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Waking Up Dead

Reviews

**Starring Phil Varone**  
**Directed by Fabio Jafet**  
**(Music Video Distributors/  
Demolition Visual Entertainment)**

Let's face it folks; it's not always pretty when the often tumultuous realms best known as the Hard Rock and Heavy Metal genres and the proverbial Silver Screen collide. The results, although generally well-intended, typically leave all but the most obnoxiously obsessed of fans less than satisfied. Hell, even with the unavoidable presence of full-fledged classics such as *Decline Of The Western Civilization II*, most viewers (particularly those who've already worn out their VHS copies of *This Is Spinal Tap*) are left only wanting for more. Thus, when acclaimed Emmy Award winning director Fabio Jafet (Billy Miles and The Toadies, among others) and notorious ex-Saigon Kick/Skid Row drummer Phil Varone unleashed their oft-publicized '...four years in the life...' documentary *Waking Up Dead* (2007) upon a largely unsuspecting public.

Opening with a thorough chronicle of nearly every aspect of Varone's much-celebrated (albeit tragedy-filled) career and personal life, new and established fans alike are immediately subjected to a whirlwind timeline that begins with Saigon Kick signing a multi-album contract with corporate behemoth Atlantic Records and continues with Varone joining Hair Metal veterans Skid Row for an arena tour with the mighty Kiss. Effectively bearing witness to a delightfully seedy, hairspray and mascara-encrusted cornucopia of topless groupies, blowjobs and countless lines of cocaine, Jafet strips away the sugar-coated foolishness that is so often perceived as the norm, expertly delivering an impossibly vivid portrait of the '...dark side...' of the industry, resulting in a dizzying, edge-of-your-seat montage that cautions and informs as it entertains.

With the film's primary focus eventually--and presumably inevitably--gravitating towards Varone's disturbingly out of control cocaine addiction and the dire emotional and physical consequences (including a near-lethal overdose and an eviction notice) that invariably surround it, the remainder of Jafet and Varone's incredibly gritty collaboration plays out like an NC-17 rated Afterschool Special. Believe me, *The Boy Who Drank Too Much* this most definitely *ain't*. Absolutely not for the faint of heart, weak of constitution (or those not sincerely interested in wholeheartedly embracing the less than glamorous aspects of the Rock 'n' Roll lifestyle), the arguably unlikely duo artfully showcases Varone's heart-wrenching decline without losing focus of the humble '...family man...' aspect of the tortured skinsman's battered personality.

Fortified throughout by a mosh-inducing soundtrack featuring a slew of ridiculously pummeling '...tuneage...' from F5, Before Braille, Crease and Temple Of Brutality as well as a virtual plethora of eye-opening bonus material (including an alternate opening and a wealth of unedited backstage footage), much of the audiovisual train wreck that is the undeniably ingenious *Waking Up Dead* ultimately succeeds by vicariously granting the average viewer a seemingly unprecedented level of behind-the-scenes access. Wisely intertwining the clusterfuck disaster that fuels the average major league tour amid snippets of frequently hilarious day-to-day buffoonery, Jafet (who also served as Producer and Editor), leaves little, if anything, to the imagination, a factor that instantly separates the film from its few would-be contemporaries.

But is it *really* worth the price of admission? Ab-so-freakin'-lutely! Seriously, dude...when was the last time you checked out a Heavy Metal biopic that was actually entertaining? Yeah, that's what I thought.

Jam-packed with enough quasi-mindless drug abuse, nudity and profanity to satisfy even the most discriminating of debauchery junkies (myself most definitely included), the majority--if not all--of the decidedly noteworthy scenes contained herein simultaneously capture Varone at both his absolute best and his very worst without somehow resorting to bargain basement tabloid sensationalism. Needless to say, if you've once again found yourself in search of a slightly less than obvious (yet thought provoking) DVD experience, then this, my friends, might just be the cure for what ails you. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

#### Select Phil Varone Discography

Thickskin (2003) \*\*\*

Dressing Up The Idiot (1997) \*\*

Devil In The Details (1995) \*

Water (1993) \*

The Lizard (1992) \*

Saigon Kick (1991) \*

\* as a member of Saigon Kick

\*\* as a member of Prunella Scales

\*\*\* as a member of Skid Row

\*\*\*\* as a solo artist

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