

## On Screen

Films & DVDs



Still from *23rd Century Giants: The Story Of Renaldo & The Loaf* (2021)



Brian 'Renaldo Malpractice' Poole (left) and David 'Ted The Loaf' Janssen

### **23rd Century Giants: The Story Of Renaldo & The Loaf**

Alex Wroten (Director)

Well Dang! Productions Blu-ray 2021, 82 mins

Imagine a film about an architect and a biomedical scientist teaming up and you probably wouldn't think it's a documentary but instead a comedy or a science fiction fantasy. Actually, those last two genres might well describe the music of Renaldo & The Loaf, the subject of said documentary. Alex Wroten's unlikely 2021 film (now on Blu-ray) about the obscure duo with a cult following travels along a similar route of rise/fall/resurgence seen in other music films, but the subjects and their surrounding cast of characters (including fans and friends) are so wonderfully off the wall that they give the story a unique charm.

Seen here in separate interviews, David 'Ted The Loaf' Janssen (the NHS scientist) is something of a doubter,

always second guessing their career, admitting that their early albums "weren't recorded with the knowledge that they were going to be made public" and that their whole raison d'etre was "an escape from reality... a last ditch attempt to hold on to childhood". Much more enthusiastic about their work is Brian 'Renaldo Malpractice' Poole, the draftsman (who provides the group's gnarled vocals), though even he admits that they functioned "in a creative bubble" early on.

Originally, the two were chums from Portsmouth on England's south coast who found a surrealist musical bond in the early 1970s, starting out with freak folk before evolving into novelty-like madness and delightful eccentricity crafted with tape loops, Casiotones and household instruments, including metal comb, pickle jar, vacuum tube. By 1979, they christened their project with their dice game nicknames and found kindred spirits

in The Residents, who released their albums on their own Ralph label.

After Renaldo became Ralph signees and promised the label that they'd produce anything but "40 minutes of dog farts", we follow their trajectory as improbable early MTV artists whose profile rises after their collaborative album with The Residents, 1983's *Title In Limbo*. As Ralph's principals Jay Clem, Homer Flynn and Hardy Fox (key players in The Residents machine) recall their parts in the Renaldo history, we also get a mini history of the label's vicissitudes.

By the mid-80s, Renaldo quietly faded away, finding that their day jobs and family commitments didn't jibe with their musical lives. But after a semi-official band website reconnected them in 2006, the pair found that they had no trouble picking up where they left off, now armed with music software to concoct their strange creations. Dramatically, Wroten shows

them finally sitting side by side to recount their history together for the first time in the film, literally demonstrating that they had become friends and bandmates again.

By the mid-2010s, their albums were reissued and there was even a new one, 2016's medieval-themed *Gurdy Hurding*, and their first proper concert ever, held in Vienna in 2018 with clips seen here of the small but enthusiastic audience. By then, a new label, Klanggalerie, and a new set of artist/collaborators had become their boosters and interview subjects here. By the time the credits roll, we're taken on a delightful modern day tour of the duo's favorite local pubs.

As such, the film stands as an inspiration for musical oddballs everywhere that one day, their story might be told too. Perhaps Ralph refugees MX-80 and Club Foot Orchestra will be next?

Jason Gross