

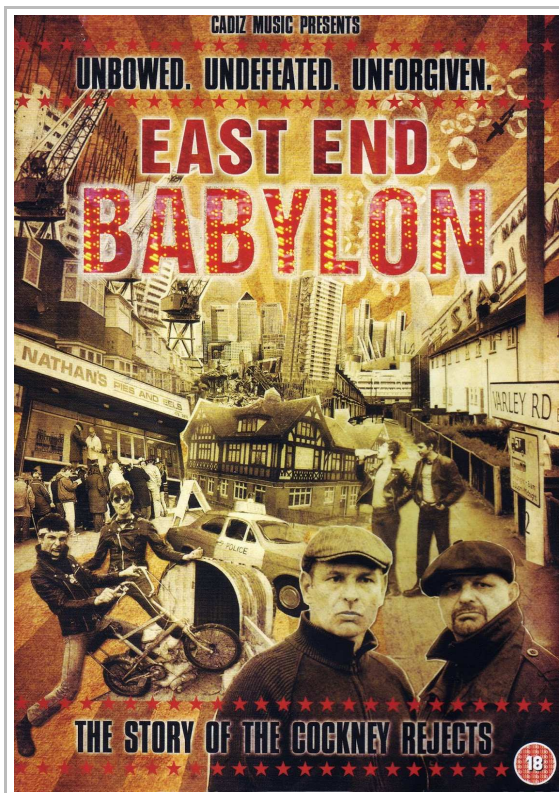
# FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

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

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2014

## DVD Review: East End Babylon: The Story of the Cockney Rejects

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Images from the Internet



### East End Babylon: The Story of the Cockney Rejects

*Produced and directed by Richard England*

*Cadiz Music / Custom House*

101 minutes, 2013

[www.eastendbabylon.co.uk](http://www.eastendbabylon.co.uk)

[www.cockneyrejects.com](http://www.cockneyrejects.com)

[www.cadizmusic.co.uk](http://www.cadizmusic.co.uk)

[www.mvdvisual.com](http://www.mvdvisual.com)

The Cockney Rejects were not one of the British bands that excited me in the way that others did in those early days, as with the Adverts or even John Otway and Wild Willy Barrett. They were more of the football hooligan types like the Hammersmith Gorillas that were just a bit too idiosyncratic and locally topical for me. This film gives me the chance to explore what was going on about them,

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and see if I was missing out on anything.

One way to judge a “foreign language” film like this, whose focus is a band I don’t know anything about, is will it keep my attention. Early verdict is in, and yes, it did a bang-up job straight through. Oh sure, the very thick East Ham (London’s poor East End shipyards neighborhood) kept my ears peeled as it were, and there were the occasional parts I had to replay to figure out the hell they were talking about, but it was worth the watch.

Part of what makes this successful is the mixture of not only period live footage of the band and current interviews, but the splicing of newsreels from World War II while the neighborhood was devastated by German bombings and home movies of band members. What I especially appreciated is how a topic is introduced and then a clip of the band playing the song about it is shown.

This kind of British punk, which members of the Rejects claim they invented in a backyard shed, is different than, say, the Pistols, the Clash, and the Damned. It is more driven, being closer to what would become SoCal hardcore than just anarchy. It’s beer – a lot of it – and football, rowdiness and history (more than politics), and totally East Ham working class loci perspectives.

As is described early on, the area was a breeding ground for bank robbers and the rolling of drunk sailors. A dangerous part of town where it was safer to know everybody than to not know anyone, even if you were just walking about, this is the breeding ground for their particular form of anger. They would right soon start a fight with you as buy you a pint or seven.

They are sort of like the Brit versions of the Tony Maneros that I was used to dealing with every day growing up in Bensonhurst. Oh, speaking of Otway (whose name briefly appears on a marquee in a film clip), he did a song about this sort, called “Headbutt.” But again, if you get on the good side, you had a better chance of not getting beaten up again. Their shows were, at times, outrageous and contentious.

As much as this film is about the band, it seems to be a history lesson of East Ham, from its longshoreman days through the closing of the docks in the 1970s (if I understood correctly, they blame it on the unions). As one of them posits, “There were only three ways out of the East End: football, boxing and rock’n’roll.” He apparently didn’t mention the fourth and fifth, which is prison or death, but I digress...

This early chapter is also about the Greggus family in the middle of all that history. This is hardly surprising as it is produced by the guitarist, Micky Greggus. Not as much an ego trip, however, as you may imagine, it shows how they

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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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[Suburban Voice: Al Quint](#)

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[Who Really Cares blog of Craig Davison](#)

were part of the East End, and uses the East End to explain its effect on the family, rather than the other way around. It's actually a good vision for the film, and it works.

The boxing part introduces Jeff Turner, the strapping singer of the band. He started out as a pugilist, and then helped co-found the Rejects. He brought his boxer moves to the stage, which he rightfully justifies as his stage style, much as other singers have their own, identifiable flair.

An aspect I also found interesting is how they conned their way into their first recording studio. You could call that punk, but I see it as year of being desperation-taught survival skills, even though they were around 15 years old at the time. With the help of Jimmy Pursey (Sham 69) in the studio as producer, they released a song, and used that to get their way into their first gig. Again, to me, this is more than just a punk story, but a sociological behavior that made that forlorn environment work for them. A little bit of luck, a smattering of chicanery and fast talk, and they're at their first gig *after* recording at Polydor Records. Backtracking a bit, they even wrote their first songs *after* they found out they would be in the studio.

All this led to a signing with EMI (did I mention they were 15?) and a couple of hits that got them on *Top of the Pops* more than once. A drunken appearance, however, led to "phase two" of the band. Going full steam into the football realm (of West Ham, natch), the band's music became more anthemic, raising them to a core leader of oi. This leads to epic fights, a gig in Manchester that is infamous, and a battle with Brit Nazi punks that is legendary, all of which is explained in detail, for which I'm grateful. After that... aw, mate, stitch that, I'm not gonna give away the whole documentary. Besides, I'm on page three in this Word doc already.

Most documentaries I've seen recently regarding music has people talking with a stack of books and records behind them, as they yammer on. Here, we see the Rejects in various places around the Ham, such as their mum's house (she's interviewed as well), along the Thames, in pubs, gymnasiums (boxing, remember?), and various places, keeping it fluid and moving. By not focusing only on the band, but on the times both past and, well, further past, as well as the present, the story doesn't get claustrophobic. It's always moving, always interesting. Perhaps it could have been a little shorter, but it still kept my attention. They are natural storytellers.

Which brings me to the one thing I would like to change: there are various language captions available, but the one I needed, English, was sorely lacking. The accents are so thick, sometimes things got lost in the translation (e.g., one I knew was claret = blood). An English caption choice would have been welcome. But, hey, if that's the

worst I could find, that's pretty damn good.

The extras are definitely worth the view: eleven shorts lasting between ten and fifteen minutes apiece that vary greatly from a live acoustic set, Jeff giving an inspirational talk, some of their recordings, their love for reggae, and stuff that didn't make it into the film (enjoyable, but rightfully so). There is also a very nice glossy multi-page booklet with photos and some text.

The most important thing this doc does is give you the opportunity to like these guys, both on a musical and personal level. Do yerseff a favor, mate, and give a peek.

**Bonus video:**

Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at [9:26 PM](#) 

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