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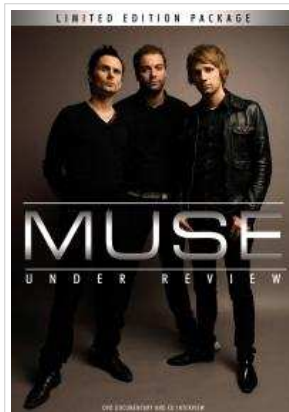
Muse Under Review

Cast: Matthew Bellamy, Christopher Wolstenholme, Dominic Howard, Safta Jaffrey, John Leckie, Mark Beaumont
 (Chrome Dreams)
 US release date: 23 March 2010 (MVD Visual)

By **Bill Holmes**

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Many unauthorized band documentaries are little more than a few talking heads pontificating about the subject, interjecting personal interpretations and emotional reactions in place of facts and useful information. *Muse Under Review* is a cut above most others thanks to the participation of several key players in the band's career, most notably former manager Safta Jaffrey. His ego-less recall of the band's progress from first gigs to one of the biggest bands on the globe is the thread that ties this interesting and well-edited story together.



AMAZON

Jaffrey and producer John Leckie (who produced both *Showbiz* and *Origins of Symmetry*) are the most credible and interesting voices, especially when detailing the efforts to parlay Muse's strong local success into lucrative recording and distribution contracts in foreign markets. Other contributors include NME journalist and Muse biographer Mark Beaumont, designer Laurence Stevens, video director Matt Kirby, engineer Ric Peet, equipment tech Scott McKenzie and NME scribe Jude Rodgers. The program also features some Muse performance and interview footage, rare photographs, news items and scene shots that are used effectively in the chronological study of the band.

Although Muse's global success has crested in less than a decade, the trio has been together since the early '90s. Having met in their teens and played separately in bands with fatal monikers like College Mayhem and The Gothic Plague, by the time the three members united in Rocket Baby Doll they had attracted the attention of mentor Dennis Smith, who had a production company with Jaffrey. The pair signed the young band and helped craft a course of hard work, strategic planning and controlled exposure to illuminate their unique approach and musical wizardry.

Despite the initial success of their EPs, labels were not beating down the door, even after a well-received showcase at the CMJ festival in New York City. Jaffrey's patient plan to conquer America is an informative snapshot of the music industry at the time, as he carefully juggles offers from Maverick, Mushroom and Warners to subsidize the recordings and develop a critical and popular following.

Matthew Bellamy, Muse's principal songwriter, had always believed that their concerts required spectacular production as well as pristine sound.

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His earlier songs focused on spiritual and mystical topics; veritable space operas that leveraged his instrumental versatility and classical music background. As each successive tour brought more confidence, the band's stage show expanded to include more and more spectacular lighting and visual effects from multiple video screens to giant fluorescent glitter-filled balloon orbs dropped over the audience.

He also displayed an uncanny balance of following sage advice and taking chances; willing to work a long term plan true to his artistic vision rather than aim for the bigger dollars a more commercial sound would bring. Muse began road-testing songs prior to recording, lyrics and themes became both mature and otherworldly, and the band changed producers from album to album before finally taking the reins themselves.

By the time of their global breakout headlining Glastonbury in 2004, any doubts about their abilities vanished with a stunning performance that had fans and critics raving. That their stature has only gotten larger is impressive; as of 2010 they are arguably among a handful of the world's most successful bands and only getting bigger.

The main extra on the DVD is *Capturing The Muse*, a nine-and-a-half minute overview of the band's approach to stage design and promotional videos. Other bonus features include contributor bios, an advertisement for other Muse related products from the distributor. Muse is working on their own performance documentary DVD which is tentatively slated for release late in 2010. Hopefully fans will not feel misled if they confuse the two, but only the jaded would not find value in this two-hour plus offering.

RATING:  6
EXTRAS RATING:  5

— 26 March 2010

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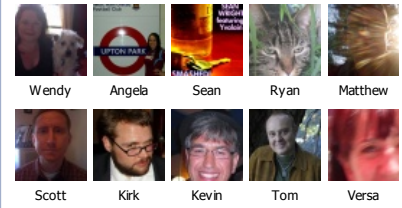
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