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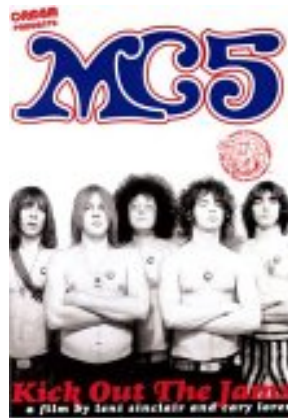
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REVIEW

DVD Review: *MC5 - Kick Out the Jams*

Posted by [Pete Blackwell](#) on July 08, 2005 02:14 PM (See [all posts by Pete Blackwell](#))
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[Mc5 - Kick Out the Jams](#)

DVD from *Music Video Distribu*
Release date: 12 July, 2005

It has become a cliché in rock journalism to describe any unusually noisy or brash group from the 1960s as the "first punk band." The Monks have had that honor bestowed upon them, as have the Stooges, the Velvet Underground and Detroit's MC5, amongst others. While there is an argument to be made for each of these choices, these comparisons do little more than redefine "punk" into some vast generalization that tells you less about the music every time another band is added to the pantheon.

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The MC5, therefore, were *not* the first punk band. They were hippies, after all. They did, however, marry several essential elements of what would later become punk rock: noise, politics and *attitude*.

The Motor City 5 (no, not the Detroit Pistons) formed in 1964 while they were still in high school. Fronted by singer Rob Tyner and guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred "Sonic" Smith (later the husband of Patti Smith), the MC5 played a high-octane style of music that they dubbed "avant-rock."

Their political ideology was formed in the heady days of the anti-war movement, and crystallized through their association with radical poet and founder of the White Panther Party, John Sinclair, who became their manager.

Definitely one of the most radical rock bands of the 60s, and certainly one of the loudest, the MC5 solidified their anti-establishment reputation by being the only band to agree to play at a festival organized to coincide with the protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Writing about the convention in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, Norman Mailer described the band's sound as "the electro-mechanical climax of the age."

The *MC5—Kick Out the Jams* DVD features concert footage of the band from the late 60s shot by Sinclair's wife, Leni. Conceptual artist and founding member of Destroy All Monsters, Cary Loren,

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added some psychedelic visual effects that will be either mind expanding or incredibly annoying, depending upon your perspective.

The audio on the DVD is culled from live performances, but it is not necessarily from what is being shown on the screen, so *MC5—Kick Out the Jams* is not, strictly speaking, a concert DVD. It is, however, a fascinating look into the more avant-garde fringes of the hippie movement.

Concert footage is interspersed with shots of the audience as well as scenes from protest marches in Detroit. Most affecting are scenes of the band kicking out the jams onstage, with flag draped Marshall stacks eerily reminiscent of the coffins that were returning home from Vietnam in increasing numbers those days.

Even without a true audio representation of what's on the screen, the live power of the MC5 is fully evident. The best clip on the DVD is a promotional video for the single "Kick Out the Jams" that was recorded live at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit.

If you're new to the MC5, this DVD is not the place to start. A better entrée would be their seminal debut album, *Kick Out the Jams*, which was released in 1969. The title track, which opens with the war cry, "Kick out the jams, mother f*ckers!," helped ensure their legacy, as well as their relative obscurity. Retail stores that refused to carry the "obscene" record

My copy (English translation) has several surahs w...

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eventually forced Elektra to drop the MC5 from the label. They later signed to Atlantic and recorded two more albums, but the moment had passed them by.

MC5—*Kick Out the Jams* DVD is a must-have for aficionados and collectors, as it brings together plenty of rare and unreleased footage of the band at their prime. The DVD tacks on a bizarre, rambling interview with acid casualty John Sinclair from 2003 as an added bonus.

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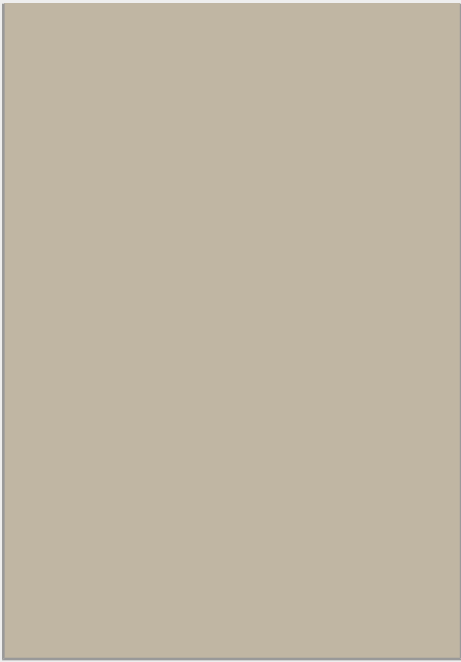
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