



PopMatters

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way that Gong and Hawkwind were high-minded, conceptual endeavors.

The low-budget drama that links these performances and videos in the first portion of the DVD prefigures the kind of piss takes that would become commonplace a decade later in film, music videos and even stage banter. Devo wasn't the first band to acknowledge the weird relationship between rock and commerce but few have done it as well as its done here, and few have also been as funny. This is so low budget you don't even notice the low budget.)

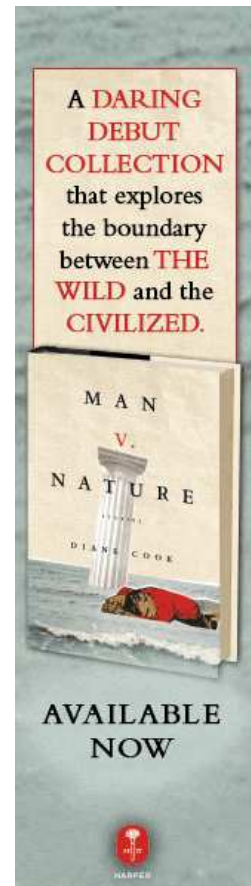
The rawness of the guitars and the precision of the rhythms remind us that these are guys who came out of an industrial city. These are guys who could have gone heavy metal like Black Sabbath and Judas Priest, but instead chose to strip their music of any reference to blues and virtually any emotion, instead coming out with something that was anti-rock. What could be more progressive, more art-filled than that?

But to get out of our heads for a moment, you should know that the songs here will blow your ever-loving mind. They're not just squared-off jams that predicted the frigid days of synth-pop, but instead pieces of music that recognized that devolution doesn't come without pain and sometimes even a man who ain't got the blues has still gotta howl. There's plenty of howling in "Jocko Homo", "Come Back Jonee", and "Uncontrollable Urge", all presented in full glory here, a reminder of the sheer power of Devo.

But, as the saying goes, writing about Devo is like tap-dancing about Gregory Hines, and so this is one of those rare occasions where the critic shouts with all the power and the fury in his soul and suggests that you find out for yourself just how impressive Devo was in its late '70s glory. Rounding out this DVD is a real treat for fans new and old, the Butch Devo and The Sundance Gig video, featuring the band live at the Sundance Film Festival in 1996. The group reached deep into its musical memory for the night and prepared a set that featured songs written in the group's earliest days. (A vinyl version of this performance has circulated before.) This performance is a welcome update for fans, and gives the thrill of finally seeing a much talked-about moment in Devo history.

Some stalwarts have been talking about this disc's reemergence for some time, and there's been Internet chatter about other Devo visuals entering the market again for the first time in a spell. Maybe all of that will spell a feature-length documentary that brings us up to the present day and explains why Devo was as much punk as it was progressive.

Rating: 



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Jedd Beaudoin is an award-winning writer and broadcaster. He holds an MFA in creative writing (fiction) from Wichita State University and hosts *Strange Currency* six nights week for Wichita Public Radio. His writing has appeared in *No Depression* and *The Crab Orchard Review* as well as at websites such as Ytsejam.com and Amazon.com.

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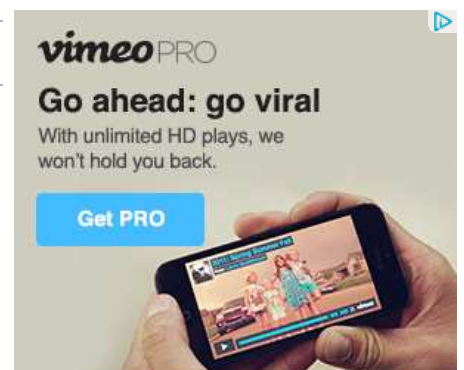
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