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The Mentors

El Duce Vita [DVD]

(MVD Visual) Rated: N/A
 US release date: 3 April 2007

by **Lana Cooper**

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It takes a certain kind of person to be a Mentors fan. In order to listen to a single song by this band—let alone an entire album—one must possess a high threshold for offensive, crudity-laden, and often misogynistic humor as well as an utter lack of taste. While the exact criteria beyond that just given is hard to pin down, it can be determined that usually a Mentors fan isn't too popular with the ladies and even fewer members of this fan base are actually women themselves.

As one of the rare females of the species with several Mentors albums and *El Duce Vita* solo discs in her collection, my introduction to *The Wretched World of The Mentors* came during my high school years. During one of my crew's regular lunchtime trips to McDonald's, my friend Jeff was blaring what I would come to know and love as *The Mentors* 1991 album, *To The Max*.

Elementary, rhyming profanities as sung by a man who sounded as if he gargled hourly with that bottom-shelf blockbuster, *Banker's Club* vodka were strung together by churning, heavy metal guitar riffs and tickled my (literally) sophomoric fancy. I was hooked.

With their trademark black executioner's hoods gracing and hiding the heads of the band members, *The Mentors* formed in 1976 in Seattle before heading for Los Angeles and its legendary rock club scene. The group did not achieve true notoriety (or infamy, depending on how you view it) until the 1985 Congress hearings orchestrated by Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) interest group which sought to censor nearly every pop, rock, and rap recording artist. The relatively obscure *Mentors* caught the attention of the PMRC with their song, "Golden Showers", prompting a reading of some of its lyrics on the Congressional floor and inducing peals of uncontrolled laughter from those present.

The *Mentors*' former frontman, El Duce (*née* Eldon Hoke) also reached a level of prominence for his claim of involvement in Kurt Cobain's death. In the documentary *Kurt and Courtney*, Hoke claimed that Cobain's wife, Courtney Love offered him a large sum of money to kill her husband. Shortly after alleging his involvement in the mystery, El Duce met his untimely demise in 1997 when he was hit by a train, possibly after consuming massive amounts of alcohol.

The *Mentors* have carried on without Duce, with most of the group's original lineup intact, still performing and recording. However, the cult status of the band and El Duce has generated a demand for archival footage of both live bootlegs and original concept videos.

El Duce Vita, *The Mentors*' first official DVD release is actually a re-issue of 1990's *The Wretched World of The Mentors*, which could previously only be found on VHS, via bootleggers, or through mail-order on the band's website.

While the prospect of a *Mentors*' DVD release is exciting for fans, the footage is far from digitally remastered or anything that was previously



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unavailable. Many of the band's concept videos included on *El Duce Vita* retain their fuzzy picture quality, undoubtedly duped directly from VHS to DVD as indicated by the way the picture rolls every so often from the age of the transposed tape. At points throughout, several interviews are cut off at the last few syllables before launching into the next video, suggesting a home cut-n'-paste method of editing from the original tapes.

The video collection features several fan-favorites and their accompanying concept videos—"concept" being a rather loose term in this instance. "40 Ouncer" is an ode to unabashed alcoholism, while the video for "On the Rag" (a song with lyrics that would send Gloria Steinem running for the hills). While some of the videos are humorous, albeit tasteless, "Sex Slave" borders on porn. Not just soft core. We're talkin' full-on, in-your-face (pardon the pun) porn with full-frontal nudity. The shock value is marginally lessened by a dose of exaggerated, campy humor and bad acting.

Also included is that perennial PMRC favorite, "Golden Showers", with such lyrics as "Our relationship / I don't want to spoil it / You are my / Personal toilet" interpreted in video format by The Mentors.

Sweetening the deal, *El Duce Vita* features interviews and vignettes sandwiched between the collection of Mentors videos. In one of the obviously staged segments, El Duce is sitting in a cardboard box, poring over a copy of *Hustler* before being interrupted by an interviewer. The singer/drummer's mood lightens considerably when the interviewer hands him a joint. Throughout, Duce utters forth several statements usually reserved to fall from the mouth of one's drunken uncle, citing "I love women. I think everyone should own one."

Fans are then introduced to the other band members: Bassist Dr. Heathen Scum (who now has assumed the mantle of group leader following El Duce's death) is easily identifiable by the large pair of thick glasses visible beneath his executioner's hood, and guitarist Sickie Wifebeater, whose "girlfriend" complete with cartoonish makeup to suggest missing teeth and a blackened eye, talks about her "loving" relationship with the group's guitarist.

The disc's extras offer mere snippets of entire live shows. Footage from the 7th Street Entry in Minneapolis, circa 1991, showcases El Duce behind the drum kit and playing to a small, mostly-male audience. While the band doesn't sound very good on this live outing, they're worth watching for the added hilarity of Duce's out of breath vocals and awkward, fumbling stage raps so bad that even Dr. Heathenscum suggests that he "should go to Monologues Anonymous".

Clips from The Mentors' performance in Austin, Texas offer a crisper picture, but muddled sound, possibly due to technical difficulties as indicated by two hefty roadies fiddling around in front of Sickie. El Duce comes out from behind the kit to sing in front of the mike on "Sandwich of Love". He stands stationary and still at the microphone, possessing all of the stage movement and presence of a fifth grader reciting a song at his elementary school pageant. The band manages to finally iron things out on "Four F Club" with Sickie Wifebeater managing to finally reproduce his signature sound from The Mentors' albums in a live setting, nailing an alternating bottom-heavy crunch with fast-noted metal runs.

More of the same is shown with another extra with The Mentors live at The Country Club in Los Angeles cementing the fact that El Duce was certainly not the most literary duck in Walden Pond. Actually, I would wager he's probably too stoned to find it. However, in spite of it all, El Duce possessed a bizarre likeability that made his lackluster frontman skills forgivable.

El Duce Vita is a great starter kit for Mentors' fans who haven't been exposed (again, pardon the pun) to their delightfully derelict ditties and are looking to catch a glimpse of the band in their glory days. Considering this collection has been compiled on various other video Mentor-bilia and has likely been viewed by die-hard fans before, the DVD doesn't offer much else besides adding another format option to the menu besides its VHS predecessors. The picture quality isn't up to digital snuff and the extras, while a nice treat, are still pretty brief.

As I said before, it takes a certain type of person to be a Mentors fan. If crude, sexist, and sexual humor offends you, then I'd suggest you avoid *El Duce Vita* like poor Eldon Hoke should have avoided that train. On the other hand, if your curiosity has been piqued by this band, then you may enjoy this DVD and find yourself as simultaneously "shocked and grossed" and as enthralled as I once was by this band many moons ago.

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— 16 May 2007

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