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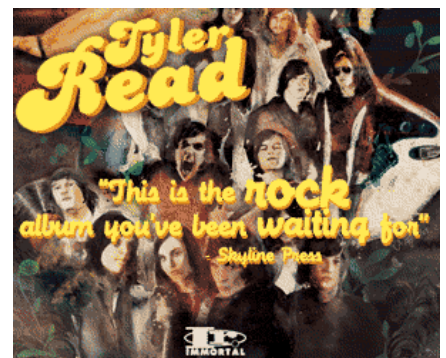
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### The Killers

#### The Killers

[Leaving Las Vegas]  
(Pride)

by Michael Franco

✉ Email ✉ Print ✉ Write to the editor

When a documentary about a band begins with a disclaimer that it contains none of their original music and that is was not authorized by their management or record company, you cannot help but be skeptical. How, after all, can you adequately cover a topic when you are not allowed to present what is at its core? This would be akin to making a documentary about Picasso and not showing any of his paintings. Viewed this way, making a film about an artist without depicting his or her art seems both futile and absurd.

This is the dilemma faced by *The Killers: Leaving Las Vegas*, a film that tells the story of the quartet's rise to international stardom, from their early days as unpolished upstarts playing local clubs to their enthusiastic rise in Europe to their eventual acceptance back home in the States. While the film gives excellent background and context about the Killers, ultimately it feels too far from its topic. In place of the band's music are snippets of music that sound vaguely "Killers-y", which is to say synthesized and atmospheric, but canned in that video game soundtrack manner. Add to that the fact that there's very little footage of the band (and what little footage there is seems secondary), and you've got a documentary that seems more like a cash-making opportunity by its makers than a labor of love.

There are two things, however, the film manages to do right, especially considering the obstacles. For one, it gives an excellent overview of the music scene from which the Killers sprang, which, it turns out, wasn't much of a scene at all. Hailing from Las Vegas, the Killers were—rather awkwardly—original in a town full of groups aspiring to be the next Staind or Papa Roach. For those who have wondered why the band was mistaken for being British when they hit it big, there's a logical reason. With rather Anglophilic influences ranging from the Cure to the Smiths, the Killers weren't able to cultivate much of a following in their native city, nor with the American public at large, and they only caught on in the States after becoming a sensation in the UK. Indeed, as the film explains, the band tried their luck overseas in a last-ditch effort to get something going before they called it quits.

The documentary also gives some insight, albeit brief, into the personalities in the band, particularly frontman Brandon Flowers and drummer Ronnie Vannucci—who, it turns out, not only possesses the most musical talent in the band, but also the most charisma. Using recent interview footage of the band, the film reveals Flowers to be a likeable but thoroughly awkward leader. Though the footage is brief (too brief for a documentary of serious import), it's proof that Chris Martin need no longer worry about being the most gawky frontman in rock, for Flowers has a lock on that distinction. When fielding questions, he pauses like he's searching for something worthy of a rock star to say, then delivers something endearingly blundering. At one point, he's asked about his fans, and he gives the usual "we'd be nothing without them" speech before offering up, "We don't know any of our fans personally"—which, of course, has nothing to do with anything, except that it shows how people who feel uncomfortable say awkward things. Unlike his idol Morrissey, Flowers isn't awkward in an intriguing, charismatic manner; he's just genuinely unrefined. Seeing how hard he's trying, however, you can't help but feel for the guy and root for



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him.

Vannucci, however, commands the most time in the film, probably because most of the participants were closer to him than any of the other band members. More so than his bandmates, Vannucci is the artistic force in the Killers, both because he is classically trained (which means he provides an impeccable foundation the others can build upon) and also because he possesses the charisma a frontman should, that intoxicating mixture of confidence and nonchalance. His personality is revealed through interviews with former bandmates and college professors, which, while intriguing, are still too far removed from an interview with Vannucci himself. After a while, you get the feeling those sitting down for the interviews long to be closer to the band, and participating in a documentary is tangible proof of an old and fading connection.

*Leaving Las Vegas* provides some essential background to the Killers, but is never able to get close enough to the band. Yes, it does show that bands with determination and belief can break out of a tired or nonexistent music scene. And, it does show that a band is always a delicate balance of personalities, never one member departing away from collapsing. Still, without extensive interview footage of the band—or any of their music—this documentary feels more like an attempt by the makers and all of those involved to solidify their connection (however slight—and it's often very slight) to the band than a serious film. Perhaps, then, if you watch it to learn just how much people want to be close to fame, *Leaving Las Vegas* is an enlightening, if not ultimately frustrating and depressing, documentary.

**RATING:** 
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— 1 May 2007

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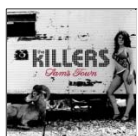
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