

ROCTOBER #43/FALL 2006

TV Party - The Documentary, TV Party - premiere episode (Brink/MVD) From 1978 to 1982 New York scenester Glenn O' Brien helmed perhaps the greatest, and certainly the most historic, cable access show in history. The columnist for Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine knew everyone, and when he decided to emulate the *Playboy After Dark* TV show - simulating a party on the air and working musical and talk show guests into the party - he got *everyone!* In the Ed McMahon chair was Blondie's Chris Stein (his gal Debbie Harry subsequently became a regular), the character generator (the device that types titles on the air) was run by Jean-Michel Basquiat, who on occasion would practice his text-based art by randomly typing polemics across the TV screen during the live broadcast, and the token black was Fab 5 Freddy, who later would revolutionize cable TV as MTV's token black, ushering in the Hip Hop revolution. The band played experimental noisy art rock, and they damn well played it better than Doc Severin's band could have played it. Live musical guests included David Byrne, John Lurie and Charles Rocket, who was fired from *Saturday Night Live* for saying "fuck," but welcomed to a show where anyone could say fuck anytime. Or could smoke pot. Or could take obscene phone calls. Or could fight. Or could be political or sexual or outrageous or very boring. It was a bizarre, dynamic free for all, where theme shows like *Caveman Show*, *Sex Show* or the *Crusades Show* were high concept off-season Halloween bacchanals. Of course the camerawork was inept, the show was iffy and the high hipsters were less clever than they thought, but it was better than anything on commercial TV. Ever. This series of DVDs includes an amazing feature length documentary with appearances by George Clinton, James Chance and the cable access engineer who begrudgingly oversaw this mess. There are also a series of single episodes released and the purity of their chaos is remarkable.

Desmond Dekker "...in memoriam 1941-2006" (Secret) No one deserves more tribute than the "King of Ska." Between 1963 and 1970 the charismatic Desmond Dekker recorded dozens of sublime singles with Jamaican super-producer Leslie Kong. After becoming a top act in Jamaica, he broke ground in 1967 when his rocksteady classic "007 (Shantytown)" became a hit in the U.K., followed two years later by the haunting "Israelites" a number one British hit and a US top ten single. Dekker relocated to London, but his promising recording career was derailed when Kong unexpectedly died in 1971. After that he recorded sporadically until his death last year, often revisiting his greatest hits, as he did in 2004 in what is described on this as "his last recordings." While this CD features long, quality liner notes, it fails to explain why exactly he recorded this many sound-alike cover versions of his songs, and why exactly we should buy this and not the originals. That said, it's impressive to sound as good in your 60s as you did in your 20s, and I actually listened to this CD over and over and loved it.

Accept "Metal Blast from the Past" DVD (Grakkar) I can't recommend this highly enough. In some ways it's not good enough, as the bulk of this DVD is not some new overview of Accept's metallic missionwork, but rather a brilliantly awkward late 80s "documentary" (including all their music videos and TV appearances) on this mighty German band that is far from comprehensive. The bonus material includes a good Bulgarian TV concert from the nineties and a handful of non-Udo videos. That said, I endorse any DVD lionizing the greatest Patton Oswald-lookalike-led band in metal history, a band bold enough to make ultra-homoerotic tunes like "London Leatherboys," and a band with a twin guitar attack mighty enough to make a tune called "Fast As A Shark" seem reasonable. Udo is one of the best metal singers of all time, a giant among men despite his size, and a genuinely magnetic performer. The footage of the band goofing around on tour is priceless. The DVD has a CD of unreleased demos on the flip side, and a detailed band history with photos and LP covers included. This is as balls to the wall as it comes.

Led Zeppelin - The Origin of the Species DVD (Sexy Intellectual) This is one of the better entries in this series of rock critics talk as TV footage rolls DVD documentaries. This is only covering the birth of Led, and it's fun to see film of pre-Zep bands and hear early pre-Zep records. It's also a good forum to defend the band for borrowing, and though there's not much on the old time bluesmen who were pillaged, there's a great segment on the genesis of "Dazed and Confused" where the original folkie version by Jake Holmes is followed by a live version by the Yardbirds, eventually arriving at the one we know and love.

