



A once notorious bootleg of legendary rockabilly faves The Cramps play in front of a crowd of patients at a mental institution is, at last, 25 years after the event, being made available. RRP reveals the weird story behind it...

Even for a group as strange as The Cramps, perennial trash rockabilly favourites in the UK, it was a pretty weird gig. Played relatively early in their

lengthy career that has spanned four, yes, four, decades, it saw the quartet performing live at a mental institution in Napa, California.

But despite being more than 25 years old, it has achieved legendary status in the vast Cramps canon. Filmed on a shaky, black and white camera, the gig had survived as a near mythical bootleg, seen and revered by a few, heard of by many more. A mere 30 minutes or so long, the gig sees the inmates wandering on to the stage, dancing with the band, attempting to grab the microphone and sing, or merely wandering around in a somewhat bizarre and confused state. It's the weirdest gig The Cramps have ever played and they're probably the weirdest band any of the inmates have ever seen.

And now it's coming to DVD. The release, due from Wienerworld, is hardly going to win any DVD awards. Shot on grainy black and white video, it wouldn't pass muster as a wedding video in terms of quality, and most pirates are better quality, but such is the notoriety of the content that few Cramps fans would be complaining.

For those that aren't too familiar with the band's lengthy and single-

minded career, here's a potted history of The Cramps: they rose to prominence in the late 70s, riding the wave of the punk boom, although their music was more fuelled by 50s rock 'n' roll and rockabilly and 60s garage music. Their trash aesthetics – singer Lux Interior and long-time partner and guitarist Poison Ivy both profess a love for serial killers and a taste in lurid clothing – won them a large audience in the UK that remained consistent throughout the 80s and early 90s. Their star waned somewhat towards the end of the last decade, but the past couple of years have seen them enjoy something of a resurgence in popularity. This has, in part, been inspired by a back to basics fervour inspired by the likes of The White Stripes, who share a love of raucous, simple guitar rhythms with The Cramps. DJs like Andrew Weatherall have been praising them to the hilt, playing their tracks out at clubs, and plenty of other Cramps fans have come out of the woodwork. Whatever, the reason, last year saw the band release a new album and tour the UK, climaxing with a run of sold out dates at London's Astoria. Perhaps even more intriguingly the Napa gig has truly become the stuff of legend. In a case of art imitating life, a group of performance artists and musicians pooled together and, last year, the gig was re-enacted at London's ICA in front of a crowd of psychiatric patients. The resulting

film, *File Under Sacred Music*, has played at the NFT, ICA and other art cinemas across Europe. That fact alone has helped the potential of this release, making more people aware of the fact that The Cramps had played one of the most unusual gigs at one of the most unusual venues you're ever likely to see. Meanwhile the first official UK release for the DVD, courtesy of Wienerworld, packaged in a suitably Cramps-style sleeve, means that days spent scouring record fairs of the Internet for a copy of the bootleg are a thing of the past. It may not be Woodstock, but it does have a genuine curiosity value. ■■■■■

In Context...
Madonna or U2 it ain't, but this is a genuinely fascinating historical document and one with genuine appeal to the underground army of Cramps fans

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