



Joe Strummer – Let's Rock Again!

(Image Entertainment)

Actor Dick Rude worked with Joe Strummer on a couple of Alex Cox films (Walker, Straight to Hell) in the mid-'80s and followed the Mescaleros around for a year and a half before Strummer's death in 2002, and their longtime friendship infuses this affectionate, uncritical but enjoyable last testament. Rude was able to film a series of relaxed interviews with the notoriously affable Strummer and nailed some fine, well-shot footage of the Mescaleros on tour in Japan and such diverting hijinx as Strummer begging for airplay by knocking on the back door of an Atlantic City radio station. While the Mescaleros' world-beat-infused music is pleasantly grooving and occasionally memorable, the excitement inevitably picks up on a remake of the Clash's "London's Burning" (which can't help but coming off as a bit too proper and restrained compared to the chaos of the old live Clash) and, more intriguing, on a cleverly slowed down, witches-circle-stomping version of the Stooges' "1969," which is riven with menacing swoops of violin. Such unexpected moments make one wish that Strummer had matched his rebellious lyrics in later years more often with such dark and twisted musical settings. And while not every one of the banal questions from star-struck fans that Strummer patiently and seriously answers here makes for compelling cinematic drama, his unexpected death makes you appreciate even these remaining scraps, these untimely last words.

BONUSES: An abundance of extras, including a Q&A session at an early screening of the film with a still-grieving but clearly passionate Dick Rude; extensive additional interviews with Strummer; a slide show; backstage outtakes; five bonus concert performances; and a brief trailer that cuts off unexpectedly, just like its subject's life.

Love Dolls Superstar: Fully Realized

(We Got Power Films, www.wegotpowerfilms.com)

Here's a relic, finally cleaned up and available on DVD, of those hazy daze back in the mid-'80s when many of the bands in the extended SST Records family briefly achieved a sort of creative, communal, artistic bonding on par with their spiritual idols the Brady Bunch and the Manson Family. Of course, the re-release of David Markey's Love Dolls Superstar is also a reminder that few of those (however sarcastic) hippie-ish ideals of brotherhood and community remain today: SST honcho and alleged "spoilsport" Greg Ginn pulled his guitar solos from several instrumentals on the soundtrack, which are hardly missed, what with new music from Kristian Hoffman, Abby Travis and Mario Lalli joining the original soundtrack's breezily absurd blend of Dead Kennedys, Saccharine Trust, Annette Zilinskas, Sonic Youth and Redd Kross. Despite some witty dialogue, Love Dolls Superstar (a sequel to Markey's Desperate Teenage Lovedolls, the trash-to-riches tale of a fictional Runaways-style all-femme rock band) feels more like an extended home movie and backyard dress-up party as it never quite reaches the snappy lowbrow heights of its obvious inspirations, John Waters, Ed Wood and Russ Meyer. The film actually looks cheaper than its \$10,000 budget, and you can argue that, apart from some hammy cameos by Jello Biafra and Bob Moss, the best acting comes courtesy of a Gene Simmons doll. Still, there's some hilarious stuff, especially the wish-fulfillment thrill of seeing Jeff McDonald's psycho-fan character murder Bruce Springsteen (brilliantly caricatured by Jordan Schwartz) and the white-knuckle excitement when the Love Dolls escape the planet on a rocket ship that looks suspiciously like a park's jungle gym.

Production values aside, it's a genuine hoot to watch the early members of Redd Kross, the Bangles, Sky Saxon (!) and more-obscure L.A. scene luminaries like Zilinskas and Pilkington steal scenes and cheerfully revel in their Riot on the Sunset Strip/Patty Hearst/Billy Jack dress-up fantasies.

BONUSES: There are some equally silly/stupid outtakes; a trailer; and a somewhat serious David Markey interview conducted by longtime trash-film connoisseur and Flesheaters singer Chris D. as well as precious glimpses of the flick's grown-up stars at an American



Cinematheque retrospective.

v/a – God Save the Queen: A Punk Rock Anthology

(Music Video Distributors; www.musicvideodistributors.com)

There's no rhyme or reason to this punk-video collection. There are no detailed credits, no accompanying booklet, photos or liner notes. It just is. It's as if someone said, "Hey, we've got a bunch of great punk videos. Let's throw them all together." There's no overriding theme here, nor is the collection tied to any particular style or era of punk, although most of these videos are from the late-'70s and early '80s. Four of the 20 bands are from America, and the rest are British. Still, despite or maybe because of its lack of an overall concept, this is an enjoyable assortment, even if some of it has already been seen in other contexts. My favorite parts are the concert footage from the too-rarely-seen Vice Squad, some early Buzzcocks, some fierce G.B.H., some defiant X-Ray Spex, and the always seedy U.K. Subs; I also have to confess that the Adicts' rabble-rousing "Viva the Revolution" video still gives me a thrill. There's some old Heartbreakers, some recent Stooges (from the Detroit reunion show), some typically frustrating, erratic live Germs, as well as a scattered few poseur groups in the mix just to keep your critical faculties honest. Despite its title, though, there's nary a peep from the Sex Pistols.

BONUSES: None.

The Willowz – See in Squares: A DVD Collective

(Sympathy for the Record Industry, www.sympathyrecords.com)

I hate watching videos of ambitious young rock bands lip-synching on a dry-ice-filled soundstage even more than I hate going to the dentist, but these Willowz videos are such arty and distracting exceptions that a few have burned themselves permanently into my subconscious for future dream playback. In fact, the best of these two-dozen videos don't rely on foggy soundstages or singers miming the lyrics at all; instead, they combine magically real imagery to these already fantastically cubed garage-trash songs and actually expand the visual possibilities in your brain, as opposed to most corporate, literal videos, which kill the imagination. These videos constitute an engrossing sampler of modern art-school imagery mixed with the mundane background of the band's suburban Orange County home. The Willowz' songs, which at various times evoke elements of the Minutemen, Pussy Galore, Redd Kross and the White Stripes, are sometimes so short that you find yourself in the unfamiliar position of actually wanting a video to go longer. Director Cory Reeder's video for "No Name Notes" is little more than the band members smashing things and walking in slow motion next to a mobile home under a beautifully fake-looking pink-sunset desert sky; it's gorgeously weird. Trees seems to be a recurring theme in several videos, particularly Charles Spano's timelessly old-timey "Lock Me Out" and during the party in the trees that occurs in John Michael McCarthy's "Equation #2." Most bewitching of all is the Beta Movement's video for "Walk Straight," in which Willowz bassist Jessica Reynoza and singer-guitarist Richie Follin turn into giant trees and plant themselves in a stylized rural field, with black birds flying ominously out of his mouth. It helps that the three band members remain visually striking even over the course of 26 disparate video styles. They make wonderfully charismatic cartoon characters on Artificial Army & Joe Rubalcaba's animated Disney parody, "Toys," another video that subverts the notion of their Anaheim hometown as the happiest place on Earth.

BONUSES: In addition to the 20 videos on the main menu, there are six bonus videos, highlighted by Michel Gondry's stylized B&W take on "I Wonder," which feels like a silent movie and involves some interesting souped-up alterations to a homeless cart. There's also a slide show and, most amazingly, a fairly wild Willowz concert filmed in Nightvision at a Christian summer camp in a rec room filled with screaming kids. The Willowz are so good at creating their own fantasy worlds that by the time you're done watching this DVD, you won't know what's real and what's imaginary anymore.

