

DVD Review: *The Sacred Triangle: Bowie, Iggy & Reed 1971 - 1973*

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The death knell for the innocence of the flower power years of the 1960s was first sounded by the deaths of Martin Luther King Jr and Robert Kennedy in 1968 with the latter resulting in the eventual election of Richard Nixon to his first term as President of the United States and an escalation of the war in Vietnam. With Nixon in office, and the body count rising in South East Asia, the non-violent protests of the 1960s were soon a thing of the past. In 1971 Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on students demonstrating against the war at Kent State university resulting in the deaths of four protesters. All of a sudden music about love, peace and LSD making the world a better place wasn't such a good fit for the times as people didn't really want to be reminded about what was going on around them but preferred entertainment which would help them forget their troubles.

The glam - short for glamour - rock movement which saw rock bands doing everything from wearing their girlfriends' clothes on stage (The New York Dolls) to wearing elaborate costumes, dying their hair and slathering on the make-up, was, on the whole, escapism to the max. More concerned with style than substance the music was a harbinger of what was later to become known as the ME decade. Self indulgent, flashy and quite often musically simplistic, glam rock wasn't about social change, it was about everybody having a good time and rock and roll superstars preening in the spotlight. Of course that wasn't true of all those at the time, there are always those who find a way to transcend a genre and make a definitive statement about themselves and their music at the same time.

According to a new documentary, *The Sacred Triangle: David, Iggy & Lou 1971 - 73*, being released on DVD November 23, 2010 by Chrome Dreams on the and distributed by MVD Entertainment, three such exceptions at the time were David Bowie, Iggy Pop, and Lou Reed. While these three men are now well-known singers and songwriters for a variety of reasons, the early 1970s saw each of them at a crossroads in their respective careers. Bowie was still looking to breakthrough as a popular performer; Reed was looking to start a solo career after his break with Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground; and Pop was trying to recover from the excesses of the original Stooges.

The movie provides the usual rock and roll documentary mix of talking heads, period concert footage and pop culture history lesson to tell its story. Although Bowie ends up being the pivotal figure, we learn that the impetus for his shift to the theatricality of glam rock, and by extension the *Ziggy Stardust* album which catapulted him to fame, was the work being done under the umbrella of Andy Warhol's Factory in New York City in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While The Velvet Underground's music and gritty lyrical content were responsible for his shift from being a solo performer on twelve string acoustic guitar to fronting a hard edged rock band, it was the outrageousness of [Pork](#), a

theatrical performance produced by Warhol in 1971, that inspired his stage shows and encouraged him to create the androgynous character Ziggy Stardust.

While the movie never says so overtly, one also gains the impression that Bowie also liked the idea of being an impresario along the lines of Warhol. For shortly after his initial success he formed MainMan Management, a production company. In fact, from information given in interviews, Bowie's ex-wife Angie in particular, the feeling is that at that point in his life he was more interested in being a star first and a musician second and the latter just happened to fulfill the former goal. Former Factory denizen Lee Black Childers, who was later a vice-president of MainMan, is also interviewed, and explains how Bowie became the producer of record for *Transformer*, the album that brought Lou Reed into the public eye as a solo performer. He also talks about MainMan's attempts to work with Iggy Pop at this stage and how the one album they produced of his pretty much sank without a trace.

The Sacred Triangle does a good job in bringing the history of the era and the key players to life. Those interviewed, including Jayne (Wayne) County, were all able to talk intelligently and informatively about the three men and the events surrounding the period in question and to explain how the careers of Bowie, Reed and Pop ended up intertwined at this critical juncture in all their careers. However, what it doesn't do is live up to its title. While I've been an admirer of all three men at various points in their careers, the movie failed to convince me that there was any justification in referring to their collaboration at this time as the most dramatic shift in musical style since the beginning of the rock age, as the blurb on the DVD's packaging claims.

In fact, while there is no denying the music produced at the time was interesting, the lasting impression created by the film was of a movement based on titillation and a desire to shock rather than any great artistic motivations. There is something almost superficial about the way the movie treats its subject matter with the result at the end you're left saying, so what? If you were looking to gaining any new insights into either one of Bowie, Reed or Pop, you will come away disappointed. I've always considered glam rock to have been one of the symbols of how far rock and roll strayed from its roots in the 1970s by the way it seemed to celebrate fame and the cult of personality over the music. While that might be an unfair assessment on my part *The Sacred Triangle* did nothing to change my opinion. As far as I'm concerned, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and David Bowie succeeded in spite of their association with glam, not because of it. In fact, as it becomes clear in the movie, Bowie was the only one of three who even was part of the genre, and by 1973 he had divorced himself from it by retiring his Ziggy Stardust persona.

As for the technical quality of the movie, little attempt was made to re-master any of the original concert footage so the sound is only basic stereo. While some of the older clips are a bit fuzzy, the producers have done a good job in searching out pieces of as high a quality as possible. Unfortunately their flaws are obvious when they are compared to the material shot specifically for the movie and makes for some rather jarring transitions. It also only serves to emphasize the dated quality of the material, and making it seem even less significant in terms of its importance in popular music's evolution.

Those who are die hard fans of the performers under discussion, interested in background on Andy Warhol and The Factory, or who like early 1970s rock music will probably find *The Sacred Triangle* interesting. However, the rest of you can probably find better things to do with a hundred plus minutes of your time.

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