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Films On DVD



DVD: Wendy O. Williams and the Plasmatics -Ten Years of Revolutionary Rock 'n' Roll (2006)

Review Rating: Very Good

Label/Studio: MVD Visual

Catalog #: DR-4522

Region: 1 (NTSC)

Released: November 21, 2006

Genre: Documentary / Concert

Synopsis: Exhaustive chronicle of the legendary punk/heavy metal band and its unforgettable singer.

Directed by: Randy Shooter

Screenplay by: None

Music by: Wendy O. Williams & the Plasmatics

Produced by: Randy Shooter

Cast: Wendy O. Williams, Wes Beech, Dante Bonutto, Jim Cherry, Ray Callahan, Malcolm Dome, Brian Drago, Chris Knowles, Jim Kramer, Krusher, Hilly Krystal, George Pierson, Greg Smith, Maria Raha, T.C. Tolliver, and Doug Smith.



Film Length: 119 mins.

Process/Ratio: 1.33:1

Colour

Anamorphic DVD: No

Languages: English Stereo 2.0

Subtitles:

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Special Features :

2 Music Videos: "The Damned" (4:36) + "It's My Life" (4:09) / 9 Concert Clips: "Butcher Baby" (3:40) + "Pig is a Pig" (4:40) + "Sex Junkie" (3:10) + "Living Dead" (3:51) + "Masterplan" (4:28) + "Party" (3:21) + "Goin' Wild" (4:10) + "Fuck 'n' Roll" (6:47) + "Reform School Girls" (3:25) / Bootleg Concert Footage: "Pieces from Harpo's" (20:09) with 7 chapter indexes / 4 Outtakes (:08) + (2:44) + (:48) + (1:36)

Comments :

One of rock's most striking and seemingly anarchic pioneers finally gets her due in this new documentary from director Randy Shooter, packing a wealth of vital archival material plus new interviews from several former members of the Plasmatics, the punk/metal band that lasted from 1978-1988, as originally conceptualized by producer/showman Rod Swenson.

According to the filmmakers, the beginning of the band was pretty simple: open call for auditions, with specific needs that included a charismatic female headliner. From there, Swenson had them tour under a name, logo, and an image he fostered from his own origins & interests in the performance art field, plus ingredients that were pushed to further extremes by Williams' own anti-consumerist, ant-establishment beliefs, resulting in the famous on-stage shtick of cutting a guitar with a chainsaw mid-song, and blowing up a car after spray-painting it with various frank language. (Some additional production anecdotes, regarding the pyrotechnics and inappropriate highway micturating, are collected in the Production Notes/outtakes gallery.)

The band's explosive performance style and Williams' shrill persona were attractive elements during the early days of music videos, and the band's antics were frequently profiled on some of the primordial music video shows, like Canada's [The New Music](#), which regularly embraced the spirit of indie artists.

(Two of the band's best-known videos, "The Damned" and "It's My Life," are included in the huge music gallery. Purists should note that the soundtracks have been remixed using original stereo album masters, with the explosive finale of "It's My Life" retained in its original mono, with sound effects.)

The group's relationship with major labels was uneasy and predictably brief, yet even without major support, they gained a reputation as the most aggressive band around, with Williams' talents as singer and later soloist eventually netting her a Grammy Nomination for Best Female Rock Vocal Performance in 1982 – largely the result from the influence of several unique producers (including KISS' Gene Simmons) who helped the Plasmatics reshape their sound.

Even after Williams briefly went solo, the band actually remained fairly intact. The name change from the Plasmatics to WoW (both benefiting from catchy names and arresting logos) partly stemmed from an effort to keep the group free from any possible legal headaches, after an unhappy relationship with Capitol Records was coming to an end. Aside from changes in drummers, most of the core musicians stayed to the end, with various musicians being brought in for recording sessions and tour dates.

In spite of their success with devoted fans, and rock critics who sensed Williams marked a major shift in the male-dominated heavy metal and punk movements, the Plasmatics were plagued by unending indecency charges, stemming from tour dates in conservative towns & cities, and the group eventually called it quits in 1988, just as Madonna's own brand of sexuality was starting to propel her into pop stardom.

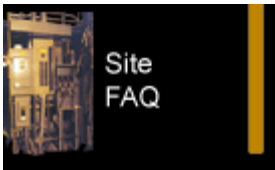
As the interviewed critics and pop culture historians explain, Williams was a raw force whose in-your-face style is still pretty shocking, yet her position as a hard, female singer in a punk and heavy metal band was quite a rarity. What keeps her controversial today isn't the physical destruction of TVs, cars and guitars, but her sexuality, which she physically let loose through sheer costumes and S&M outfits, or sometimes smothered with frothy, brackish substances to hide her frequently bare, taped, or clothespinned breasts.

Whether bored with the necessary media junkets or instinctively challenging male rock journalists, some interviews with Williams were conducted with the reporter sitting on her shoulders like an infant, and in later years, she carried the band's lead guitarist on her shoulders during performances.

Her antics give an impression of a drugged-out, self-destructive loon, but Williams, a macrobioticist, and the band were more than competent musicians; even if Williams' coarse vocals were removed from the songs, the group's music had structure, and it allowed the musicians to indulge in some complex solos. Williams' own lyrics became increasingly political and anti-establishment, yet they also formed the unified, integral parts of each album.

Where the doc fumbles is in its omission of specific details of Williams' early years, and everything that happened after the 1988 dissolution. We still don't understand what drove her to music, nor are told of her pre-band experience in the sex trade (a link that explains the striptease style evident in many of the archival concert extracts on the DVD). More importantly, Williams' final years outside of the music industry are completely omitted, as is her suicide, in 1998.

It may be that director Shooter wanted to keep the doc's scope solely on the band's performance and recording years, or perhaps it was a part of a cooperative agreement that, in sticking to the music, Shooter would have full access to every facet of the band's history. With hours of concert footage, archival interviews, clips from TV appearances (like [The Tomorrow Show](#), with a brave Tom Snyder), plus excerpts from music videos and concert outtakes integrated into the doc's narrative, it's a fair trade over the doc's main flaws.



Like the Sexy Intellectual / MVD [Under Review](#) series, in terms of the band's active years, this documentary has a wealth of archival material, but unlike those 90 min. productions, director Shooter may have realized during the editing stage that his doc was headed towards the 150 minute mark. The jump cuts in the recently filmed interviews, resulting from cuts by the editor to form concise replies, do work on a stylistic level, but the removal of natural pauses in the meaty, albeit monotone narration track creates a stream of verbalized facts that move at a breakneck speed, and become distracting when placed over reproduced articles we're still trying to read.

When a music or interview montage begins, the doc settles into a more accessible tempo, but a return to a narrated sections frequently offsets the film's pace, and one gets the impression the recorded tracks were snipped dry to ensure the film would clock in at maximum of 2 hours.

So while **Wendy O. Williams and the Plasmatics: Ten Years of Revolutionary Rock 'n' Roll** feels like a rushed first draft, the information and music will keep viewers, particularly novices, glued for its duration. The Plasmatics were a fascinating band that benefited from crafting original music videos, and throughout the doc, viewers can play complete song performances and videos when an icon appears. Those extras (part of an hour's worth of extras) are also playable in separate galleries, and they make this DVD a worthy effort to clarify the band and Williams' reputations as more than crazy performance artists lacking any kind of discipline, or talent.

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