

MOVIES



BRING ME
THE HEAD
OF GENE SISKEL
CAROLYN KEDDY

It's the queer issue of MRR so fortunately I received one queer theme documentary. *Travel Queeries* explores what it is like to be queer in European countries. The filmmakers travel around different countries interviewing activists and artists about their sexual identity and their relationship to the international queer scene. It is interesting and informative. I am glad people are out or coming out and letting the world know it.

Travel Queeries warns at the beginning that there will be scenes of violence against queers in the film. However, I was still appalled to see a man getting beaten by a group of fifteen men at Serbia's first pride march. People and the police are just standing around watching while the already bloodied man was repeatedly kicked while on the ground. It is very disturbing.

On the lighter side of *Travel Queeries*, I am surprised to learn that Berliners would claim to have no drag scene. I guess I naively just always assumed they did. Although the inquiring American eventually does come across one, it seems odd to me that it would be denied in the first place. That scene also opens up something new to me, women who perform as men performing in drag. The American woman begins performing with the German drag queens. (travelqueeries.com)

Punk In England is the follow up to Wolfgang Büld's previous punk documentary *Punk In London*. It begins with the death of Sid Vicious and explores how bands were developing in the aftermath of the first wave of punk. The Clash is featured first exploring their forays into reggae. Then the documentary goes on to explore mod, ska and The Pretenders presumably representing new wave. The majority of the film is live performances from the Clash, The Jam, Secret Affair, The Specials, The Selector, Madness, Ian Dury and The Pretenders interspersed with interviews with the bands.

Punk In England has the advantage that it was filmed in the late '70s so it managed to capture some of what was going on at the time. It is not a nostalgic trip back and there is no revisionism. However, unlike *Punk In London* the focus seems too small. We know there were tons of different bands playing and releasing records at the time, but the documentary focuses on a minute part of the scene and a few of the bands involved. *Punk In England* is a bit more serious as well. It lacks the funny interviews such as the one in *Punk In London* with Arturo Bassick of the Lurkers and his parents where he calls The Boomtown Rats and The Rolling Stones sellouts. Plus if you aren't a big fan of ska or mod you will be bored.

Also included on the *Punk In England* DVD is Büld's short film *Women In Rock*. Büld conducts interviews with the Slits, Siouxsie

Sioux, Girlschool and Mania D about being women in music. Viv Albertine of the Slits puts it succinctly. Their music is the way it is because they are women. They got their inspiration from punk, but they wouldn't be able to make the same noise as the men so they don't. Siouxsie is a bit more sarcastic stating that she is sick of people calling her the best female singer. She is better than the male singers too. (mdvvisual.com)

It is hard to believe that Neil Hamburger managed to develop a comedy career out of a crank phone call. As far as intentionally bad, but often really funny comedians go Neil's the champ. When he decided to do a country record *Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners* I didn't even think twice about buying it.

Western Music and Variety with Neil Hamburger has Hamburger and his band The Too-Good-For-Neil-Hamburger Band performing songs from the album at a July 4th 2009 party at Radio Recorders in LA. The famous recording studio where Bing Crosby recorded "White Christmas" had a week to go before being torn down to make way for a new restaurant. The show consists of the band playing a few instrumentals then Hamburger joining them for a few songs followed by a few jokes and so on. The band even attempts to tell some jokes too.

The *Western Music and Variety with Neil Hamburger* DVD also contains a bunch of extras. A short film titled *All Alone With Neil Hamburger* has Neil on a quest for ice in a hotel. There are a couple of music videos and a bizarre TV appearance on *Chic-A-Go-Go*. Neil lip-syncs "Three Piece Chicken Dinner" while a group of costumed people of all ages dance behind him like on a '60s music show. Truly odd, but appropriate. (www.dragcity.com)

I finally got around to seeing *Cadillac Records* after a few people wrote to me telling me I should. *Cadillac Records* is the story of the Chicago Blues label Chess Records. Formed by Leonard and Phil Chess the label would introduce the world to the sound of the electric blues coming out of Chicago in the '50s and '60s. Artists such as Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, Etta James and Chuck Berry, all recorded for Chess.

Chess Records has an interesting story, but *Cadillac Records* suffers from the typical Hollywood nonsense. Each character gets boiled down to his/her one character flaw. Leonard Chess rips off his artists. Muddy Waters always needed money. Chuck Berry had a thing for young girls. Etta James abused drugs. There is not enough focus on the music except when it comes to Beyonce. Beyonce stars as Etta James and sings three complete songs in the film whereas none of the other singers featured even get to do a full one. Beyonce is also the executive producer.

The only one who comes off well in the *Cadillac Records* is Howlin' Wolf. He doesn't fall for Chess' tricks. He gets paid, stands up for himself, retains the loyalty of his band members and manages to do everything right. Therefore, he only gets a small part in the film.

I am always looking for films to review. If you made one, send a copy to Carolyn Keddy, PO Box 460402, San Francisco, CA 94146-0402. If your film is playing in the San Francisco Bay Area, let me know at carolyn@maximumrocknroll.com. I will go see it. www.carolynkeddy.com