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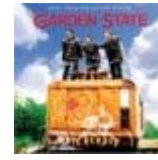
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Under Review DVD

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#### The Smiths

Under Review DVD

MVD/Sexy Intellectual

Review By : E.A Solinas

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The 1980s weren't an ideal time for music, but it was a blossoming time for certain British rock bands who displayed all their originality and talent. And of the Brit rockers, one of the best was THE SMITHS, with their seven albums and the musical origins of Morrissey.

Admittedly, it's hard to really know what will surface when an unofficial DVD comes up. "The Smiths - Under Review" takes a look at the brief, influential life of this band, at its effect on the musical scenery, and at the band members today. But somehow, it never quite manages to be more than a glossy look at the background of the band.

Fortunately the DVD relies as much as possible on the band's own words, and the gradual unfolding of their music. It opens with them being signed onto the do-what-you-want label Rough trade, which now has incredibly creative bands such as the Fiery Furnaces, Aberfeldy, and Bell Orchestra. At the time, it allowed the Smiths to basically pursue their artistic side, instead of the usual grind of searching for a new radio-friendly sound.

The documentary continues in a linear manner, from the band's beginning to after its end. The clips and studies follow the band through member firings, controversial comments, lots of hit singles, and even "Meat is Murder". Finally they take a look at what happened after 1987, when the band

split -- Morrissey went on to a somewhat less admired career, while the others tried their hands at collaborative bands with much, much less success.

Don't expect "The Smiths - Under Review" to ever go very deep -- it's mostly sort of filling viewers in to what the band was, what it made, and what made it tick. And while the documentary does dabble sometimes in the band's flaws and "boring" moments, the focus is mostly on how bloody great they were.

Basically, it's best for beginners rather than longtime fans, who will probably be aware of much of this already. The extras and commentary are somewhat lacking, since they are tied up in the chronological album releases and don't really go into much depth, since much of the same generic historical information can be found online. They even forgot the brilliant "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out". That's one of the big downsides of unofficial documentaries -- usually you don't get much that you don't already know, since the people with interesting info are usually quite "official".

The rock reviewers don't seem to have a very deep grasp of the music -- when they run out of subject matter, they continue talking. They should have been a little more brutal with the editing, and cut out whatever was not too insightful. But on the other hand, they challenge many of the long-held assumptions about the band's highs and lows, and they keep an eagle eye on the band as a whole, and the members other than Morrissey.

The most insightful information is from the producers and Craig Gannon, the "fifth Smith" who was seriously screwed over by all accounts. Gannon's account is perhaps the most fascinating, since he seems to harbor little ill-will towards his former bandmates. And to round off the "official" side of this documentary are John Porter and Stephen Street, who worked with the band for much of their career. Porter carries over the whole "I got screwed but I still like those guys" attitude that Gannon has, and Street's long experience adds some pleasant details to an otherwise generic biography of the band.

Fans will also probably have some fun with a little quiz, which is basically the only real extra, and which measures just how much of a Smiths fan you are. I got a fairly good score, but apparently I need to go listen to the albums and read the books all over again.

"The Smiths - Under Review" is a good place for beginners to get a feel for the Smiths, but fans won't find much here that they haven't known for years. It's worth checking out for completists and newbies, but otherwise not so much.

#### **Track List:**

Hand In Glove  
This Charming Man  
What Difference Does It Make  
How Soon Is Now  
Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now  
The Queen Is Dead  
Bigmouth Strikes Again  
Panic  
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