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DVD

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Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis*Music Video Distributors*

“What they demonstrated so clearly was that something like rock music...could be elevated to something poetic.”

The Velvet Underground have undoubtedly become one of the most influential bands in recent rock history. Although the band was largely ignored in their own time and have generally become associated with Andy Warhol and a drug ridden Lou Reed, this DVD manages to shed light on some of their most remarkable, and obscure songs alike, making it clear that the V.U., as a band, was nothing short of genius.

Even the name of the band has cult connotations, as it is derived from a journalistic book by Michael Leigh entitled “The Velvet Underground”, which explores unusual sexual practices in the United States in the mid-1960’s. The book is generally regarded as a very interesting documentation on what is ultimately a social phenomenon that has come to define the 60’s sexual revolution and would guarantee that V.U. would be unlike any other band to have come before or after them.

“Under Review” traces the history of V.U. from the time they formed in 1964, when classically trained Welshman John Cale met Lou Reed, all the way to Lou Reed’s abrupt departure shortly after their fourth album in 1970. In between Moe Tucker and Sterling Morrison completed the original line-up of the now iconic debut album “The

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Velvet Underground & Nico”, epitomized by Warhol’s phallic cover design: the protruding banana. It gives an in-depth analysis of the avant-garde aesthetic that characterized V.U., thanks in great part to John Cale’s haunting amplified viola, which to this day makes “Heroin” one of the greatest songs ever written and performed. It also covers in great detail the disintegrating relationship between Reed and Cale, which led to Cale’s inevitable departure shortly after their second album “White Light/White Heat”. Cale’s departure saw the introduction of Doug Yule, which marked the beginning of a more melodic approach to music rather than the aggressive avant-garde sound influenced by Cale’s continuous instrumental experimentations. Although the self-entitled third album “Velvet Underground” (also known as the ‘Grey Album’) and the fourth and final “The Velvet Underground Loaded” will never stand on par with their first two albums in terms of popularity, they do in their own rights deserve to be recognized as great music collaborations.

This DVD features live and rare studio recordings of some of the most popular V.U. songs that have managed to overcome their cult status to become recognized as some of the most innovative and daring songs, amongst them “Sunday Morning”, “All Tomorrow’s Parties”, “Heroin”, “Sweet Jane”, “White Light/White Heat” and many more. They are also comprehensively reviewed and discussed by special guests that include original drummer Moe Tucker, ‘Warhol Superstar’ Billy Name and Luna mainman Dean Wareham, amongst many others.

The Velvet Underground is one of the most influential and important bands of our time, which makes this intimate and honest portrait of them all the more astounding. V.U. created a breakthrough in rock history that is perhaps only equalled by Bob Dylan, for never before have the decadent streetwise subject matters that Lou Reed wrote about been combined with such an inspiring avant-garde and pop aesthetic. As a documentary, this DVD has to be classed amongst the finest ever created, masterfully managing to portray that time of transition between the peace-ridden lyrics of the 60’s and the anarchic punk 70’s that followed.

<http://mvdb2b.com/>

By **Matthias Mueller**

This release was published on 01 May 2006.

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