



M-80

[The Monochrome Set](#)

[Wienerworld](#) - WNRD2567 (DVD)

Available from [Wienerworld](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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The Monochrome Set was known for what's often called their art-punk stylings over in Wherever-It-Was-They-Came-From, England, and, that in mind and having no clue what to expect (punk was never exactly at the top of my list in the late 70s...or the early 80s...or the mid-80s...nor the late 80s...hmmm, come to think of it, it was never at the top of my list period, ever), I burst out laughing when the very first thing to cross the TV screen was a logo and spoken intro informing me that this was a 'Weinerworld' production. Perfect!, thought I between guffaws, what a lampoon on mercantilism in the modern music world!, but, um, heh!, well, it's the actual name of the label imprint. Oops!, and perhaps a course or two in advertising principals beyond surname ego-glutting might help said enterprise; after all, one thinks of porn industries and hot dog vendors when faced with such sobriquets, not rock and roll.

The DVD itself is so named after the Marathon 80 festival, sub-sobriqueted as 'A New-No-Now Wave Festival', staged in Minneapolis in 1979 as the decade turned. Hmmm again. Someone was working overtime in the Trying-way-too-hard-to-be-clever Dept., probably gig organizer Tim Carr. The event, though, was a two-day-er of 'impolite music' with 20 bands and headliners like Devo, who had anagrammatized themselves as 'Dove' and turned in a hilarious set of Christianized soft rock, a video example or two of which can be found on the Net. The weekend, however, was staged in the dirt-floored University of Minneapolis Fieldhouse, a warehouse, and ever more proof that punks and ilk were, let's face it, the NuHippies, though they'd rather die than admit it, ground level gigs like this providing interesting parallels to what happened outside media norms in the 60s. I mean, I know only too well, having attended my share, that lo-rent concerts were common back then and, well, Woodstock had a dirt floor, right?

Info on M-80 is exceedingly difficult to locate, and the 4-page insert by Alberto Umbridge is informative and amusing but fails to note why the M-Set was filmed in what was plainly a professional TV style, with fades, overlays, and etc. Had this been intended for broad consumption? Seems unlikely, though the prospect is appetizing. In fact, ambiguities abound, but the evidence of the eyes and ears could care less as this is a very interesting raw document and the earliest known filming of the group while it plies away in angular guitaristics and the era's trademark toneless, er, um, enchanting. Well, one can hardly call it 'singing'. Oh!, had 'sprechestimme' but been a part of punk scribes' wanting vocabularies, think of how much more dignified things would've seemed!

Unfortunately, for followers of the band's history, the cinematics of Tony Potts, the ensemble's 'fifth member', are absent, Potts laid up with measles that day. But it's not difficult to see why Monochrome Set enjoyed their reputation. Watching **M-80** is not very far afield from taking in the early Who, Kinks, and other bands that, in their own time, were doing just what frontman Bid and cohorts are engaged in: playing around with the genre and setting new standards. M-80 was pretty eclectic, but had the fest instead recruited Pere Ubu, Television, Japan, Durutti Column, and similar acts in an attempt to weave a cohesive theme, the band would've been much more perfectly cast, as they definitely carried an arty manifestation crossing elements of the just-named combos with Velvet Underground and other progenitors.

Tongue-in-cheekery goes hand in hand with the cynical wont of the times, and song titles like *Martians Go Home*, *Viva Death Row*, and *The Etcetera Stroll* give some indication of what to expect. Once well ensconced in the bill of fare, attraction to the group's contrastingly high-powered and simultaneously blasé (the singing, the listless strolling about) work increases exponentially. There was a mountain of crap issued in that transitional period, now completely dead, but Monochrome Set sat well apart from the crassness of it all and formed itself as not only musically very valid but omni-commentaristic and novel. The punk-alt-no-wave movement was a study in contradictions—when a music mode is initiated by a poncey merch (Malcolm McLaren), what on Earth do you expect? Sinatra?—and Monochrome Set was one of the bands upon which that highly interesting linchpin turned. Too bad the movement didn't quite evolve as it should, but that's where documents like this come in...so you can see where the media glitz machine missed some damn big opportunities as it sprinted to worship Madonna and Bruce Springsteen.

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