"God Save the Queen - a punk rock ANTHOLOGY" DVD (MVD) MVD has been releasing some remarkable music DVDs over the last few years, often digging up amazing, obscure masterpieces, or lost historically essential independent documentaries or music compilations (they are the DVD home of the Target videos). But they also have put out a few knockoffs, including concert videos featuring single-camera fan shot footage of bands decades past their prime, or projects that capitalize on the name of a rock star without actually having said rock star involved or featured. Thus, when they compile the best segments of their releases onto a themed anthology video, you might be wary. Their last punk compilation featured too much inferior material, and defined punk so broadly that it didn't work as a cohesive document. This amazing release corrects those mistakes. Featuring, for the most part, the all time greatest punk bands of the pre-hardcore era, and the best Oi and proto-punk acts, this really is a clinic for folks who want to know what the music is all about. Great archival segments include a brutal live Dead Boys clip, amazing X-Ray Spex footage (with a killer Poly Styrene interview), and a short Germs segment with Darby as gloriously incomprehensible as he could be. And even the contemporary concerts by aged legends is either totally legit (the Stooges reunion concert) or edited dramatically in multi-camera shoots so you can't see the wrinkles (Subhumans). Of course, a lot of the video quality is appropriately subpar, as much of this was mastered from decades old VHS, but that's punk! And sure, some of this is cheap as hell (the Toy Dolls spent about 8 pence on their video) but pre-Green Day, that was your punk budget. My only two complaints are that the video doesn't include info on what full-length videos these are culled from (though there are hints, like the credits that run over the Exploited's mohawks) and that the sequencing was kind of ruined by including a long Johnny Thunders interview near the beginning. Even though it was fascinating to see Thunders trying to keep himself together while an annoying British interviewer tries to be proper while digging for heroin quotes, it killed the punk-pace of the DVD, and should have been at the end, even though I understand wanting to put early legends of punk at the beginning. But overall this was a joy to watch, and should be required viewing at Schools of Rock.

Rock Fresh DVD (MVD) This documentary on L.A. graffiti artists by Danny Lee is certainly visually rich, extremely stylistic, and incredibly slick. But despite this being a technical triumph this is actually one of the least satisfying graffiti docs I've ever seen, especially in light of the same DVD company releasing the amazing *Style Wars* not once but twice over the last few years. The problem with this film could be its strengths if the cheerleading filmmaker had a more critical eye: with one or two exceptions every artist here is continuing to work in a style that hasn't developed much in decades, they aren't from the same backgrounds as the poor inner city kids who pioneered the style, and they are all at a point where they are working for corporate clients or developing lucrative businesses (like selling expensive ugly graffiti trucker hats). If this film featured more voices critical, or at least acknowledging of, this weird place for "street" art to be then *Rock Fresh* would make more sense. And when Lee does show opposing clichéd opposing voices it still works against the film: he interviews an anti-graffiti politician and the measured, sensible response from the government official actually makes her seem more intelligent and reasonable than the filmmaker who is spouting pro-graffiti rhetoric that seems to have little to do with the corporate ambitions of his subjects. All that said, this film does look great and if you are a graffiti-ologist you need to see this. But don't expect it to be the best of the genre.

Nina by Blag Dahlia (Scapegoat), "Nina...and other delights" (MVD) Despite being an evil, presumably venereal disease ridden, definitely chaos instigating misfit, Dahlia of the Dwarves has always demonstrated intelligence, articulacy, and a profound understanding of how much good will come of his excessive badness. Not surprisingly this sexy novel (and its sister CD, an excerpted audio book, of sorts) is joyously naughty. Nina herself is a literary character you will love on the page but would fear on the street. To be honest, I can only think of one or two Dwarves songs that even vaguely hint at the writing prowess demonstrated here, and that's the way it should be. A true evil genius knows there's a time for stupid. When he wrote this book was not one of those times.

