



**Billy Childish Is Dead**  
Dir Graham Bendel, UK, 2005  
(Cherry Red)

There's more to Billy than simple three-chord thrash, y'know.

He's an eccentric and a dyslexic, suffered terrible abuse and bullying as a child, has painted over 2,000 paintings, penned 30 volumes of poetry, written two novels and continues to fascinate mainstream artists with aspirations towards credibility such as Jack White, Kurt Cobain and – well, most of the Seattle/Olympia lot, actually. He is bloody-minded: follows his own path of anti-establishmentarianism (art, music) through both Stuckism and his refusal to self-promote. He's parochial, has lived in the same part of Medway forever, shaves with a cut-throat razor, has a fascination with the two World Wars, doesn't tolerate fools, doesn't quite see why his former lover Tracey Emin should take credit for ideas that he gestated and is brutally frank, sometimes disturbingly so. He was expelled from St Martins School Of Art, has been turned down by Goldsmith's on two separate occasions, and continues to carve his own path out of nothing.

His music – based round the direct approach of Sixties bands such as The Creation and The Kinks – favours analogue over synthetic every time, antique instruments, onstage uniform and attitude. Critics who say anyone could do what he does are missing the point: not only are his woodcuts evocative of Van Gogh (he once staged an exhibition of his own work in tribute to the Dutch artist) but no, no one could do what he does, even with those three chords. For the appeal of Billy Childish lies in his personality, his self-created aura – and no one else possesses the ability to be Billy Childish.

In this fascinating 80-minute documentary (plus plentiful bonus footage), director Graham Bendel talks to friends, band-members (deadpan wit and drummer Bruce Brand: Holly Golightly smoking a fag), admirers (an upper-class toff, biographer of Sir John Betjeman: the ever-repulsive Shane McGowan) and journalists, trying to dig a little deeper, discover the motivation behind the fierce independence. There are clips of Billy's bands – Buff Medways of course, Milkshakes, Headcoats – interviews with the man himself, going about his everyday eccentricity, and some droll one-liners.

Excellent.

Everett True



**Paradise Lost: The Murders At Robin Hood Hills/Paradise Lost 2: Revelations**

Dir Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinovsky, US, 1996/2001 (Warp Films, 2005)

West Memphis, Arkansas, 1993. Three young boys are savagely abused, mutilated, murdered and dumped in the woods. It's the stuff of nightmares, media panics, folk songs: slaughter in a sylvan setting. But it's the fallout from this event that shapes *Paradise Lost*, first released on HBO in 1996.

Local teenager Jessie Misskelley, after 12 hours of interrogation and possible police coercion, implicates himself and friends Jason Baldwin and Damien Echols as the murderers – despite his low IQ and flawed story, this is used as evidence. *Paradise Lost* then charts the boys' trials and the grief of the West Memphis people, creating a vivid document of the community itself. Berlinger and Sinovsky are adept at this. In *Some Kind Of Monster*, they painted a compassionate portrait of an aging Metallica. In *Brother's Keeper* they explored rural communities' attitudes to outsiders. Here, they combine the two: the accused are metal fans, black-clad outcasts in a god-fearing town. This cultural choice proves to be powerful ammunition against them, as chain-smoking moms declaim in biblical language outside the court and epic testifying takes place at the local Baptist church. Damien Echols, meanwhile, tries to explain his Wiccan-lite views as his Book Of Shadows is passed around the the jury. "Wicca, Satanism... or both?" booms the prosecution.

Damien Echols and Mark Byers (stepfather of murdered Chris Byers) soon come to command the viewer's attention, and by *Paradise Lost 2* (made in 2001) it sometimes feels like a head-to-head battle between them. Be-mulleled Byers first stomps into view shooting at a pumpkin, spouting hellfire rhetoric. By the second film, not only is he a tireless campaigner against the support groups set up for the 'West Memphis Three', he's also deeply disturbed and under suspicion himself. *Paradise Lost 2* leaves out the trial footage, but uncovers new evidence with the pace of a cracking good thriller. Both films are testament to the documentary's ability to bring injustice to our attention. It's worth remembering, though, that all three accused are still in jail – and, despite the lengthy appeals documented on the Free The West Memphis Three site, Damien Echols is still sentenced to death.

