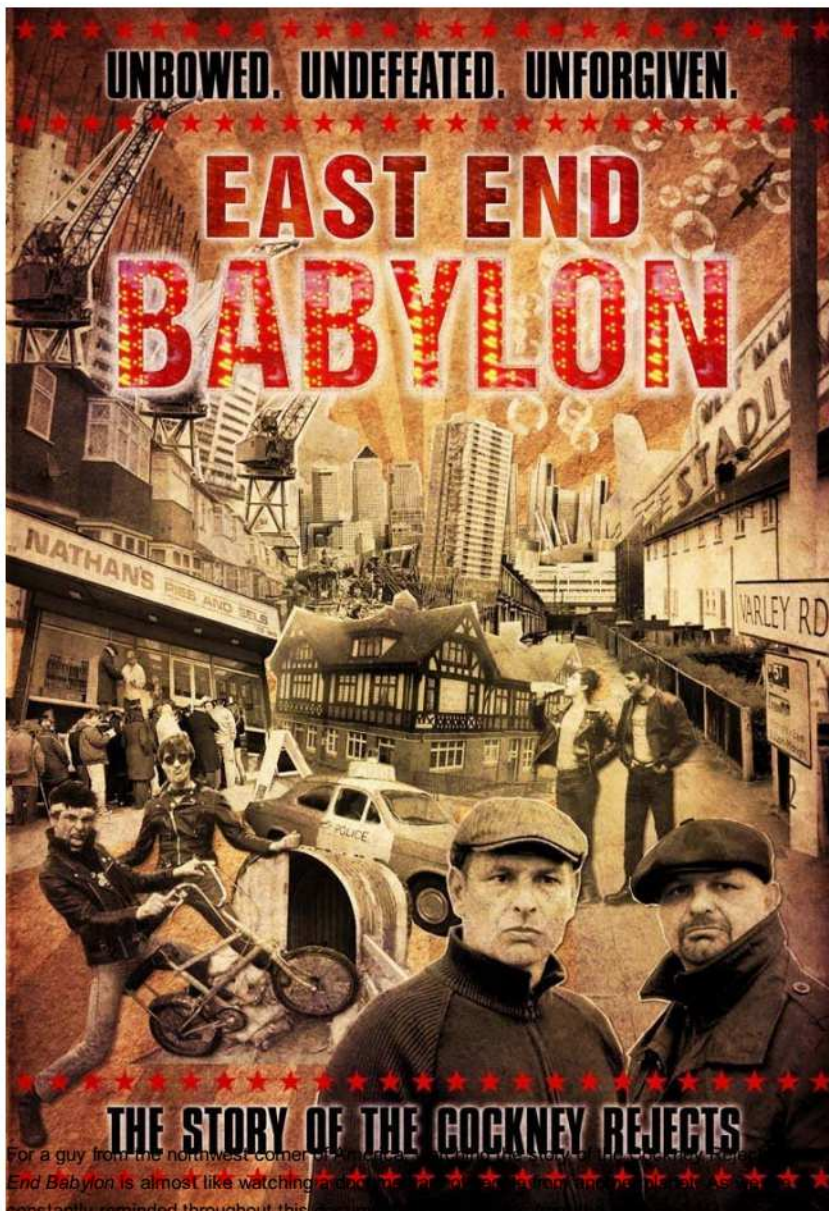


East End Babylon: The Cockney Rejects Story DVD Review: Punk Hooligans for Life

By [Greg Barbrick](#) on November 7, 2013 1:17 AM | [0 Comments](#)

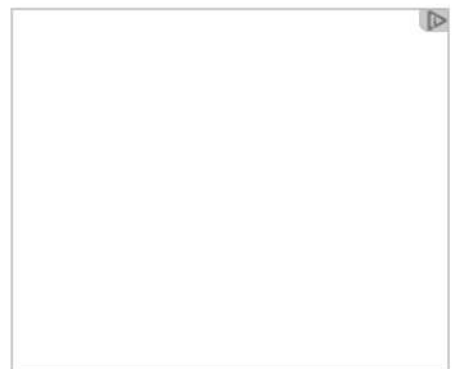
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For a guy from the northwest corner of America, watching *East End Babylon* is almost like watching a documentary. I'm constantly reminded throughout this

Apparently this is a sovereign nation, with customs and rituals known only to the inhabitants. They also seem to have their own language, as guys in the band have such thick accents that subtitles should have been used. Despite all of this, or maybe even because of it, I found *East End Babylon* to be a fascinating film.

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I should mention that I knew nothing about the band besides their memorable name before watching this movie. I have seen their colorful albums in import bins over the years, but never took the plunge and actually bought one. So the biggest reason I wanted to watch *East End Babylon* was just to find out what they were all about. It turned out to be quite a story.

