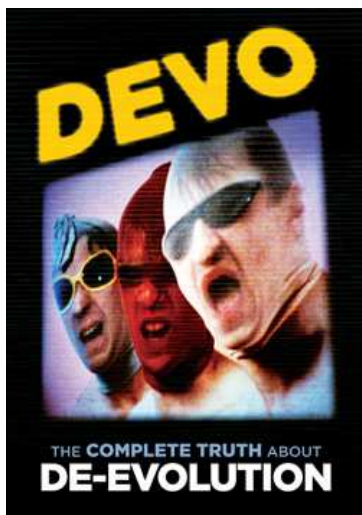


Devo

The Complete Truth About De-Evolution

February 17th, 2014 | by Stephen Slaybaugh | 3 Comments


Throughout the band's existence, Devo has been inextricably tied to the visual component of performance. From its beginning as a six-piece artistic entity at Kent State in the early '70s, the band has concerned itself with video, technology, and the points where art, pop culture, and rock & roll meet as much as anything else. By their own admission, it was a video project that reignited the band just as they were about to hang it up after several years of spinning their wheels in Akron. The Truth About De-Evolution, directed by Kent classmate Chuck Statler, was filmed in 1976 and featured the songs "Secret Agent Man" and "Jocko Homo." Statler, in fact, intended the film for laserdisc, which was still in its infancy but seemed the perfect vehicle for a music-driven project, given the quality of its audio.



It is that film (which won first prize at the Ann Arbor Film Festival in 1977) that gives this DVD its name: The Complete Truth About De-Evolution (MVD). Originally released, ironically enough, on laserdisc in 1993, this is the second DVD reissue, the first being Rhino's edition from 2003. In addition to its namesake, it collects nearly all of Devo's music videos, which can be watched with or without commentary from Devo principals Mark Mothersbaugh and Gerard Casale. It also includes the "Theme from Doctor Detroit" clip, which was not on the laserdisc, but was on the Rhino DVD. And like the Rhino DVD, it doesn't include the "Are You Experienced?" clip that was on the laserdisc, although it does have a test card directing viewers to watch it online. Where this edition differs from Rhino's is that it includes an absolutely riveting version of "Gates of Steel" from the band's Freedom of Choice tour that originally appeared on the Live 1980 DVD, as well as a couple more recent post-reunion live performances.

But really what is most important about this DVD is simply that it is back in circulation. It is enlightening to listen to the commentary track as Casale and Mothersbaugh reveal the inspiration and motivation behind each video. For example, the videos from the Oh, No! It's Devo album ("Time Out for Fun," "Peek-a-Boo," and "That's Good") were meant to tie into the visual components of the band's live show, and Casale explains that they actually embedded cues for the visuals into the album recording in order to enact them in concert. (That tour included a 3D show that was broadcast live and subsequently on Pay-Per-View.) That the band was featured in a full-length film produced by Neil Young and were also one of the first acts to use blue screen in producing their videos, only further proves Devo place as video pioneers. (It's not so surprising then that Mothersbaugh went on to work on the soundtracks for movies and television.) That Devo so cogently tied together kitsch, Dadaist references, pop culture allusions, cutting edge technology, and their uniquely critical worldview only makes this volume more startlingly revelatory. There's also a good deal of humor, albeit largely black humor, so enjoying it on a surface level isn't out of the question. To say Devo was ahead of its time is a lacking understatement. It's probably more realistic that everyone else has simply been light years behind and may never catch up.


3 Comments

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john mckinney says:
February 17, 2014 at 16:54

If music is the universal language which I have always felt it was...should it not convey more than songs of complacency and languish...ie... Im sad she left...Im happy shes here...Im mad at my boss etcetera....Yes I loved the sound and the band's songs ... nothing has changed...we are all just a few decades beyond thats all...issues have certainly not changed. Humanity is still in the fight for it's very existence. ~ John McKinney

[Reply](#)

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-P- says:
February 17, 2014 at 17:59

You're wrong about the Theme For Dr. Detroit promo video. It is not on the Rhino DVD.

Also, The Rhino DVD has better video quality for the promo videos than this new version.

Recent Rumpuses

Devo
The Complete Truth About De-Evolution

Cracker and Camper Van Beethoven
Highline Ballroom, New York, January 19

GG Allin
My Prison Walls

Travis
Webster Hall, New York, September 23

FLAG
Irving Plaza, New York, September 19

Peter Hook & The Light
Webster Hall, New York, September 13

The Mission
Irving Plaza, New York, September 5

Gentlemen of the Road Tour
Troy, August 30-31

Nelsonville Music Festival 2013

The new version's videos are faded, less detailed and have a slight distortion in their aspect ratio, as if the images were slightly stretched sideways (looking at the videos side by side you will see this).

[Reply](#)



Stephen Slaybaugh says:

February 17, 2014 at 18:11

I stand corrected. Thanks for the info P.

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