

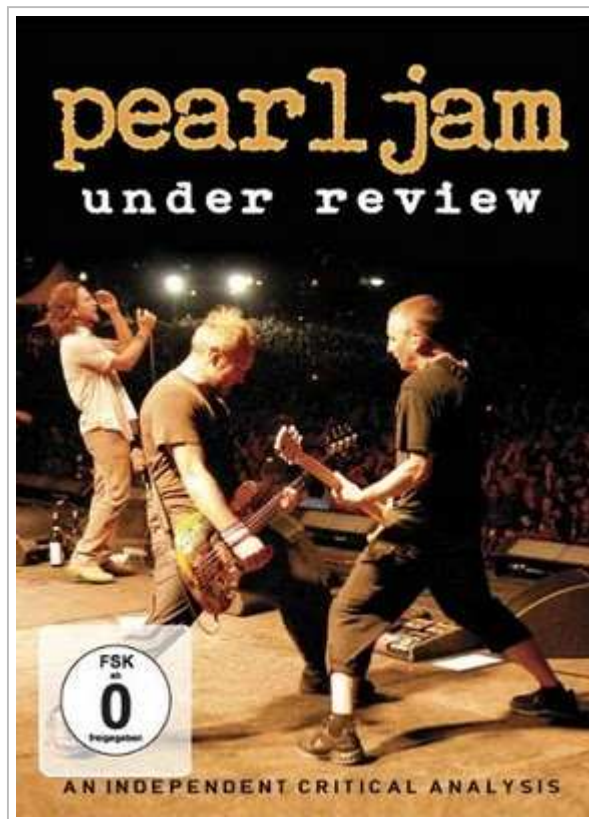
FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2010

DVD Review: "Pearl Jam: Under Review"

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Images from the Internet



Pearl Jam: Under Review
Directed by Alan Westbrook
Narrated by Thomas Arnold
Sexy Intellectual, 2010
90 minutes, USD \$19.95
Chromedreams.co.uk.com
MVDvisual.com

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To tell the truth, grunge never did much for me. Yeah, I've liked bits here and there, but as a movement it just sounded like rehashed navel-gazing soft metal rock (nascent emo?). To me, the real balls of the 1990s Seattle music scene was with the women, like Babes in Toyland and Bikini Kill. But they were given a different name, Riot Grrrls, so they were historically segregated (even if the term came from them).

That being said, I was looking forward to watching this British documentary. Pearl Jam's been around for 20 years and I've never followed them, so I wanted to learn what was going on. And I sorta found out.

What I mean by "sorta" is I have a bunch of issues with the talking head experts (no women, even though they did much of the writing about the local scene in fanzines back then) picked for this particular video. Usually director Alan Westbrook does a great job, but here he chose mostly mainstream music writers from around the country, contributors to - and editors of - publications such as *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and *The Village Voice*; there is a local Seattle writer that has published some grunge-based books, and all of them seem to be knowledgeable, but they are incredible sycophantic to the band and don't just dabble in hyperbole, but immerse in it. Some quotes I pulled include: "[Pearl Jam are] holding the torch for good old rock'n'roll," "There is probably no band in America more respected by fans and by other musicians, certainly," and "Pearl Jam is one of the most important bands of the last two decades in American Music." Really?

A bunch of Seattle bands are mentioned, such as Nirvana (duh), Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, and Mother Love Bone. Again, no women, not even Hole. Anyway, after the death of Mother Love Bone's lead singer Andy Wood via OD on the cusp of their album being released (talk about bad timing, eh wot?), the band splintered and then took on some new members. With Eddie Vedder moving up from So. Cal to become lead vox, they transformed, after another name change, into Pearl Jam. Vedder himself is interviewed about the band in a couple of clips shown from 1996.

Ignoring local labels like the groundbreaking SubPop (not being critical about that; I have no problem with a band signing to a major), they broke nationally with their first album, *Ten*. As big as their first release was, their second, *Vs.* was even larger, selling over a million copies the first week (breaking a record). This was their first (and wise) association with producer Brendan O'Brien, who made their sound rougher, much to the glee of the critics on this film.

Road Trip to Yellowkn 6: Yellowknife to L

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos
c/o 62 Timber Ridge Rd,
Commack, NY 11725. From
88, I used to publish a musi
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FFanzeen, which dealt with
wide-ranging independent r
scene. I also photographed
bands from the period (and
since). And the beat goes o

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[Suburban Voice: Al Quint](#)

One area addressed on *Under Review* is the supposed feud between Nirvana's Kurt Cobain and Vedder, and it's pretty much trashed (Kurt started it by calling Pearl Jam "careerists"), with the blame going to the media who was looking to start a fight between the only major bands from the same town.

Their third release, *Vitalogy* is described by one critic here as better than the Who. Nah, don't buy it. The Who were four incredible lead musicians; with Pearl Jam, and this is actually something I had a problem with in this documentary, pretty much all the viewer hears about is Eddie Vedder. The moody Vedder did this; the introspective Vedder wrote that. This is Pearl Jam, not *Eddie Vedder's Pearl Jam*. I was interested in hearing about the band as a whole, not the 99.9% devoted to its lead singer and songwriter. I couldn't tell you one person who was in the band, as each is usually mentioned by name once in the 90 minutes once they form as PJ.

The seclusion for their noble tout at the windmill called Ticketmaster is a key part of the center of the study, and rightfully so. I was so rooting for PJ on this, but even at the time I was not convinced it was going to succeed. If more bands would have stood by and taken the same stance, possibly, but no single band, no matter how big, could have stopped the money-grabbing monster that is TM, who set the model for all other ticket scam-artists - I mean sellers (and government officials, such as the dubious Mayor of New York, Mike "Buy the Election" Bloomberg, made ticket-scalping fees legal).

All the "official" Pearl Jam albums are covered in some detail (including comments by two of their studio engineers), but what interested me was their 120+ "bootleg" releases of every show on a particular tour, which was a brilliant idea; unfortunately, it is only lightly talked about here. This was a groundbreaking concept, and I wanted to learn about how it came about and how successful it actually was, but other than mentioning it happened in a passing moment, that was it for this DVD.

Now Pearl Jam have their own label (Monkeywrench) on which they released their last album, *Backspacer*. There are a bunch of side projects the band members have been working on, like Vedder's solo *Into the Wild*, but not much is talked about there.

Twenty years after their first album, they are the only "grunge" band still around from that place at that time, and still selling out showplaces. Great for them, truly. What I came away with from this documentary is less than I was hoping, and it is certainly less critical than most of this British series (even with the albums that those here say were not as powerful as the earlier ones, such as *No Code*).

[Blog of Lance Strate of C Semantics/Media Ecology Association](#)

[Who Really Cares blog of Davison](#)

If you're a fan of the band, well, there's much to get off on, including a *lot* of live performance clips and some from their early videos (before they stopped making them, apparently), and detailed descriptions of Vedder's role in society and to his followers, but I found it a little hollow, and a bit disingenuous due to the glorification of Vedder-er-er-er (supposed to sound like an echo).

The extras are slim, being the contributor bios and an only fair-quality audio interview with Vedder and drummer Matt Cameron (who does most of the talking, natch) while they were on tour in Berlin in 2009.

Well, one thing this documentary did do is inspire me to go to a video sharing site and check out some of their music. That's something.



BONUS VIDEO:



UNRELATED BONUS VIDEO:



Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [12:01 AM](#) 

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