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REVIEWS: PUNK ROCK KARAOKE - [CD & DVD]

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LABEL: MVD Visual

DATE: 11-14-08

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Now Playing: 'California Uber Alles' - from Punk Rock Karaoke (full band audio companion)

If you've ever been to a karaoke bar (I have, don't judge me) and flipped through one of the catalogs of music available to sing, you may have noticed some recurring themes – you can do country songs of any vintage, all manner of pop from Fifties girl groups to Meatloaf to Suzanne Vega (beware “Uncle Tom's Diner” by the way – it's torturous), a galaxy of show tunes and even alt-rock if Cake, Ugly Kid Joe or Creed is your thing (some will have REM too) or classic rock; though from what I've seen, the ‘No Zep’ rule still applies. In fact, it may as well be written right on the cover of those books: “If it's got hard, loud guitars, you won't find it here.” There's no metal and no aggressive anything in stock and unless you want to fake it, throw Sinatra on and get snotty, no punk rock. It's a deplorable situation – punk rockers are forced to content themselves with croaking out The Doors or The Beatles, or croak out The Kinks and The Stones.

Blessedly, nature abhors a vacuum and an all-star group of old-school punks came together a while ago to rescue recreational singing fun from the clutches of total mediocrity but are finally releasing a document that you can use at home. The *Punk Rock Karaoke* CD/DVD set is better than the canned music typically offered at a karaoke bar; members of NOFX, The Minutemen, Bad Religion, The Adolescents and Social Distortion all step up to perform classic punk and hardcore songs by bands including (but not limited to) The Descendents, Black Flag, Bad Religion and Minor Threat without vocals for anyone willing to scream along to. Just like at the bar, the DVD authoring is set up so the lyrics highlight to keep the timing of the songs and a ton of really bizarre stock footage flashes across the screen to keep those not singing entertained.

If singing isn't really your thing but you like the idea of hearing people sing along to some classic songs, the creators have taken that possibility into account and so, in a separate section of the DVD as well as on an accompanying CD, PRK has commissioned a group of big-name singers including Dicky Barrett (Mighty Mighty Bosstones), Jim Lindberg (Pennywise), Dave King (Flogging Molly) and, of course, the king of punk rock cover songs Spike Slawson (Me First And The Gimme Gimmes) to take a run at these songs and essentially show the uninitiated how it's done.

It's kind of amazing that the band didn't get this product out sooner. I mean, the band has

always done well in performance and, while nobody likes to admit it, karaoke's fun and it has always sucked that, outside of one of PRK's few-and-far-between shows and in the confines of a regular karaoke bar, while the song selection is vast not everybody can play. While *Punk Rock Karaoke* might not be a single-disc total solution, it sure as hell is a step in the right direction and the set does spell hours of drunken fun.