

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

The Cockney Rejects held a strong fascination for me when I was a young punker in the early 1980s. Part of the reason, I reckon, is because I could find so little information about 'em back then—they weren't covered in U.S. papers all that much, if at all, and my steady supply of fanzines was initially limited to *Flipside*, and black-rhino rare issues of *Generations* (or at least that's the name I remember of a short-lived tabloid-sized rag put out by the BYO folks), *Zig Zag*, *No Mag*, and *MRR* that happened to make its way into Montebello's Roadhouse Records—and part of it was because what they were singing about struck a deep chord.

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—Jimmy Alvarado, *East End Babylon: The Story of the Cockney Rejects*

same part of East L.A. I was from, judging from all the straight talk about asshole cops, fighting, and street-level snapshots of poverty condition lives peppered across their first two albums. This film is essentially tailor-made for that kid I was, and the history-obsessed adult I've become.

The core story recounted here is that of the band—a cabal of street rats mostly too young to even vote in the U.S. who put out a remarkable slew of hard-edged and humorous tunes over a scant few years before joining the lamentable slog of punk bands flexing their inner metal musings—but director Richard England prudently weaves their tale into both nearly a hundred years of the East End itself and the family history of main protagonists (and brothers) Jeff “Stinky” Turner and Mick Geggus.

The film follows the full arc of both band and brothers—early success, their disillusion with punk, the metal years, the band's dissolution, Stinky's turn as a boxer, and the band's rebirth and resurgent popularity—along with bits about the football fanaticism to which the band was tied; the early oi movement woefully disserved by Britain's creepy, caustic tabloids; and the greater world in which the band was distilled.

The editing is tight, and the visuals are peppered with lots of historical footage and photos of both the band and the East End itself and limits the number of “talking heads” seen throughout; never a bad thing. This is a veritable cornucopia of awesomeness for the fan, but, more importantly, it is a film that has been executed in such a way that the most casual viewer who's never heard of the Rejects would likely find something of interest to glom onto if they happened on it while flipping through the channels some late evening. —Jimmy Alvarado (Cadiz Music, cadizmusic.co.uk)

Hardcore Norfolk: A Story of Rock'n'Roll Survival: DVD

Where's Norfolk? About two hours from Richmond. You know, where bands like Avail and GWAR and Strike Anywhere are from, where all the best bands find a way to play while on tour. Not that many made the ninety-mile detour from the Richmond-to-Chapel-Hill route, but if they had they would have found some crazy kids making music despite the conservative, military nature of the town.

I will admit that I am a little biased because I first got to know *Hardcore Norfolk* back in 1984, when I bought my first punk rock records at a Skinnies, a Norfolk record store that has refused to die. There were flyers for shows at a place called Connection Hall. *Hardcore Norfolk* was a loose-knit group of friends who put on shows, played shows, and went to shows at this place in the back of a beauty parlor. I was a few years from getting my driver's license and I lived in Virginia Beach, the next town over. The venue was in a “bad” neighborhood so forget a ride from the parental unit or anyone else's parental units. Bus service was a joke. I had no hope of going. The venue closed a few years later but the music didn't stop.

Hardcore or punk bands make up about two-third of the music featured here. The movie chronicles all kinds of self-promoted music in Norfolk, starting in the late '50s. Shiptown Records was Norfolk's answer to Motown. There was a lively soul music scene along Church Street, with clubs that embraced black performers during the era of de facto segregation. In the '60s, Norfolk had more sailors than hippies and several rockers refined their chops while in Vietnam. A jangle-pop band called Waxing Poetics and indie-rockers Antic Hay from the late 1980s and early '90s also get a fair bit of coverage.

In the 1980s, Virginia Beach aggressively banned backyard skateboard ramps so a committed group of skaters got the first public vert ramp built at Mount Trashmore. At that time skateboarding was punk's gateway drug, so a lively scene grew up around skateboarding, with bands like The Faction and JFA making that ninety-mile detour.

Probably the most well-known band featured here is The Candy Snatchers, who toured extensively and got themselves on the cover of *Maximum Rock'n'roll* in the late 1990s. Of course, this film can't be everything to everybody so some bands are left out and some maybe get too much time, but that's the nature of music documentaries.

