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Muse: Under Review DVD

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By **Christian Lipski**



Muse: Under Review is a retrospective of the British rock band's career since its start in Teignmouth, UK (and thank you for showing me how that is pronounced).

It's an unauthorized biography, meaning the members of Muse did not contribute or endorse the material. Immediately, I'm assuming this means no music, no photos, and no new information, which was the main problem with earlier documentaries like *Muse: Manic Depression*.

Happily, I was well mistaken here. The DVD is filled to the brim with clips from videos and live performances, behind-the-scenes photos, and interviews with music journalists and key participants in the band's rise. It's two hours of in-depth study which should make the band's fans glow with satisfaction.

Starting from the band's assemblage as Gothic Plague and then Rocket Baby Doll, the documentary traces the decisions and obstacles along the way to the top. The band's first manager Safta Jaffrey explains how he was introduced to the band and immediately noticed their potential. He is also the one who brings up the initial comparison to Radiohead, which was noted by "a couple" of reviewers and then adopted by many others in what he terms "lazy journalism." (See my article about this comparison [here](#).)

The comparison was obviously not helped by the hiring of *The Bends* producer John Leckie to work on the

band's first two albums. Leckie is a great source of information about the crafting of *Showbiz* and *Origin of Symmetry*, lending his experience to our understanding of the band's sound. Incidentally, Leckie also waves aside the Radiohead comparison.

We learn much more about the band's attempts to find a label willing to take on their unique sound, being rejected by the UK, and finally finding a welcome at Madonna's Maverick records. You can hear the frustration in Jaffrey's voice as he describes the long search for a home, and it's this kind of personal experience that gives the viewer a sense of being there.

Eventually leaving Maverick after the label declined to release *Origin of Symmetry*, the band continued to refuse to compromise their sound, reaching further and further with each album. *New Music Express* journalists Jude Rodgers and Mark Beaumont do an expert job of identifying what makes each album special and different, all the way up to *The Resistance*. Their continuous thread of commentary makes it easy to see the musical development with each new release.

The documentary weaves in selections from the band's videos and live performances to underscore the musical points being made in the interviews, and insiders such as Leckie, Ric Peet (engineer on *Origin of Symmetry*), and Scott McKenzie (guitar tech) provide a nuts-and-bolts view of the band's creations. Leckie tells a fascinating story about finding and recording the pipe organ on *Origin's* "Megalomania," which is followed by a live performance of the song in a church, with Matt Bellamy pulling out all the stops, as it were.

We're also treated to footage of the band's first headlining appearance at the Glastonbury Festival in 2004 as Jude Rodgers describes the risk the band took in accepting such a large responsibility, and the images prove that Muse were more than a match for the venue. Muse being such a visually powerful group, it would be senseless to try to explain their impact without providing such examples, and this DVD does not hold back.

And lest you get the impression that *Muse: Under Review* is a puff PR piece, rest assured that the interviewers' comments are not edited for content. Mark Beaumont has a few things to say about *The Resistance* that would not necessarily make it to a press release, and Rodgers doesn't shy away from calling out what she sees as a trend towards repetition, but their opinions are well-considered and interesting. You have a sense that they are offering objectivity rather than gushing with blind praise. The journalists' presence provides an informed outsider's viewpoint that balances Jaffrey and Leckie's side well.

In short, what *Muse: Under Review* gives to the fan or fan-curious is a well-researched and -supported look at a band that is poised to achieve a permanent place in music history. Recommended highly. Join the Resistance.

Muse: Under Review was released by *Sexy Intellectual* and *MVD Visual* on March 23. It is available from [See Of Sound](#) and [Amazon](#).



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