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YOUR LIFE - ENTERTAINMENT - MARQUEE

Thursday, Jul. 30, 2009

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London is still calling in these three DVDs

This week's Sound Check focuses on the British music scene during the fertile time of the mid-1970s-early 1980s, and then jumps back to the USA for a career-retrospective collection from Minnesota country-rockers The Jayhawks.

'Punk in London,' Various Artists (MVDvisual, HHH)

These three mid-June DVDs capture German film-maker Wolfgang Buld's documentary trilogy in three separate volumes. The first volume features rare interviews and performances from The Clash, X-Ray Spex, The Jam, The Adverts, The Boomtown Rats and more. Occasional German narration and subtitles notwithstanding, the performances make these films worth watching, though adequate lighting and sound are sometimes lacking. Highlights include the sax-driven Spex, the new-wavey Adverts and the ferocious Clash, whose complete Munich set is one bonus feature.

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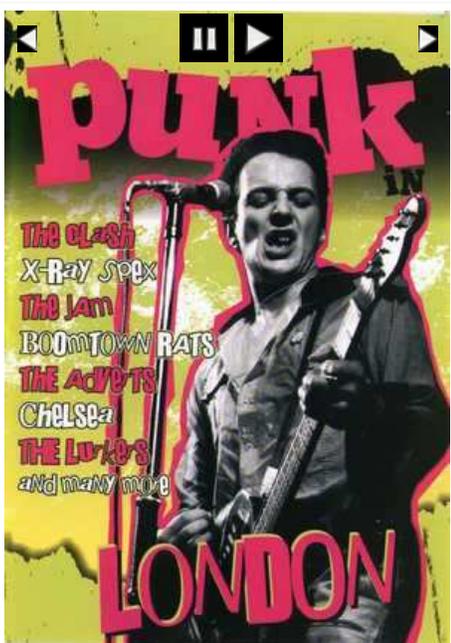
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England is a much smaller country than the United States, which enabled punk rock to become a nationwide movement instead of a curiosity there. However, as the Killjoys' singer points out, London was the center of it all and the rest of the country followed suit, sometimes reluctantly. Punk rock's rise away from one of the world's biggest cities is detailed on the next DVD.

'Punk in England,' Various Artists (MVDvisual, HHH)

The sound quality on this disc is much worse than the one above. A later show by The Clash, a vintage show by The Jam (also showcased on London) and much more are shown on this volume. Ian Dury & The Blockheads doing "Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick" is priceless.

Revealing interviews detail various opinions about whether or not the original aims of English punk rockers were achieved. The English punk rockers were initially driven by wanting changes in their economic conditions; and these same problems contributed to the rise of English reggae.

'Reggae in Babylon,' Various Artists (MVDvisual, HHH)

The reggae volume of Buld's trilogy has better audio than the volume above, and less distracting German narration than the first disc. Reggae music is

fascinating with its rhythmic emphasis on the "three" rather than the "four" that most rock 'n' roll stands on. There are layers of instrumentation and vocals that belie the music's sonic simplicity; both of these facts help this DVD sonically. Some of the English reggae players were expatriate Jamaicans, but lots of Britons of African descent also participated in this music aimed at social change. There was also an element aimed at good times, as exemplified by covers of "Ain't No Sunshine" and "Easy."

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