

AMY WINEHOUSE

The Girl Done Good

78 minutes

MVD

WHY I LOVE AMY WINEHOUSE:

- 1) Her ever-expanding and individualistic songwriting and vocal talents;
- 2) Her "Fuck you, this is who I am" persona;
- 3) Especially over the past year, her train wreck of a life.

This British documentary by A Sexy Intellectual Productions initially seemed like a snoozefest. Unless you are a musician, much of it might go over your head. The DVD is comprised of interviews with many people us Yanks have never heard of-- her musical director Bill Ashton of The National Youth Orchestra, 19 Management's Simon Philip (who signed her to Island Records initially as a big band/jazz vocalist), author Lucy O'Brien who penned *She Bop: The Ultimate Definitive Encyclopedia of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*, The Daily Mirror's music journalist Gavin Martin, and The Guardian's music journalist Paul Lester.

There are also in-depth analyses of her style by jazz musicians Chris Ingham, jazz singer and vocal coach Barb Junger, R&B band leader Geno Washington (whose comments about her are the most animated and original observations, in my opinion), 1960's girl group singer Mari Wilson, and BBC London DJ Robert Elms.

Her first release, 2003's *Frank*, was produced by Salaam Remmi (Nazz, The Fugees, Miss Dynamyte) and released by Universal Island. The earliest live footage shows her plinkng electric guitar, and the CD sparked comparisons to Sarah Vaughan, Judy Garland, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald with a hip-hop vibe as far as vocal style. Yet lyrically, Winehouse's sexuality compared more with Madonna. In the beginning, Winehouse's look was much tamer, and her earlier videos portray a healthy, curvy sex kitten.

One of the highlights of the DVD is Kelly Osbourne and Amy playing billiards as Osbourne interviews her:

Osbourne: Do you feel that, because you're a female artist, that you get treated differently?

Winehouse: Only when I'm on my period.

Osbourne: Amy, who's your favorite female singer?

Winehouse: Alice Cooper-- I think she's great.

Osbourne: Do you consider yourself a sex symbol, Miss Winehouse?

Winehouse: Only to gays.

Husband Blake Fielder-Civil is also in this segment, and Osbourne asks him about his and Winehouse's tumultuous and much-documented relationship. Osbourne remarks, "I watch you, when you watch her, and you're so proud," to which he responds, "Yeah, of course, but it's funny cuz those songs are all about me." Osbourne giggles and calls him a bastard... she forgot to include the adjective "smarmy."

In Geno Washinton's comparison of her to Whitney Houston, Winehouse wins hands down, for she has the penchant for poetry in spades, whereas Houston does not.

It's rather a shock as the viewer sees Winehouse go from a curvaceous fashionable diva into a skeletal punk with her now-trademark '60s girl group era updo. Cooments Mari Wilson, "There's something disturbing about it-- it signals someone who's damaged."

Winehouse's musical style change-- from jazz neo-traditionalism with a twist to dirtier R&B of the 1960s is summed up succinctly by Jungers as "Doo-wop with a potty mouth." Yeah...

Clips of live appearances abound-- on the good side, MTV footage of her singing "Rehab" is awesome-- she's kinda

slurry and supersexy (especially when she kittenishly licks her perfectly-French manicured finger after singing "I just... I just need a friend..." and she seems to be present and lucid, unlike later footage of her embarrassing "Beat It" duet with Charlotte Church.

Missing are interviews with her parents, from whence the true influence must lie-- I can imagine her listening through her bedroom walls to her folks' LPs on Sunday afternoons or during tea... her father Mitch was a cabbie, and not much is said about her mother... a few photos are all that the viewer gets.

Back to Black's producer Mark Ronson should have also been in the mix. However, I was pleased to see The Dap Kings get their due props. This soul revue from Brooklyn recorded and toured with her, but their main chick is the incredible soul sister, Miss Sharon Jones.

Interviewees speculate about Winehouse's drug and alcohol abuse with candor. During a taping of the British pop game show *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*, she asks host Simon Amstell, "Can I have another drink?" He replies, "Do you want another drink?" She says, "Yes!" He says, "Do you want us all to just sit here while you drink yourself to death?," makes a few comments about her meeting Fielder-Civil after the show to acquire drugs, and then concludes the segment by remarking, "This isn't a pop quiz anymore, this is an intervention, Amy."

Also speculated about is her next musical direction. Two bonus tunes on a re-released deluxe *Back to Black* are songs by 1970s Brit reggae/ska band The Specials.

"I cheated myself, like I knew I would..." couldn't be a more dead on comment. Winehouse seems to be cheating herself, and it's sad. She's fucked up, and every second of it seems to be available with the click of a mouse or a flip of the dial. And yet, she's so real. I understand her co-dependent marriage that's been put on hold courtesy Fielder-Civil's incarceration for assault. She's young, talented, lauded, rich... times were high and then she lost her cohort in crime. Some gals hide, some gals slut it out, some girls shop-- but I betcha the great majority of all those gals get drunk or high to cover the pain.

Unauthorized by Winehouse, her management and her record label, I enjoyed the idea of indulging in contraband. This DVD peeled back the layers of the enigma of Amy Winehouse in a most unexpectedly fascinating manner. And no... you can't borrow it. Get your own.

-Colleen Morgan

