



Shared Darkness

A Communal Life in Film and DVD, Examined

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**Muse: Under Review**

This entry was posted on 4/17/2010 2:00 AM and is filed under [DVD](#)
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I first got to know [Muse](#) in tangential fashion, through a **clutch of startlingly fresh radio tunes that sounded quite different than the rest of their FM modern rock brethren**. Owing to my laziness and idiocy, it was a while before I was able to piece together the fact that what I was hearing was in fact the work of the same band, but once I did it certainly made sense — their ability to swing effortlessly between ethereal noodling, emotive prog-rock and somewhat more traditional brawn (think "[Knights of Cydonia](#)") infused their work. I first caught them live as the opening act during U2's stadium tour last fall in Washington, D.C., and I wasn't disappointed. Some of their influences — Queen, Manic Street Preachers, Blur — are readily apparent, but Muse makes music that is undeniably all their own.



As its title would suggest, the new straight-to-DVD doc *Muse: Under Review* provides an overview of the band's entire career, mixing rare performance and interview footage of the group with talking head contributions from some of their closest colleagues, as well as those who have witnessed and written about their journey. This list includes band engineer Ric Peet, video director Mat Kirby, biographer and *NME* writer Mark Beaumont, and, most notably, former manager Saffa Jaffrey and legendary producer John Leckie, whose insights are especially invaluable.

Three teenage pals from the tiny English seaside town of Teignmouth, Muse is comprised of guitarist-frontman Matthew Bellamy (above center), bassist Chris Wolstenholme (left) and drummer Dominic Howard (right). Bellamy is painted as the driving creative force behind the band, shaping **the epic pomposity of their sound, in which huge guitar riffs and otherwise occasionally bombastic production meet shimmering instrumentation and intersect at odd angles with Bellamy's fragile falsetto**. There's not much in the way of thematic heavy-lifting, however, so those wanting to delve into Muse's preoccupations with paranoia, space exploration and transcendence will be left mostly guessing.

If one can forgive **this lack of self-analysis and firsthand narration** (the old interview tidbits with the band are few and far between), the DVD is actually a fairly solid watch, both for longtime devotees and more casual inductees to the band's mushrooming fan base. At times *Muse: Under Review* dips rather stupidly into extended song clips from tangential mock-influences (Captain Beefheart, Tom Waits) to make up for this hole at its core, but a nice selection of old concert and showcase footage buoys the spotlighted arc of Muse's career, for which Jaffrey and Leckie provide the spine. Everything is touched upon, from the musical roots of Bellamy's father and an important 1998 showcase for Rick Rubin and Columbia Records to the production of debut album *Showbiz* and reasons for the four-year Stateside delay of sophomore follow-up *Origin of Symmetry*. Some good anecdotes are revealed, too, like Bellamy hijacking a real church organ for "Megalomania." Overall: interesting stuff.

Housed in a regular plastic Amaray case in turn stored in a complementary cardboard slipcover, *Muse: Under Review* comes to DVD presented in a letterboxed 4:3 aspect ratio, with a 2.0 stereo audio track. Its bonus features consist of text biographies for its talking head interviewees and a **10-minute look at the group's focus on staging and accompanying visual efforts**

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(mainly [the music video for "Hysteria."](#) actually), buoyed by interview material with director Kirby. To purchase the DVD via Amazon, [click here](#). **B+ (Movie) C+ (Disc)**

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