

**video reviews:*****Put the Needle on the Record***

(REM Entertainment / MVD)

Electronic music still hasn't found the audience in America that it has found elsewhere in the world, making it somewhat easy to overlook the fact that some of the genre's most pioneering work was done Stateside. The community is still rather isolated, which—as it has done in the past for punk rock—probably serves it well, continuing to foster an “us vs. them” mentality, where *us* = the partygoers who like a good Red Bull and vodka at 4 a.m. and who can rattle off the names of 50 star DJs, and *them* = all the misunderstanding squares who are used to their live music experiences ending by midnight, and keep their iPods cluttered with singer-songwriters (full disclosure: if it came to a Civil War, this writer's fondness for Ellen Allien and several others would not save him from being swiftly classified as one of *them*).

Put the Needle on the Record is a loving valentine to electronic music, set against the backdrop of a wild few days in Miami called the Winter Music Conference—the so-called Cannes of electronic music—where many of the genre's luminaries assemble to play poolside, try to break new records, headline huge parties, and collect awards. The documentary tries to cast the Winter Music Conference as an important piece of history itself, but it mostly just serves as a matter of convenience, making it easy for first-time writer/director Jason Rem to get a number of big names to pull up a chair on the beach. Some of the interviews are simple grab-and-gos on the red carpet, which feels a little cheap—nothing illuminating comes out of those, and it feels like purely a way to get the names of, say, Oakenfold and The Crystal Method on the box cover. For the most part, though, the interviews are effective, allowing the artists to stitch the narratives themselves rather than rely on stiff narration. Charles Feelgood and Jason Bentley are among the interviewees who add the most to the story. Rem must have asked a lot of the right questions, and he keeps himself out of the storyline entirely, which is willpower that many documentarians unfortunately do not possess. He also does a good job of including old-timers, new bigshots, and rising up-and-comers, who combine to tell an interesting and important story, and one that is probably unfamiliar to most non-fans (and maybe even some fans).

The documentary is done on the cheap—some street interviews look exactly like what you might see on *Real Sex*—but that seldom distracts. Its one major impact may have been the soundtrack, which unfortunately doesn't stand out—and sometimes is even quite bland. Conveying the ecstasy of a great DJ show may be impossible to do on film, but *Put the Needle* doesn't even come close; the shots of partygoers and live sets have less visceral impact than a typical *Wild On* segment on E!

So *Put the Needle on the Record* may not be the best salesman for electronic music, but it is a much-appreciated history teacher, even attempting at one point to parse out the myriad sub-genres that befuddle non-fans (trance, house, electronica, etc.). In addition to covering the roots of the genre, the interviews also touch on some of the modern issues confronting DJs, such as licensing songs to commercials and illegal downloading. Some take themselves very seriously, others can hardly believe that they get paid to spin records. Some cast themselves as rock stars, others envision themselves as, first and foremost, matchmakers for all the singles on the dance floor. As with any genre, there are easy stereotypes about electronic music (and sometimes they're spot-on), but it takes a diverse cast of characters to make up such a still-vibrant community.

— Adam McKibbin

www.dj-film.com**More by this writer:**

Ellen Allien & Apparat - Feature Interview

Ghostly International (V/A) - *Idol Tryouts Two*Hefty Records (V/A) - *Hefty 10 Digest*The DFA - *Remixes: Chapter One****The Re***
Week of Nov**Feature I**Pink Mo
The Lon
The
I
Lad**Record**J Dilla -
The Ho
Skye - *Min*
Teddybears
Girl Talk -
Put the Needle o
Swan Lake
Hot Snakes - *Th*
Benjy Ferree -
Casey Diemel -**Live R**Noel G
Red S
The National
Kasabi
The Long Wint
What Made Mi