

Reviews

DVD Review

Johnny Thunders

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Who's Been Talking: Johnny Thunders In Concert

MVD (MVDV4590)

Grade: ★★★

Let's not beat around the bush here: The picture quality of *Who's Been Talking: Johnny Thunders In Concert* is terrible. From the blurry looks of it, the film seems to be smeared in Vaseline.

In a perfect world, the images of this historic document would be crystal clear, but, then again, perhaps the lack of visual clarity is appropriate, considering how unfocused and out of sorts Johnny Thunders' life was.

Recorded in Osaka, Japan, on April 3, 1991, this DVD captures one of Thunders' final concerts. He died later that month, reportedly of a drug overdose, but before he passed on, the former New York Dolls' guitarist, wasted genius that he was, ripped through a rousing, artfully sloppy performance of raw rock 'n'

roll in the Land of the Rising Sun with his band the Odd Balls.

The sneering punk idol, who formed The Heartbreakers after the dissolution of the Dolls, appears to be under the influence much of the time, but the red-hot riffs he rolls out in "Personality Crisis," "Blame It On Mom," "Disappointed" and "Born to Lose" are impossible to ignore, somehow channeling both Chuck Berry and the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones.

If he appears disinterested at times, wait a song or two and Thunders will scorch the stage of Osaka's Club Citta. Two separate medleys of "Hit The Road Jack" and "I'm Not Your Stepping Stone" and "Louie, Louie" and "Hang On Sloopy" are, at once, confused and utterly inspired. One of rock's notorious bad boys, Thunders could confound audiences one moment and send them into a frenzy the next with his rambunctious energy, ballsy guitar and devilish attitude. It's no wonder The Replacements' Paul Westerberg wanted to be him.

— By Peter Lindblad

"That's My Desire" merges '50s vocal harmonies with the pop aspirations of The Beatles' early period. Nicking a Chuck Berry riff, The Knack whip up a raucous "Back In The USA." In the Lovin' Spoonful cover "Did You Ever Have To Make Up Your Mind," The Knack tighten up the song's hooks and give it a sunny

(who would also play with Paul in the Baker-Gurvitz Army with Cream drummer Ginger Baker) and Louis Farrell, Gun mapped out a hard-rock path that others, like Black Oak Arkansas, would follow.

It was Black Oak Arkansas, in fact, along with Judas Priest and others, who covered Gun's biggest hit, the full-throttle

scope of musical exploration. Underneath the muffled, lo-fi atmosphere, the BBC recording of "Race With The Devil" is a wild free-for-all of riffs, while "Sunshine" radiates melody and sonic psychedelia through the cloudy mix. From an Alan Freeman Radio 1 broadcast comes "Take Off," another step in Gun's psychedelic evolution, posing the three-

somes as Cream's alter ego.

The recordings aren't all quite so rough, though most improvements are small. The bonus tracks, "Drives You Mad" and "Don't Look Back," are steps up, flying out of the speakers with soaring guitar leads and blustery drums, while the woolly "Hold On," again from Alan Freeman Radio 1, bravely strains against the canned fuzz that surrounds it. Both collections feature detailed liner notes that tell the story of these, unfortunately, neglected footnotes in rock history. Revisit them soon.

— Peter Lindblad

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disposition, as this set tracks The Knack's migration toward folk-pop.

Gun, and its later incarnation, Three Man Army, went off in another direction. Made up of Gurvitz, his brother Adrian

rocker "Race With The Devil," a U.K. hit in 1968. That brush with fame is included on *Reloaded*, a collection of radio recordings and demos that suffer from poor sound quality but reveal a broadening



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