



Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis

Captain Beefhart/ The Velvet Underground

Music Video Distributers 2006

No rock bands are submerged in rocky documentation like Captain Beefhart and the VU. *Under Review* puts a light on in this nostalgic abyss by relying on substance rather than homage. The series wields grainy footage and in-depth interviews with the “key players” to comb for insight behind these artists’ progressive records.

There’s weirdness to scenes like a young Magic Band stomping out to “Electricity” on a stranded beach that pound your attention. There’s the realization that Captain Beefhart’s persona had value beyond being an offbeat footnote in an era where even that was quite difficult. He tried to scrap *Strictly Personal*, the band’s second album, after producer, Bob Krasnow, added psychedelic effects over the tapes. Beefhart nè Don Van Vliet compulsively schooled the band on freakthinking. He threw them Coltrane and Howlin’ Wolf records for reference. Every drum solo, clarinet and horn was carefully entwined with the mysticism of the blues.

The Velvet’s disc is delectably subtle, consisting of a monologue from Moe Tucker and Doug Yule (drummer and John Cale’s replacement, respectively). Their living quarters seem downtrodden after all the years of receiving dues, but I guess they didn’t cash in on the T-shirt train like Johnny Ramone (rumor has it Moe Tucker works at Wal-Mart!). Her kitchen is depressing, cramped with appliances amongst cheap flower arrangements that seem grandmotherly for an ex-speedfreak who carried rhythm under vocals about transvestites.

While *Under Review* fails to unveil the aura surrounding Captain Beefhart’s antics, it gives a raw glimpse into the environment that birthed *Trout Mask Replica*, a thing as unworldly as the infant in *Eraserhead*. ‘Drumbo’ John French answers questions from a kitchen phone oddly hanging from a tree branch in the woods. And avoiding the border of wistfulness, Beefhart bassist Jerry romps with drunken gloats like “We weren’t pussyfooting around.”

Even with stacks of horrible retrospectives and verbose critical surgery, these two DVDs appease the elusive need for knowledge of records that escalated the continuum of rock music. They scrap all the we-wasted-out-life-thinking-about-this-shit commentary on the influence of Lou passing gas or how Vliet’s midnight-encounter with a misplaced banjo reincarnated the blues with cerebral white delirium.

So take all your retrospectives and bury them in your town’s nearest Pet Semetary. This is all you will ever need. “A squid eating doe in a polyethylene bag is fast and bulbous. Got Me?”

(Side note: If anyone can name more than six questions from these DVDs' "Hardest Interactive Quiz in The World Ever," you should immediately shoot yourself in the fucking head.)

-Zach Stephenson

Next

