



NICK DRAKE

Under Review (dvd)

(Sexy Intellectual/MVDvisual)

The mysterious manic depressive Nicholas Rodney Drake (June 19, 1948-November 25, 1974) left an immense hurdle for directors; since he initially sold just a few thousand of his three LPs (to his immense dismay, contributing to his demise at 26 from an overdose of the antidepressant amitriptyline—ruled a suicide, though we'll never know), and partly because he barely cooperated in their promotion (rarely playing live or with relish, granting one tight-lipped interview, then retreating reclusively to his well-off parents home in rural Tanworth-in-Arden, Warwickshire, where he died), we have no footage of him doing... well... anything! So it's only photos, others' recollections, and snatches of his affecting music that remains, 34 years later.

Following JOROEN BERKVEN'S shorter 2000 Drake bio film, *A Skin Too Few*, Drake's entry in the *Under Review* series interviews a different cast with a different focus. *Skin* relied on the principals, actress sister GABRIELLE, producer and engineer JOE BOYD and JOHN WOOD, and college musicians chums like key string arranger ROBERT KIRBY. But since *Under* is not authorized by Drake's estate or Island Records, it calls instead on his two biographers, critics like JERRY GILBERT who did the interview for *Sounds*, and esteemed Britfolk peers RALPH MCTELL, JOHN RENBOURN, and musicians from FAIRPORT CONVENTION (who backed Drake on record, including ASHLEY HUTCHINS who discovered Drake), and INCREDIBLE STRING BAND. *Under* thus goes lighter on biography to explore the music, technical aspects like Drake's development of myriad alternate tunings, and demonstrations of Drake's maverick jazz-influenced style, having come at guitar from sax and piano. Now that the moody genius is a cult star, *Under* is fascinating fable, not fatuous fanboy fluff. (mvdvisual.com)

- Jack Rabid