Frances May Morgan



**street sounds**

Words: Mark Pilkington

**20 years on, Neubauten's klang still reverberates**

**Einstürzende Neubauten: Halber Mensch**

Dir Sogo Ishii, Japan, 1985 ([www.cherryred.co.uk](http://www.cherryred.co.uk))

The most literal of the bands to spring from the 'industrial' culture of the late Seventies, Berlin's Einstürzende Neubauten quickly drew a worldwide following thanks to their paint-peeling recordings and incendiary live performances. Employing tools and materials more usually found in scrapyards and factories, over the past 25 years EN have scraped, hammered and drilled a niche that is entirely their own.

1985 saw the release of *Halber Mensch*, still one of their most satisfyingly intense albums, and the band – Blixa Bargeld (vocals and guitar), FM Einheit and NU Unruh (percussion) Alexander Hacke (guitar) and Marc Chung (bass) – on a tour of Japan. Having seen his 1984 feature *Crazy Family* (about, well, a crazy family) the band contacted the young Sogo Ishii to document their concerts. There was really no other choice. Emerging from Japan's punk scene in 1977, Ishii took the DIY aesthetic to heart: grabbing 8mm and 16mm cameras from Tokyo University and being in the right place at the right time as The Stalin, The Roosters, Anarchy and other J-Punk outfits ripped up the nation's blueprints for cultural and economic regeneration.

**Blixa mid-metamorphosis between Batboy and Edward Scissorhands**

Works like *Anarchy '80 Ishin* (1980) and *The Stalin For Never* (1984) cemented Ishii's reputation as a film maker bristling with diamond sharp ideas and raw energy. A musician himself – most recently recording an album as Mach 1.67 with indie heartthrob actor Tadanobu Asano (Kakahara in *Ichii The Killer*) – Ishii's films have an innate sense of rhythm that can best be seen in the startling electro-superhero battles of *Electric Dragon 80,000 Volts* (2001).

*Halber Mensch* splices together footage of Neubauten letting rip in a disused warehouse with gig footage and three specially shot videos: *Letztes Biest*, *Halber Mensch* and *ZNS*. Slow tracking shots and pans carry us through a steaming scrapyard accompanied by the slow-burning intensity of 'Armenia' before we get our first glimpse of the band: death dandy Blixa mid-metamorphosis between Batboy and Edward Scissorhands, Einheit the sensitive, hammer-wielding brute and Unruh, impish in a leather jumpsuit, offset by the besuited Chung (now an MD at Sony Music) and Hacke. Things become frantic and Ishii's cutting keeps perfect pace – out come the chainsaw and shopping trolley as the camera swings wildly overhead and glides through mounds of twisted metal. A journey through macro and micro cosmos – from distant stars through a slow spinning human embryo – segues into a *Top Trumps* style line up of EN's instrumentation that includes both the machines and their human handlers.

*Halber Mensch* and *ZNS* feature the dance company Byakko-sha decked out as deranged biomechanical zombies stalking EN with 'Thriller'-style moves. Elsewhere, the band are devoured by worms of metal and flesh, imagery that clearly influenced *Tetsuo* director Shinya Tsukamoto. The aesthetic is of its time, but remains satisfyingly bizarre; bursting with mechanoid homo-eroticism and flashes of surreal humour, such as an 'unplugged' EN tearing up a motorway at the film's end, ignored by passing motorists and bus passengers. The final sequence, EN performing before the ghosts of long-vanished skyscrapers – still raging at the end of time – could yet prove prophetic as the band continue to record and tour 20 years later.