The mainstays of the Cockney Rejects have always been brothers Jeff (vocals) and Mickey Geggus (guitar). Jeff has used a number of pseudonyms, including Jeff Turner, Jeff "Stinky" Turner, and even just Stinky. The brothers were initially joined by Chris Murrell (bass) and Paul Harvey (drums).

The first 20 minutes of the movie is spent describing the conditions of West Ham in London's East End in the '70s. If the Geggus brothers were to follow in their family's footsteps, they would have become dockworkers, the equivalent of being a longshoreman in the U.S. Your career opportunities were very limited if you did not want to work on the docks. Basically, it was either football (soccer) or boxing.

With the eruption of punk in 1977, Jeff and Mickey discovered another option, music. They formed the Cockney Rejects in 1978. These tough guys had a knack for crafting catchy tunes and were successful right out of the gate. Their self-released "Flares n' Slippers" caught the attention of Small Wonder Records, who issued the follow-up "I Wanna Be A Star." That single sold out its first pressing and led to a contract with EMI.

Just prior to signing with EMI, Murrell and Harvey were replaced by Vince Riordan (bass) and Andy Scott (drums). Thus the "classic" Cockney Rejects lineup was complete, and their amusingly titled EMI debut *Greatest Hits, Vol. 1* was released in 1980. They definitely were prolific and released *Greatest Hits Vol. 2* in 1980 as well. Their biggest U.K. hit was from *Vol. 2*, "The Greatest Cockney Rip-Off," which was a parody of Sham 69's "Hersham Boys."

For anyone who remembers the old VH1 show *Behind the Music*, the tales of the various bands were pretty much all the same. A group of young guys would get together, make it big, then succumb to drink and drugs. Then they would sober up and try again. The "sober" albums invariably sucked, but that was beside the point, as the story was always interesting. Substitute "football" for "drink and drugs," and you will find the downfall of the original Cockney Rejects.

It is hard to fathom the fanaticism of English football fans. Working-class Brits form "firms," which are basically gangs, in support of their local teams. For all intents and purposes, the Cockney Rejects set themselves up as a firm of their own. Predictably enough, their gigs became huge fights. A show in Birmingham basically turned into a riot, with a crowd who had paid their way in just to try and beat the hell out of the band.

The Rejects were by no means innocent in all of this. They knew that they were baiting the majority of their audience, and defend their actions to this day. These guys are pushing 60 years of age. Listening to them talk about how proud they still are of allowing their career to implode rather than not engage in football fights is hard to believe.

At one point in the movie, the discussion turned to another East End band, Iron Maiden. Jeff explains that what Maiden did was to tell their audience that while they were all fans of competing teams, they were all "one" with the music. A very simple and easy way to remove the issue and get on with the gig. One thing is for sure, Mickey and Stinky still have the integrity of their firm intact though.

But what the hell, it sure makes for an interesting story. While I think that the Rejects' attitudes were a huge mistake, there is a certain amount of charm in it all. I believe "Bloodied but unbowed" is the term, and the Cockney Rejects are the purest incarnation of this I have ever heard of. While the riots were a huge factor in the band's demise, there were plenty of other things going on as well. The stories of them getting obliterated on alcohol before their appearances on *Top of the Pops* are pretty damned funny. Then there was their attempt to "go metal" after seeing the Sunset Strip scene of the early '80s in Los Angeles.

The band were also victims of terrible management. As is so common in the music business, they were kids who had no clue as to what the difference between a good manager and a bad one was. At management's insistence, they never toured Europe during their salad days, although they were hugely popular on the continent. When they did tour there many years later, they found out first-hand how many fans had been waiting to see them.

East End Babylon is the closest thing to a punk *Spinal Tap* (1984) I have seen. In this case, truth certainly is stranger than fiction. Beyond all of that though, there is the music. In listening to the many songs that are played during the movie, I am kicking myself for never taking the plunge and buying one of those intriguing looking albums back in the day. For all of their "hooliganism," these guys wrote some great tunes.

The Cadiz Music DVD of *East End Babylon* runs 100 minutes, and there are another 20 minutes or so of extras. The five bonus features are "East End Babylon," (5:50), "Where the Hell is Babylon?" (2:58), "Canvey Island" (4:52), "It's Alright?" (1:11), and "How Many Rejects?" (4:16). All but the last are music videos of a sort, with brief introductions from various band members. "How Many Rejects?" concerns the many people who have joined Mickey and Stinky as Cockney Rejects over the years. The piece was filmed in what appears to be their favorite local pub, which has a framed, vintage Cockney Rejects T-shirt on the wall. When they take it down and show it to the camera,



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we see that it has been autographed by all the Rejects, past and present.

Whether you are a fan of the Cockney Rejects, or just curious about them the way I was, *East End Babylon* tells one of the most unusual stories I have ever seen. I enjoyed it immensely.

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