



Fuzz: The Sound That Revolutionized the World

Director: Clif Taylor

Cast: Billy F. Gibbons, Jon Spencer, Peter Frampton, Chris Ross

(2007) Rated: Unrated

US DVD release date: 20 November 2007 (Brinkfilm)

by James Greene, Jr.

Fuzz Face. Buffalo Pfuz. Lovetone Big Cheese. Super Muff. As much as I want to believe these are the names of porno actors, they aren't. No, these colorful monikers actually belong to different brands of fuzz boxes, those small, unassuming effects units so many aspiring rock guitarists have used over the years to hone their sound. These boxes and their ability to turn any regular six string into a primal, overdriven sexual sonic weapon have helped greats such as Hendrix and the Ashton brothers achieve musical immortality. Where did these strange little doo-hickeys come from, though, and who are the hairy, bug-eyed weirdos making and distributing them?

Director Clif Taylor answers these questions in his documentary *Fuzz: The Sound That Revolutionized the World*, albeit not very thoroughly. The film just kind of bounces around from one crusty pedal manufacturer to the next, each one offering up a few scant facts about the history of these revered metal circuit containers. A little narration tying everything together certainly wouldn't have hurt; it's not even apparent Taylor, who I'm guessing is the dude in the Gilligan hat occasionally seen hovering near interview subjects, is on his own quest for "the perfect tone" (quoted from the back of the box). It's almost as if Clif turned on his camera and hoped everything would work itself out. Luckily, I used to be into the fuzz scene, so it wasn't that hard to keep up. The uninitiated, however, might have difficulty telling their Maestro FZ-1As from their Vox Tone Bender copies.

Another gripe: no Mudhoney. Sure, the storied Seattle band gets a mention, but how could Clif not include an interview with the guys who named one of their albums *Superfuzz Bigmuff* as a tribute to the crux of their wild, flailing sound? Don't tell me they asked too much. That one guy from ZZ Top is in this documentary (you know, the one with the beard), and I simply refuse to believe Mark Arm charges more than hillbilly does to talk on camera about the Supersonic Fuzz Gun. At least we get Jon "Blues Explosion" Spencer, Wolfmother's Chris Ross, and perpetually mumbling guitar god J. Mascis. Can someone please buy that guy a megaphone? I barely caught any of his sullen offerings.

A few of Clif's subjects were interviewed not in person but via computer/video phone. Nothing suggests someone's in prison or a mental institution quite like a pixelated, lagging electronic linkup (it also suggests this film was operating on a certain budget).

The most interesting aspect of Clif Taylor's cinematic journey down one of rock's most trampled back roads is the controversial practice of gooping. That's when pedal makers cover their circuits in a gross, sticky muck to prevent other fuzz nuts from ripping off their sound (or to prevent anyone from finding out they've been ripped off). The arguments get pretty heated; gooping is pretty much the steroid scandal of the fuzz box world. One must wonder how many lawsuits over gooping have been thrown out of federal court.

Another entertaining bit is the chap who, with refreshing honesty, remarks that the most important quality any musical instrument possesses is resale value. Every musician is a "loser", he says, and it's only a matter of time before they're going to need to sell their gear for drug money. The balding man in shades speaks from experience, apparently. That's not so hard to believe. Anyone wearing sunglasses indoors in the middle of the day either has a serious drug problem or just got over one.

Unfortunately, these two moments do not a documentary make. *Fuzz: The Sound That Revolutionized the World* is too disorganized and uninteresting a mess overall; it's really just 90-minutes of unkempt rock geeks talking shop. The extras are pretty weak, unless you're interested in hearing about the Russian fuzz box market, witnessing another montage of "out there" collectors, or hearing Angie Bowie reminisce about Mick Ronson.

An essential fuzz record list might have been nice with some interactive samples, and maybe another minute or two with J. Mascis so we could try to figure out what he's saying about everything all the time. Enunciate, bro ham. Enunciate.

RATING: 4

EXTRAS: 4

— 2 January 2008

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