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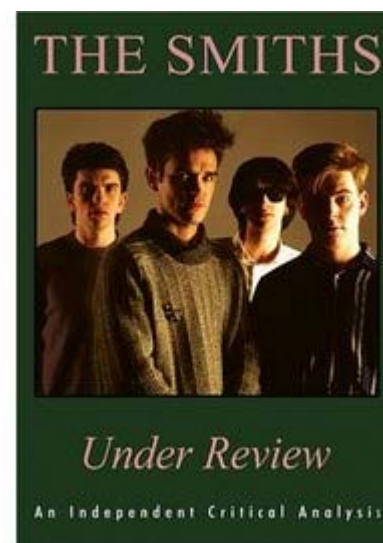
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The Smiths – Under Review (Documentary)

Picture: C Sound: C
Extras: C Main Program: B+



Way back when I was an impressionable High School lad I worked nights at the local public library and usually during the short break I was accorded from shelving books and sitting around in the sub-basement where the books were sorted I would wander up to the Music Department and after a shyly brief moment of conversation betwixt myself and the college Deejays who manned the front desk I would slide behind them and rummage through the aisles of large metal cabinets that housed the CD collection. This was the period in my life when I was moving away from the Classic Rock and Prog that almost exclusively provided the soundtrack of my formative years in short pants and drifting into the unexplored regions of what at that time was called College Rock and would soon become known as the even more inane catch-all Alternative Rock. I guess you kids call it Indie Rock these days. It was easy even for a novice such as I, head tilted uncomfortably to one side, reading the narrow spines of thousands of CDs to spot the bands that would fit the criteria of what to me was simply The New. It was all in

IN STORES NOW

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- > Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist - Season One
- > God Save The Queen – A Punk Rock Anthology (DVD)
- > The Velvet Underground – Under Review (Music Documentary)
- > Constantine (HD-DVD)
- > Dusty Springfield – Live At The Royal Albert Hall 1979 (DTS)

a name. Husker Du, The Pixies, Indigo Girls – it was obvious there'd be nary a Steve Miller lick to be found anywhere on albums by bands with such evocative monikers.

It was on one of these scavenger hunts that I happened upon **The Smiths** collection **Louder Than Bombs**. I had absolutely no doubt in my mind that a band called The Smiths, at once so anonymous but still somehow electric and fascinating, would give me exactly the kind of listening experience I craved. I was not wrong. If it had been possible to burn a hole through a CD from repeated listening I know I would have accomplished it. As it is, and perhaps this is merely my imagination impinging upon the better sense of memory, I do believe I at least singed the disc. There are few songs better suited to the sheltered 17-year-old consciousness than *Panic*, *Sweet and Tender Hooligan*, and *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now*. If there are better then I don't believe I ever heard them. And then of course there was *Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want*...damn it can still break my heart listening to it now when unexpectedly in a bar in mid-conversation with a good friend it slurps out of the jukebox and enacts all the same science and magic of a time machine.

So here I am now, roughly fifteen years after my first encounter with Morrissey and Marr, watching the latest installment in the British DVD series **Under Review** in which **The Smiths** are given the whole pedestal treatment by adoring Rock critics. Once again I feel that **Under Review** has produced a very fine program that lays out the band's arc and provides insight and context in a somewhat dry yet finally interesting, at least to a fan, manner. And I guess that's the thing. If you're not already a fan then I can't imagine you're wanting to watch this. And if you are a fan then probably you already know all that is said herein. So what is the point of these shows? After all, the shelves of record shops are sagging under the collective weight of the various and sundry series dedicated to this sort of curatorial approach to Pop Music.

I suppose part of the impulse to produce something like **Under Review** is to make the case that **The Smiths**, or Syd Barrett, or Small Faces (other entries in the series that I have reviewed for this site) are entitled to inclusion in the academic purview. As a cultural entity/actor these artists are actually more likely to affect the members of the culture than, say, a novelist or poet. Certainly more people interact with the music of **The Smiths** than the latest novel by Salman Rushdie or the cultural criticism

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of Christopher Hitchens. Therefore, yes, absolutely, the music of **The Smiths** is deserving of such consideration.

But I believe what is mainly at work here is nostalgia. We watch a program about **The Smiths** because it is essentially comforting to us to be taken back. I don't mean taken back to our youth or those golden High School days or whatever because I think most adults are clear-headed enough to recall those days in the light of what they truly were: awkward, difficult, and generally unpleasant. The comfort of these programs is in being returned to a point in our lives when something like a three-minute pop song impacted us with all the transformative force of being hit by a gamma ray. As much as I love Pop Music and as affecting as I still find some of it that emotion is as nothing next to what a song made me feel, or more accurately the song exposed the feelings that were already embedded at my core, as a shy, geeky high school kid. We necessarily grow number as the years roll on and the sometimes truly awful experiences life holds hit us full force causing us to shore up our defenses, build walls to keep as much of the painful stuff out. An unfortunate sometime side-effect is that we end up holding the painfully wonderful emotions at bay as well. The time travel these programs provide allows us to revisit that time when for better or worse we were open to the world and life worked upon our hearts like pounding waves on a crumbling shoreline.

- Kristofer Collins

Kristofer Collins is an editor at The New Yinzer and the owner of Desolation Row CDs in Pittsburgh, PA. Visit Desolation Row at www.myspace.com/desolationrowcds for more.

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