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SNFU - Open Your Mouth And Say... MR. CHI PIG {MVD}

Opening with a rather wasted, decidedly spiky Kendall Chinn filmed in 1983 who repeatedly fluffs his lines before cutting to the same man in 2008 who is still seemingly rather wasted but now resembles Cat Weasel with a Dee Dee Ramone attitude, it's immediately clear that this biopic of Kendall Chinn - aka Mr. Chi Pig, vocalist in Canadian Punk legends, SNFU - is going to make gripping (albeit rather depressing in places) viewing.

Tracing Chinn's past from his discovery of Punk via the SEX PISTOLS, we hear of his first band, LIVE SEX SHOWS, before his problems with mental instability occur via voices in his head. He states clearly he self-medicated these issues with a string of drugs - all this prior to the formation of SNFU. Once the band forms, the rough ride continues with Chinn's spiraling addiction to alcohol, cracking his skull open at a gig that eventually lead to his loss of control and increased mental instability, and his eventual sacking from SNFU.

Life immediately after SNFU stabilized a bit with a move to Vancouver and 15 years free of alcohol; but that was countered by coming out about his sexuality and an addiction to Crystal Meth. His 1990 band, THE WONGS get a mention before SNFU reform for the Epitaph deal - only to have producer and BAD RELIGION guru Mr. Brett admitted to rehab on the second day of recording! The death of Chinn's mother signalled a complete nervous breakdown and, ultimately, he became a street bum and suicidal, only to be saved by another SNFU reformation - or the resurrecting of the name at least as Chinn was the only original member.

Chinn's interviews take place in a number of settings that do not detract from the dialogue's continuity. Director, Sean Patrick Shaul, has done an admirable job in splicing the footage together - including vintage footage from the 80s - into a film where the narrative is honest but not sensationalist, down-beat yet respectful and, finally and surprisingly, inspiring. Chinn himself continually seems to draw, in my eyes at least, parallels with Dee Dee Ramone but where Dee Dee's words were 90% hyperbole, Chinn comes over as genuine, unapologetic about his own failings and totally free of resentment that could so easily be fostered given his history. Chinn closes the film with the optimistic confession that he is now into, "Less self-destruction and more creation."

Additional interviews are provided by USHC luminaries such as Jello Biafra, Joe 'Shithead' Keithley, Chuck Dukowski, John Kastner, Shawn Stern and Brian Goble while Matt Fox (SHAI HULUD) and Luke Pabich (GOOD RIDDANCE) keep the SNFU influence current.

There are no extras which is a shame - it would be interesting to view some of the interviews in full. Another disappointment, although not Shaul's fault, is that SNFU's original guitarists, brother's Brent and Marc Belke, declined to contribute. Although this ends with Chinn being relatively upbeat, by the time the credits roll, I was left with a rather posthumous feeling. Chinn has undoubtedly lead a troubled but full life, one many may relate to but one that few have actually lived and this documentary lays bare the traits of one of Punk's most complex personalities. (04.02.11)