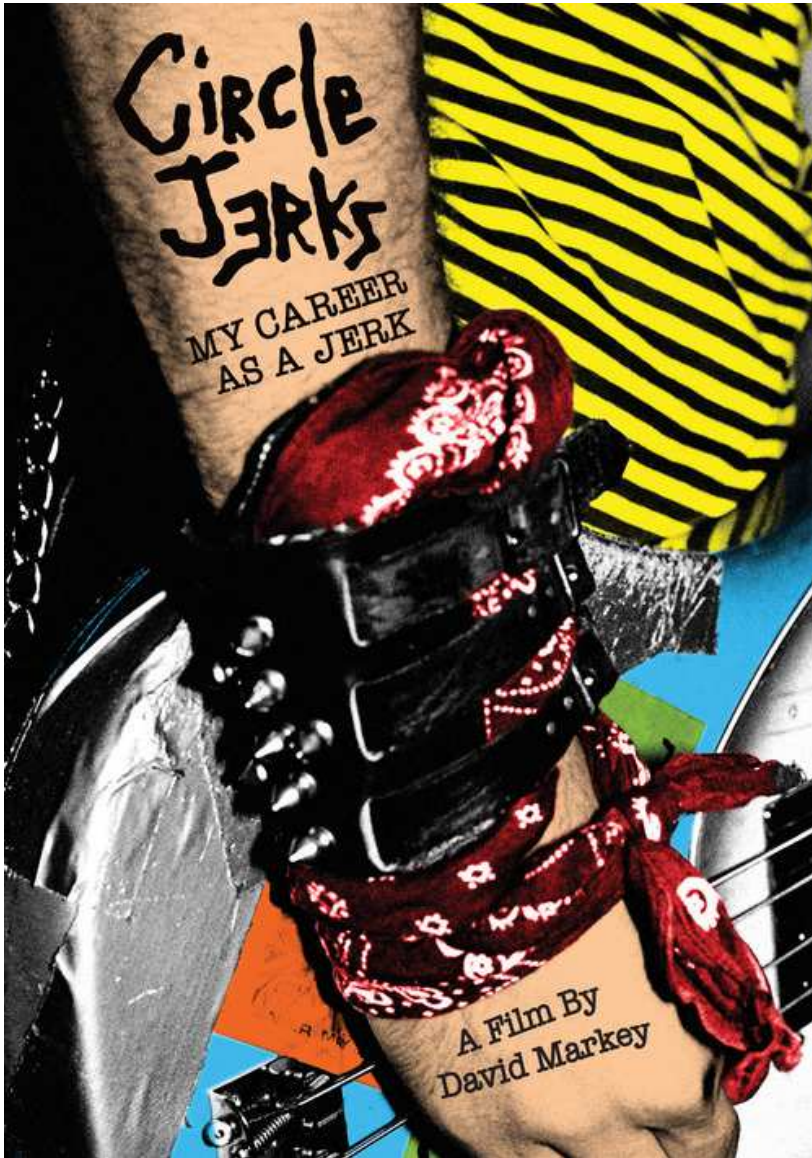


The Impaler Speaks

Circle Jerks: My Career As A Jerk



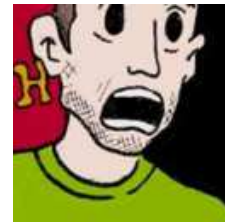
Circle Jerks: My Career As A Jerk (dir: David Markey; MVD Visual)

Circle Jerks. How many names in the grand history of punk hold as much weight? For me, not many. When prepping the 10th Anniversary cover painting for Mass Movement, artist Jethro Wall slyly – and wisely – depicted the cartoon-zombie version of me in a Circle Jerks t-shirt. Nothing else would have made as much sense. When the Southern California punk/hardcore scene was developing out of nothing back in the late 1970s, original Black Flag vocalist and original Red Cross (later Red Kross) guitarist Greg Hetson joined forces with drummer Keith 'Lucky' Lehrer and bassist Roger Rogerson to form The Bedwetters, who would quickly be renamed Circle Jerks... and the world would never be the same again.