Kate Bush "Under Review" DVD (Sexy Intellectual) Apparently (according to music experts) Kate Bush is a brilliant lyricist, a weirdo, and is pretty.

Andrew WK "Who Knows?" DVD (MVD) AWK's amazing adventure in rock 'n' roll exploded with a thrilling bang as the world seemed to instantly embrace his odd brand of hard rocking dance music infused with messages of positivity. Partying and violence and stupidity were held up lyrically as metaphors for freedom, kindness, altruism and love. Regardless of whether this made sense, it was an easy sell because the showman selling it was so sincere and so intensely enthusiastic that you believed what he said. And he really is a showman, as evidenced in this documentary/concert montage film. Between Mr. K.'s strangely intense narration we see that he always wears his dirty white rock uniform on stage, and his raucous bandmates each similarly adhere to an eclectic dress code. We see his wild stage moves and the mutual love between his audience and he (it seems like there is rarely a show where crowdmembers don't end up sharing the stage with him). We see AWK making the show go on even from a wheelchair. And best of all we see a long montage of the song "I Love New York City being adapted to every town he plays in ("I love fill in the blank city!"). The man worked and this is a great document of a performer and audience totally in synch.

Jazz Shots From The East Coast, Vol. 1, Jazz Shots from the West Coast Vol. 1, Jazz Voice The Ladies Sing Jazz Vol 1 & 2 DVDs (MVD) There was a series of jazz DVDs or MVD not long ago that drew mostly from Soundies and Vitaphone musical shorts, as well as specialty numbers extracted from black cast movies. I really dug those. There's some of that on the *Jazz Voices* series (which leans a bit towards white pop-ier ladies, like June Christy, Anita O'Day, and the great Peggy Lee. But the bulk of these DVD performances draw from obscure TV shows (some must be from overseas) and are not as visually or historically exciting as film clips as some of the great jazz footage that exists. That said, musically there's some amazing stuff to hear here. Roland Kirk, Ahmad Jamal, Keith Jarrett and Duke Ellington are a pretty broad group of greats for the East Coast volume, West Coast smoothness + TV studios = not exciting, and even Chet Baker can't beat

that, but the Art Pepper and Wes Montgomery sets are pretty interesting.

"Queen Under Review 1973-1980" DVD, Vol 2: 1980-1990 (Chrome Dreams) The self-description-of these DVDs ("the ultimate review and critical analysis of Queen's music and live performances") had me expecting something different. I

thought maybe this would be a profoundly original release, maybe with Queen footage interspersed with a session from an academic Queen conference, with learned panelists espousing upon, and fiercely debating, Queen theory. Instead it is a cheap looking, but still very entertaining, sub-VH1 special with talking heads semi-intelligently discussing Queen's work song-by-song, mostly from a pretty pure musical perspective, with no one really offering much analysis of the textual content of the songs, or offering interesting biographical info or analysis that might explain the band's motivations. Some of the people seem smarter than others (a running semi-joke in the film is to follow up a professorial declaration by an erudite rock scholar with the naggle-toothed *Kerrang* writer offering the opposite opinion). And some statements are so dumb or obvious it's hard to understand how they made it into the final edit (one gentleman mentions that Freddie Mercury was very important to Queen's success). But overall, this is a very fun DVD to watch, as the BBC live footage of Queen is, of course, remarkable, and the handful of odd interview segments they dig up include Mercury telling a reporter his Freddie-vs.-Sex Pistols story (Freddie offers to sing on their record if Johnny sings on his, then after the inevitable rebuke he teases the band about the symmetry of their bloody scratches). Definitely made by super fans, the extras include an exhaustive discography. But definitely not made by DVD makers, this has no menu graphics, and is difficult to navigate.

"Captain Beefheart Under Review" DVD (Sexy Intellectual) Some would argue that Beefheart is easier to talk about than listen to. You wouldn't know that from this release. Though this jabbering rock intelligentsia series has had many excellent primers of critically beloved musicians, I think the British producers of this may not grasp American madness and genius as well as they do their own. Any number of impossible to understand Beefheart songs, paintings, whatever present a case for his genius with far more clarity than this DVD.