

Film Review: 'The Stone Roses: Made of Stone'



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Shane Meadows' first documentary is a surprisingly conventional portrait of Mancunian beat combo the Stone Roses.

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Brit helmer [Shane Meadows](http://variety.com/t/shane-meadows/) turns his hand to documaking for the first time (if you don't count mock doc "Le Donk & Scor-zay-zee (<http://variety.com/t/zee/>)") with "The [Stone](http://variety.com/t/stone/) Roses: [Made](http://variety.com/t/made/) of Stone," a surprisingly conventional portrait of the titular Mancunian beat combo. Hugely admired rock stars back in the early 1990s, the now middle-aged and somewhat quarrelsome quartet is observed attempting a bumpy reformation and comeback in 2011-12. An ardent fanbase has made this a niche hit in Blighty with a near-\$750,000 cume on fewer than 50 screens since its June 5 preem, but theatrical roads look rockier offshore.

Appearing frequently onscreen here, as he did in “Le Donk & Scor-zay-zee” (a companion piece of sorts about fictional white rappers trying to score a gig), Meadows gushingly enthuses about his adoration of the Stone Roses, a rock ensemble whose core members — mouthy but charismatic lead singer Ian Brown and too-cool-for-school lead guitarist John Squire — have been friends and collaborators since the early 1980s.

Archival footage skillfully illustrates the backstory with enough clarity to inform the uninitiated while providing enough rare snippets to excite aficionados. Although the group’s peripheral members shifted around somewhat in the ’80s as they built up a following, by the time of their hugely successful 1989 debut album, “The Stone Roses,” a core foursome was set in slightly friable stone, with Brown and Squire accompanied by cheeky, easygoing bassist Gary “Mani” Mounfield and Alan “Reni” Wren on drums. Wren was arguably the group’s secret weapon with his formidable musical talent and knack for off-center rhythms, qualities that contributed to the band’s unique punk-meets-acid-house-meets-guitar-pop sound, which so successfully captured the musical zeitgeist of the early ’90s and influenced many bands to come. Unfortunately, the proverbial personality clashes led to a split up after the musicians’ disappointing sophomore album, “The Second Coming” (modesty was never their strong suit).

The film’s original footage covers a period from 2011, when they announced their reunion at a press conference, to their triumphant 2012 outdoor concert at Heaton Park, where 75,000 fans were happy to fulfill the desire expressed in one of the band’s best known songs, “I Wanna Be Adored.” Meadows and his crew observe the band rehearsing, playing at a warm-up concert in Warrington that sells out in hours, and going on a rocky tour of Europe; at one point Reni temporarily quits the band, and Brown exacerbates the situation by calling his colleague a “cunt” onstage. Oddly, Meadows claims onscreen that he chose not to film the post-argument fallout because the musicians “don’t need cameras in their faces right now,” which makes the director come off as a nice guy but a weak journalist. In fact, the helmer and his crew seem to have less-than-comprehensive access, which rather dampens the drama and gives the docu a hagiographic feel.

Indeed, “The Stone Roses: Made of Stone” feels in every way like something made for and by fans, with the affable Meadows leading the cheers. The pic’s most appealing section by far shows the helmer interviewing fans

trying to get into the Warrington concert and displaying his natural rapport with people, that human touch that makes him such an extraordinary director of non-pro thespis in dramatic features like “This Is England.”

The use of pencil-sketch monochrome, intermixed with color footage, offers another pleasant echo of Meadows’ earlier work, especially of “24 7: Twenty Four Seven” and “Somers Town,” while the deployment of split-screen effects feels more like a standard concert-movie device. The release in Blighty no doubt received an extra publicity boost from the fact that it debuted around the same time that the band played a big gig in London’s Finsbury Park. Meanwhile, Mat Whitecross’ “Spike Island,” a feature set during the Stone Roses legendary 1990 concert, should synergistically benefit from this film’s success.

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Reviewed at Curzon Soho, London, June 13, 2013. Running time: 96 MIN.

Production

(Documentary – U.K.) A Picturehouse Entertainment release of a Film4, Warp Films, Big Arty Prods. presentation. (International sales: Altitude, London.) Produced by Mark Herbert. Executive producers, Katherine Butler, Robin Gutch, Alex Marshall, Simon Moran, David Root.

Crew

Directed by Shane Meadows. Camera (color/B&W, HD), Laurie Rose; editors, Matthew Gray, Chris King, Tobias Zaldua; music supervisors, Tin Drum Music; sound (stereo), David Mitchell; re-recording mixer, John Rogerson; line producer, Libby Durdy; associate producer, Niall Shamma.

With

Ian Brown, Gary Mounfield, John Squire, Alan Wren, Shane Meadows.