

## FILM / VIDEO REVIEWS

### Cut Shorts DVD review [MVD]

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#### CUT SHORTS: A Collection of Short Films and Music Videos by David Markey 1974-2004 DVD

*Cut Shorts* is a DVD that allows us to look back through the career of an independent filmmaker. Often with compilations of this nature one has to slog through the earlier, cruder work, as the filmmaker learns his craft. Completely backwards, I found the early shorts to have the most imagination, presence, joy, and independent spirit. The DVD might be missing some crucial interstitials of Markey's career, as the films move from surreal, dreamlike art, to sycophantic absurdist essays on our mainstream environment.

Watching *Cut Shorts*, might be akin to watching your own child, someone in love with pop culture, having fun and being creative as a pre-adolescent, only to grow into a hipster teenager becoming jaded, and sarcastic, spouting a repetitive, and annoying, "Whatever."

It's apparent that from the beginning Markey had an acute sense of what the 'now' looked like, and how important that sense of time, culture, fashion is for film aesthetics. A lot of the earlier shorts are equal parts theatrically campy home movies, and critically accurate documents of their time. As in the work of Chuck Statler, (the director of early DEVO videos), the most subversive 'punk' moments come from the juxtaposition of jarring contradictory pop culture symbols, and actions. This collection is a portfolio of an emerging filmmaker who at the very onset had interesting even brilliant ideas to explore.

One of the weakest aspects of Markey's later work is its sarcasm; it constantly comments on culture while never telling you what it stands for. Markey and his stable often belligerently tell you what they think is stupid, or beneath them. Using musicians from the underground music scene as caricatures, the films are perched on that teetering edge known as 'spooof.' While watching these one day quickie movies, often improvised, one gets the feeling that the camera just rolls on and on, as if the hip musician left to their own device will come up with something brilliant. Unfortunately they never do.

The DVD opens with "The Devil's Exorcist," an alley movie made by a boy thrilled with film. This is a horror movie that gets right to the meat of the genre, no set-up—just kills. All the needed criteria for low budget exploitation filmmaking are present: symbols of Satanism; vomit; blood; knife jabs; horror-like camera moves, and compositions. The film also plays like a garage band's unedited demo tape, a song that perhaps repeats its chorus one too many times. While crude in fashion, there is a clear adolescent exuberance, a fan's excitement mixed with a creator's execution.

"Summer Has Been Over For a Long Time," evokes real sentiment of lost youth. One of the stronger shorts, it's a terrific instant document of a Los Angeles of the 'here and now' circa 1980, complete with skateboards, skanking, and a Buzzcocks T-shirt. Like a hardcore anthem, it vividly depicts the energy of carefree pastimes while evoking a swan song of all things passing.

Other early shorts on the DVD showcase Markey's irreverent sensibility, mixing cultural iconic kitsch with bizarre situational-ism. "Plasticland," "Puppetears" and "Popcorn," all revel in the absurd sensibilities of experimental film, garage rock, and underground art, ie. R. Crumb comics. There are setups and characters mixing masks, sci-fi imagery, the trickster, the chase, vomit, blood, murder, and ejaculation. As in the sentiment of early 80's American 'punk,' non-sequiturs, juxtaposition, and impudence are major dynamics.

Other personally developed films: "Tina the Party Peeper," "Adolf 1990" and "Burning Palms on Jennifer's Coffee Table" are cryptic in nature, and explore a more cerebral side to what film can do. Allusions to other artists, and art forms can be drawn. Ranging the unwieldy gamut from low art (Nagle) to high concept, intellectual art (Maya Deren).

At a certain point in his development Markey decided to attach a microphone to his camera. It is at this point that the enchantment of his 'pure' images began to devolve into a cinema of hipsterism, and backslapping. Befriending other underground scenesters, namely Sonic Youth, Markey got a troupe together, and then just let the camera roll... endlessly. Starting with the harmless "Stoner Park," it is quite clear rock musicians don't necessarily hold an audience captivated with their improvisational skills.

Thurston Moore must be singled out at this point as the unbearable archetype of amateur acting, and off-the-top-of-the-head humor. Perhaps he has been encouraged to be in front of a camera by friends and fans, perhaps he could audibly hear Markey laugh as he did his shtick and thus thought it was entertaining. Whatever the case, Moore kills any enjoyment I may have had during the latter half of the DVD. Beginning with "Lou Believers," Moore annoys. He ad-libs on and on, screams repetitively and has all the charm of a parasitic slug suffering from ADHD. This Ringo Starr syndrome resonates yet again in the truly unpleasant and nauseating piece of self-aggrandizement, "Rap Damage." While watching this oh-so-cool riff on the Cali hip hop scene, one prays for a quick finish, accepting that no real entertainment value will ever come.

The DVD ends with three music videos, The Posies "Ritchie Dagger's Crime" being the only one of which I found to contain some of the earlier Markey brilliance. Set during an idyllic day at the park, the video shows a nice juxtaposition between the glammy pop of The Posies with a retro hardcore punk mob frolicking. The piece at once makes fun of, and embraces the diverse cultural movements. It's the kind of association Markey shows deftness for, a facet that sadly many of his other 'cool' pieces are lacking. [\[MVD\]](#)

-David Roth



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