This was a great trip down memory lane for me but what if you are one

of those people who don't know that it's pronounced “Nawfuk”? The story of *Hardcore Norfolk* is your story if you grew up in a shitty town, lived for music, and hung out with the few people who understood you. —Lisa Weiss (hardcorenorfolk.com, debra@hardcorenorfolk.com)

Looking for Johnny: The Legend of Johnny Thunders: DVD

Director Danny Garcia is a huge Johnny Thunders fan. Huge. I mean, Garcia made this film about the guy, so it's fairly obvious. With that said, his fandom is *Looking for Johnny's* biggest flaw. Throughout, Garcia simply cannot get out of his own way, and the directorial choices he makes (and doesn't make) hobble what might have otherwise been an interesting story.

For one, it never feels as if Garcia has a clear sense of what he's trying to do in the film. Sure, he's trying to tell the story of this guy who was in the New York Dolls and the Heartbreakers, a guitarist who died under dubious circumstances, but after watching this multiple times I'm left confused. There are parts of the film—the expository parts—that feel unreasonably rushed. Worse, I have no idea what the hurry is.

Early on in the career of the Dolls, for example, drummer Billy Murcia chokes on hot coffee in a British bathtub after well-meaning bumbler try to revive him from an overdose. The film talks about how sad the event was, how vital Murcia was to the band, and prior to that moment *the dude is barely even mentioned*. It's as if director Garcia is ticking off items from a checklist throughout this film, like he's trying to get plot points out of the way.

This happens a little later on in the film when Thunders' band Gang War is briefly mentioned—I had no idea that Thunders played with Wayne

Kramer from the MC5! Unfortunately, I don't know much more than this, because, again, the whole thing is dealt with in less than a minute, as if another box is being checked off. Despite this, we're told about the band's potential and whatnot—*told*, rather than Garcia using exposition to develop the point.

And the same thing happens again later: Stiv Bators of the Dead Boys is briefly in cahoots with Thunders in a band setting, but Bators dies, Thunders is devastated, and any number of aging New York scenesters tell us how the whole thing was. What Garcia misses, or ignores, is that a bunch of talking heads telling us how important people are does not get the

on heroin, a bunch of people talking about how affecting his music was, occasional discussions of the man's musical habits (though there's precious little in the way of performance throughout—there's often grainy footage of a band while someone or other talks over music playing in the background, but not the music the band in said footage is playing—this is especially the case for the first half of the film), and an overall sense of worship and reverence that I just do not get.

It's great to hear from photographer Bob Gruen and Sylvain Sylvain, one of the two original surviving Dolls, but the assembled cast often feels scraped together, as if the director would take anyone available, and as if they're

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—Michael T. Fournier *Looking for Johnny: The Legend of Johnny Thunders*

point across. This is a documentary: we want to be *shown* through footage and interviews.

I get that the footage Garcia uses throughout must have been a labor of love, one that induced much salivation when rare or never-before-seen stuff was unearthed, but the choices to use said clips are being made at the expense of a cohesive narrative. Jeez, even Thunders' death (or was it murder?) in a New Orleans hotel room feels rushed, though I assumed (incorrectly) Garcia was sprinting through the rest of the film to dig deep into the incident like a punk rock *Unsolved Mysteries*. Nope.

So what's the rush, then? Why are so many seemingly salient points skimmed over? Beats me, because a majority of this film feels like sitting through a bunch of Johnny Thunders' uninteresting associates blathering on. There's a fair amount of canoodling about how Thunders got wasted

grateful to be on camera to tell their story. It just doesn't feel authoritative narratively, especially since the important bits seem glossed over in favor of....well, nothing. He left too soon, got too fucked up, repeat.

The reason I was psyched to watch this in the first place was to find out why there was so much mystique about Johnny Thunders—there's surely more to it than the whole “live fast, die young” thing, right? Unfortunately, I have no idea at the end of the movie: the aforementioned scenesters who narrate the film seem to dictate the film's flow, rather than the director having a strong vision and asking questions to get the answers he was looking for. What we're left with is a cipher—over which any number of people fawn and preen—and a missed opportunity. 

—Michael T. Fournier (No address listed)

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