



Director: Alec Linsell

British documentary filmmaker Alec Linsell's *The Sacred Triangle* examines the genesis of three seminal albums produced in the early '70s that forever altered the future of rock music: Lou Reed's *Transformer*, Iggy and the Stooges' *Raw Power*, and David Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. It was a fateful meeting at the iconic Max's Kansas City which turned out to be the catalyst to propel these three floundering musical geniuses on the road to rock stardom.

By the early 1970s, Bowie had evolved from novelty folk rocker ("The Laughing Gnome") to a one-hit wonder ("Space Oddity"). No matter how much this particular critic loves *Space Oddity*, *The Man Who Sold the World* and *Hunky Dory*, these albums were not commercially successful upon their initial release. Bowie was ready to take the next step, to something much bigger. Linsell's film purports that Bowie's genius was in knowing what to steal from others and what to leave alone; thus Bowie borrowed freely from his newly found friends Reed and Pop, and along with his backing band (Mick Woodmansey on drums, Trevor Bolder on bass and Mick Ronson on electric guitar), his manager Tony Defries, and his wife Angie Bowie, he began to forge his new androgynous glam rock persona: Ziggy Stardust. *The Sacred Triangle* also surmises that Bowie's Ziggy Stardust makeover was inspired by Andy Warhol's multi-media events (Exploding Plastic Inevitable, *Pork*); there are also a few fleeting mentions of Marc Bolan's influence on *Ziggy Stardust*.

(Bolan's T.Rex released *Electric Warrior* in September 1971 — the very same month that Bowie began his *Ziggy Stardust* sessions.)

Reed quit the Velvet Underground in August 1970, and in December 1971 and January 1972 recorded his first solo album with session musicians (including Steve Howe and Rick Wakeman). Reed's solo debut *Lou Reed* featured re-recorded versions of unreleased Velvet Underground tracks (some of which were originally recorded during the Velvet Underground's *Loaded* sessions). For all intents and purposes, *Lou Reed* was a commercial failure (peaking at only number 189 on the Billboard 200). Bowie brought Reed into the studio to record *Transformer* with Bowie's guitarist Ronson as co-producer, arranger and session musician (guitar, piano, recorder and backing vocals). *Transformer* — and its debut single "Walk on the Wild Side" — was a critical and commercial success. (In my opinion, *Transformer* is the Reed solo album that comes closest to the genius of the Velvet Underground.)

The Stooges were on a hiatus in September 1971 when Pop first met Bowie. Bowie brought Pop and guitarist James Williamson to the UK and got them a recording deal with Columbia. Billed as Iggy & The Stooges, they recorded their third album *Raw Power*. (Bowie mixed the album, then in 1997, *Raw Power* was re-mixed by Pop and re-released). Though considered a commercial failure at the time of its release, *Raw Power* eventually became one of the cornerstones of early punk rock. (Despite facilitating the recording of *Raw Power*, and providing a very unforgiving mix of the album, it is difficult for me to believe that Bowie had any influence on the sound of Iggy & The Stooges. Pop has admitted being influenced by Bolan's music — again, Bolan is an odd omission from the forefront of *The Sacred Triangle*.)

The Sacred Triangle is essentially about how Reed and Bowie influenced each other, how Pop influenced Bowie and how Bowie assisted Pop by facilitating the recording of *Raw Power*. No musical connection between Reed and Pop is even suggested.

Lindsell uses archival material (with some fantastic vintage footage of the Velvet Underground, Reed, Warhol, Pop and Bowie) and photos to better illustrate the memories of the talking heads (Bowie's ex-wife Angie Bowie; Andy Warhol's Factory assistant Billy Name; MainMan Management vice president, Lee Black Childers; New York scenester Jayne County). It goes without saying that *The Sacred Triangle* would have benefited significantly from some input from Reed, Pop, or Bowie — Lindsell does include some overly generalized clips (Reed from a 1986 interview, Pop from a 1988 interview, and Bowie from interviews in 2001 and 2007) but they do not work well in the context of this documentary. The interviews that Lindsell does conduct seem to ramble on a bit too long at times and the personalities of the interviewees had a tendency to grate on my nerves; that is not to say that they do not provide some interesting and unique perspectives on Bowie, Reed and Pop.

The Sacred Triangle has a lot going for it — especially in my eyes, being a fan of Bowie, Reed and Pop — and is worth watching solely for the archival footage. There is no denying that *The Sacred Triangle* covers a very unique period for these three very unique songwriters; one might also claim that this period represents the one of the most dramatic shifts in music — ushering in both glam and punk — since the dawn of the rock and roll. I would argue that (without discounting Bowie's influence on the production of *Transformer*) the significance of this time period pales in comparison to Bowie, Pop and Brian Eno's "Berlin years" (1976-1979) — when Bowie co-wrote and performed on Pop's first two solo records (*The Idiot* and *Lust For Life*); Bowie created *Low*, "Heroes" and *Lodger* alongside Eno, and Eno recorded *Before and After Science*. Of course this is purely a personal bias; the six albums that Bowie, Pop and Eno recorded during this time period are some of my favorite albums of all time (in my opinion, these albums represent the creative peak for all three songwriters).

For more information on this DVD release go to: <http://www.seeofsound.com/p.php?s=SIDVD560>

Rating: 4/10



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One Response to "Sacred Triangle, The | Review"

1. *David Phillips* Says:

[December 1st, 2010 at 9:10 pm](#)

Thanks so much for this review. I had no idea this even existed. I would take issue with your opinion regarding Transformer being the only album in the Reed canon that comes close to VU. Berlin, New York, Ecstasy, and Magic and Loss are pretty bona fide to me. And the song Street Hassle off the album of the same name is his very best song. But that's me.

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