

FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

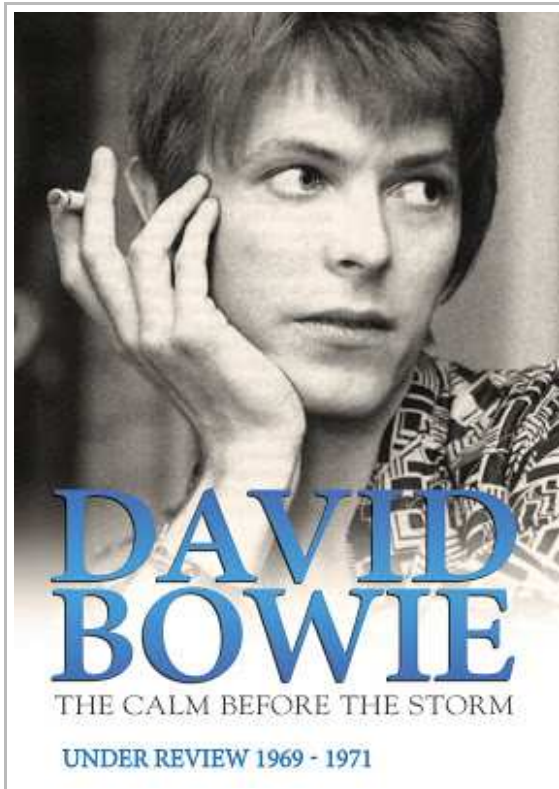
Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

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DVD Review: David Bowie Under Review - The Calm Before the Storm: 1969-1971

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Images from the Internet



David Bowie Under Review - The Calm Before the Storm: 1969-1971

Executive Producer Rob Johnstone

Narrated by Thomas Arnold

Sexy Intellectual

65 minutes, 2012

Chromedreams.co.uk

MVDvisual.com

David Bowie has always been an enigma to me, quite frankly. Sure, I understood what he was doing, and how he latched on to what he wanted - even if it originated with someone else - and made it his own. While I respect that, he has always felt pretty contrived to be, especially from his theatrical Ziggy period onward.

And yet, I have always found his story interesting, and have followed his career somewhat over the years. Now at age 66 with a new recording about to come out, here is a British documentary in the Chrome Dream collection that starts at the very beginning of his rise

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos
Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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to superstardom.

Of course, the problem with this DVD is that Bowie's career has been so carefully documented in every possible medium, there really isn't too much here that's pretty common knowledge to a true fan. But as someone who is unaware of the pre-Ziggy career, this is a treasure trove, especially all the interviews which are new, and the clips, many of which are rare.

Bowie (often pronounced as *Bow-wee* on this) started his public career apparently not as a musician, but as an activist for a bogus group he started for the protection of men with longer hair, back in 1964. This managed to get him his first televised experience, a clip of which is shown.

We follow him through his less-successful folkish-mawkish period, influenced by the likes of Anthony Newley (1999), when he was supposedly inspired by Bob Dylan (I don't see the root). But as journalist Chris Roberts states in an included interview clip, "He's always had a good ear for musicians and a good eye for collaborators. He always surrounded himself with useful people." A special talent indeed, and I mean that with no hint of sarcasm.

After the release of his self-titled album, which bombed when first released, he came up with his break-out song, "Space Oddity," a true rock gem. Then with the help of the likes of collaborators like guitarist Mick Ronson (d. 1993) he began to evolve through the likes of the LPs *The Man Who Sold the World* (1970) and *Honky Dory* (1971), and he became more flamboyant.

The tone started changing when Bowie opened for Tyrannosaurus Rex, and started adopting more of Marc Bolan's proto-Glam style. Friendship turned into jealousy as Bowie's career began to eclipse Bolan's, though they stayed friendlies for the rest of the latter's short life (d. 1977). The birth of Ziggy Stardust's androgyny started to click in Britain. Apparently, star-maker and producer John Peel (who is shown here in a 2004 interview, shortly before his death that same year) never really forgave Bowie for his alleged treatment of Bolan, and states so explicitly.

And where did that fashion style originate? Mostly from a of a cast of New York-based performers that showed up to act in a gender-ambiguously play called *Pork*, namely Cherry Vanilla (the woman who single-handedly helped introduce and break Bowie to the American audiences), the lovely Wayne (now Jayne) County, and publicity maven / photographer Lee Black Childers. Personally, I think these three should have been interviewed on this film because David Bowie may never have become *David Bowie* if it weren't for this amazing trio (testify, Jimi L!). Luckily, they are at least given credit by one of the journalists who are part of the commentary.

That kind of style "borrowing" and eclipsing would not historically end there with Bowie. One needs just look at Boy George's appropriation of bands like Hayzee Fantayzee. But I digress...

The other half of from what was Ziggy Stardust formed was the Andy Warhol Factory group, where Bowie is stated here as essentially saying that he wanted "the mind of Lou Reed and the body of Iggy Pop. Ziggy Stardust was Bowie's attempt to be that." Lee Childer's

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once told one of *FFanzeen's* writers in the 1980s that Bowie's genius is knowing what to steal, and when. Very subtly, this DVD agrees.

There is a gaggle of journalists interviewed here mostly stating opinions, such as David Stubbs, Andrew Mueller, and Paolo Hewitt. As always, what fascinates me more are the people who are more intimately involved, like collaborators from the early years like Keith Christmas and Bob Solly. Shame they couldn't get Angie Bowie, she certainly would have joyously livened up the volume on the DVD.

As always, there's lots and lots of rare clips, both video and sound, from the entire period under discussion, including interviews with Bowie, of some of his influences (like Bolan and Donovan), and even a snippet of a telly advertisement in which he participated before his rise. Of course, all of these clips are short and incomplete; otherwise this would be five hours long.

In *Chrome Dream* fashion, this is a well-released and solidly-put together. It also feels a bit more even than some of the earlier histories, in that some interviewed are actually critical of the man at the center, rather than merely full of hyperbole (though some of that is here, too).

Now that I have finished this enjoyable history, I'm going to watch an alternative version with *Velvet Goldmine*.

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

Labels: [1970s](#), [Andy Warhol](#), [Before the Storm](#), [British rock](#), [Chrome Dreams](#), [David Bowie](#), [FFanzeen](#), [glam](#), [Iggy Pop](#), [John Peel](#), [Lou Reed](#), [Marc Bolan](#), [MYD Visual](#), [Rob Johnstone](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Under Review](#), [Ziggy Stardust](#)

Reactions: interesting (0) cool (0) informative (0)

No comments:

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