"We didn't want to play Led Zeppelin. We didn't want to play Fleetwood Mac. We didn't want to play the Doobie Brothers." – Keith Morris

"Nobody knew what the hell they were doing back then. We were just making it up as we go along... 'we can do that'." – Greg Hetson

Filmmaker David Markey – the man behind such indispensable indie films as 'Desperate Teenage Lovedolls', 'The Slog Movie', and '1991: The Year Punk Broke' – has created a fantastic documentary in 'My Career As A Jerk'. The film, as its title suggests, focuses on the indispensable and omnipresent Jerks – Morris and Hetson – first and foremost, with a slew of classic live footage and video clips presenting every era in the band's storied musical career stitched between (and sometimes under) interviews with Henry Rollins, J Mascis (Dinosaur Jr), Lisa



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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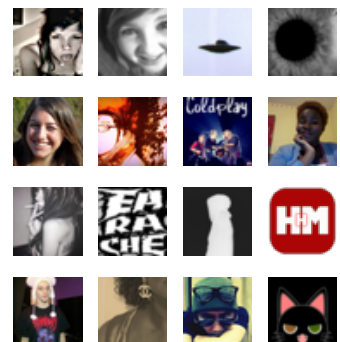
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Following



Fancher (Frontier Records), Brian Baker (Minor Threat, Bad Religion, et al), Greg Graffin (Bad Religion), and sometime-Jerks Zander Schloss and Mark Vidal aka Earl Liberty (also of Saccharine Trust) beefing up the primary narrative delivered via interviews with Morris and Hetson.

Circle Jerks' history is presented in a startlingly honest fashion, with a quick-cut dissertation on their rotating series of bassists (including both Megadeth guitarist Chris Poland and Flea of Red Hot Chili Peppers) that seems cut straight from 'This Is Spinal Tap'; discussions of the drug addictions that plagued numerous members, including Morris, and ultimately claimed the life of original bassist Rogerson; a look into Hetson's double life as simultaneous guitarist for Bad Religion and Circle Jerks, which clearly wasn't as great a situation for any of the people or bands involved as an outsider might think; the band's disastrous flirtation with major label success (or should that read 'excess'?) – and Debbie Gibson (watch and learn!) – in the 1990s; and their not-always-amicable interactions with other bands, fans, and especially the authorities.

The good times – and there are plenty – are presented in equal measure with the bad, and the footage of the band playing at some of those early shows says more to me than anyone's recollections ever could. Circle Jerks' influence in the evolution of punk rock is indisputable, and is summed up perfectly by Henry Rollins, when he recounts the tale of Teen Idles (featuring Ian MacKaye and Jeff Nelson) arriving in California for the first time – with Rollins in tow as a roadie – to play a show with Circle Jerks, Flipper, and Dead Kennedys. Not only did these young punks from Washington DC get to meet some early heroes (Keith Morris from Black Flag! Tony Alva, as seen in Thrasher magazine!), they were introduced to circle pits, slam dancing, stage-diving, and other aspects of punk culture that we all think of as having always been in place now, but in reality existed solely, at that time, within the Southern California scene of which Circle Jerks were as integral a part as any other band or person. As both Rollins and Morris recount in the film, two weeks later the DC kids were back at home, Teen Idles had transformed into Minor Threat, Rollins had formed S.O.A., and violence in the name of fun had become fully absorbed into front-of-the-stage culture in the DC punk scene.

The Impaler's verdict: 'My Career As A Jerk' is, as anyone with any sense of punk history would expect, essential viewing. Markey has crafted an entertaining, engaging, unmissable film that peels back enough layers on its subjects to reveal some previously unknown information while maintaining a focus on the fact that its subjects are, after all, true punk rock heroes who deserve to be showcased with reverence and respect. The DVD contains over 30 minutes of additional interview footage, including my personal favorite moments from the interviews with both Morris and Rollins.

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