



The Complete Truth about De-evolution

Devo

MVD Visual - MVD6054D (DVD)

Available from *MVD Entertainment Group*.

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
(progdawg@hotmail.com)

Devo was without doubt the most interesting of the satiric New Wave bands taking over as the 60s and 70s flamed out. The hippies hadn't lacked for their own tongue-in-cheekery, what with the Bonzo Dog Band, Wilderness Road, Frank Zappa, and a fair number of sociological and musical birdflip bands, but the time had come for succeeding generations to take the rostrum, and Devo did so with a devastating splash, appearing on Saturday Night Live with a video of their cover of the Rolling Stones' (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction* (which appears in this DVD, fourth track in), a visually Kraftwerky eye-stunner that launched them. Many know Brian Eno produced the debut LP, but not too many also understand that Eno wasn't the band's original patron—that would be David Bowie and Iggy Pop, who had secured them a Warner Bros. contract. The Thin White Duke and The Stooze Lizard had previous obligations, however, and so handed the task over to Brian.

That video remains to this day, in this not very humble critic's opinion, one of the most innovative such devices in music history, and I credit it as being as much an art piece as Marilyn Manson's later stunning vids of *Sweet Dreams* and companion monstrosities (in point of fact, I point to those Manson vids as among the most important art pieces in modern times, oozing with an unbelievable degree of symbolry and commentary in hyper-stylistic degree). However, this DVD provides a really good opportunity to not only once again view the re-release (which, admit, you had on VHS and gave to the Salvation Army long ago), not only to feast on a pantload of new extras (live footage, commentary by Mothersbaugh and Gerald Casale, Bruce Conner's film *Mongoloid*, and etc.), but also to grasp a whole new perspective of just how cogently the ensemble captured so much of the American Nightmare...er, I mean 'Dream'.

Though visually and aurally lo-fi throughout, I think with the sea of time between each video's separate release and now, when the effects of capitalism are being felt with painful urgency, Devo's innumerable japeries easily gain the status of prescience, and I suspect most will, as I have, find a good deal more depth in the antics of one of the strangest groups in rock history than was heretofore perceived. The band rode a roller coaster of success and indifference with the public, their 1990 *Smooth Noodle Maps* so pooh-poohed that a Euro-tour was terminated early as concert and album sales bombed...and it would be 20 years before another try was mounted. I won't say the second coming of *Complete Truth* will herald a new era and complete re-assessment of Devo, but it should, even despite what I'll momentarily be revealing. Where the B-52s, Sparks, Weird Al, and others produced no end of novelty songs, Devo was kinda taking the savage German pen-and-ink satirist George Grosz across the waters, outfitting him at The Gap, applying pomade to his pate, and sitting the surly bastard in front of the boob tube.

Now let me show you why I have a bit of a rep for infamy in the music criticism sphere: I tend to shit where I eat. Nonetheless, I'm a critic and licensed to cause trouble, so I'd like to let y'all in on a little secret: quite often the most acerbic commentarists are also the biggest hypocrites. For instance, Frank Zappa was a fierce glowering martinet against drug usage.....while addicted to the most dangerous and addictive drug on Earth: nicotine. Devo, as a band savagely but humorously decrying the capitalist Sheeple Syndrome and debilitating corporatism in American culture, was a capering Cassandra, BUT, when it came time in 1978 for the band to equably settle accounts with co-founding member Bob Lewis and render proper credit and compensation for intellectual property rights re: the de-evolution theme that was the band's entire *raison d'être*, Mothersbaugh & Co. did a volte face and turned into a deadly accurate surrogate of that which they decried, refusing to negotiate with Lewis, even hastily suing him in L.A. Superior Court, demanding a declaratory judgement against his claims, themselves averring he had no part whatsoever in the baseline formulation.

Lewis, however, was a bit more savvy and went back to the original jurisdiction point (Devo was an Akron, Ohio, band), the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio. He ridiculously easily produced a wealth of documents proving his assertion, even to the extent of Mothersbaugh and band members publicly several times having declared him to be instrumental in the subversive theory of de-evolution. Aghast, white as ghosts, trebling in terror, the band couldn't sprint quickly enough to the bargaining table and settled with Lewis for an undisclosed sum (and, I would guess, a non-disclosure agreement, which is why you, dear reader, never heard of the fracas and Mothersbaugh has done his damndest to keep the scenario squelched).

That all said, should such a nasty little incident prejudice the audient in some way re: the art? Oh hell no! Cah-mon, if that were the case, then you'd have to toss out half your record collection. Give me a break. All I'm doing is applying to Devo what they applied to everyone else. Some fair. And I gotta watch this DVD from start to finish, even though the kiddie theodolite

applied to everyone else. Seems fair. And I again watched this DVD from start to finish, even though I've viewed the earlier version three times since it's 1993 inception. The bonuses alone are reason enough to grab this new edition but having it on DVD puts the frosting on the cake...and rest assured that your Salvation Army cast-off is probably still in circulation as well. I know, 'cause I saw a copy at the Redondo Beach annex just the other day.

Edited by: David N. Pyles
(dnpyles@acousticmusic.com)

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Website design by David N. Pyles
DNPyles@acousticmusic.com
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