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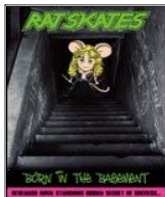


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DVD Review



Rat Skates
Born in the Basement
Released on 5/12/2007
Kundrat Productions

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PRODUCTION					4.5
OVERALL					4.5

MATT MOORING

You've probably been hearing a lot about *Get Thrashed*, the new documentary on the golden era of thrash (a flick featuring one **Rat Skates** as an Associate Producer, by the way), but a similar film was released a few months ago, albeit without as much fanfare and Blabbermouth pieces. **Rat Skates' *Born in the Basement*** is an account of the drummer's involvement in the birth of thrash through his founding work in the seminal **Overkill**. But while *Get Thrashed* takes a more panoramic view of the era, ***Born in the Basement*** isn't the thrash story, or even the **Overkill** story, for that matter. This is the **Rat Skates** story. And it's an interesting one.

As the 70's were drawing to a close, a teenage Skates (named Lee Kundrat by his mama) was obsessed with skating and punk rock, and spent time with other amateurs playing in punk rock cover bands idolizing the likes of **The Ramones** and **The Dead Boys**, eventually finding some meager success playing in a band called **The Lubricants**. When the NWOBHM hit the US shores, Skates, along with other soon-to-be thrashers (whom he dubs the "Class of 1980") integrated these new influences into their punk roots and forged new trails. But when Skates and bassist D.D. Verni made the switch to the name **Overkill** in 1980, they were still a far cry from the denim and hightops thrash uniform. Image was seen as critical, and **Overkill** Mach I looked like understudies of the **KISS** and **Twisted Sister** school of theatrics, and there are loads of old pics of **Overkill** and other classic bands to prove it.

Image is an important part of Skates' story, (thankfully) beyond the pancake makeup and Halloween costume shop visuals. The thrash zeitgeist discussion is entertaining and intriguing, but what's truly compelling about ***Born in the Basement*** is how it portrays the dogged determination and sheer drive that Skates used to pull **Overkill** from local dives to the worldwide stage. And a big part of that success was his savvy realization that because perception becomes reality, **Overkill** should look, in every way, like a band that's already made it. And *made* it, he did. He made *everything*. Shirts, demos, artwork, banners, stickers, personalized picks and drum sticks—you name it, Skates and girlfriend/wife Lori made it themselves in the bedroom of his parents' house. With his tireless DIY ethic and tremendously impressive ingenuity, Skates found ways to promote his band and improve their stage show back in the pre-net era when "adding a friend" meant actually meeting a living, breathing person, and the only "mail" you got was delivered six days a week by a government employee in funny pants. Fundamental to Rat's DIY campaign was creating a professional image that was well beyond the band's financial means and current level of success. It was all about doing more with less, and his accounts of this creativity are a big part of the film's appeal. Today's aspiring indie bands and nostalgic old schoolers alike will learn how to make homemade shrink wrap, the magic of the toll booth marketing blitz, and why milk crates, Styrofoam, and magic markers are the lynchpins of the live show of self-professed "arena wannabes."

Ironically, after Skates dedicated most of a decade to push **Overkill** into the limelight, he walked away from the band in 1987, just as they were reaching their greatest success. He blames touring, self destructive behavior and being frustrated by making less money on a label than they were as an independent act. But after watching him describe his long labor of love, it's clear that the struggle of the self-made journey was a part of the thrill, and it's hard not to speculate about the possibility that once all of that went away that it just wasn't as rewarding anymore. There are also some interesting contradictions in the film, such as Skates declaring that he was "at war" with the hated local cover bands (it was hard to get booked as an original act), even though he started as a cover artist himself, or talking nonchalantly about ripping off image ideas from other bands, and later hinting that other bands had later stolen ideas from them.

Born in the Basement, like early **Overkill**, is an entirely do-it-yourself project of Rat and wife Lori, and they've produced a film to be proud of. It's definitely worth checking out if you're a fan of early thrash or are in an independent band, although a DVD like this probably has a low replay value for most, so the twenty bucks may be hard to shell out for this hour long documentary unless you feel you'll get your money's worth from a couple viewings.



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