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Radiohead - Arms & Legs: The Story So Far

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Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted June 29, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Product:

Radiohead's career continues to defy expectations and the conventional wisdom. At first, they were sold as basic British grunge, thanks mostly to MTV's nonstop obsession with the band's first single, "Creep." Then, they made music television programmers apoplectic by releasing two ballads - "High and Dry" and "Fake Plastic Trees" - off of their otherwise rock-oriented album *The Bends*. By the time of *OK Computer*, the public and press didn't know what to make of the group, and the animated video for the concept-oriented "Paranoid Android" didn't help. But once that amazing masterwork of a record was released, once "Karma Police" became a solid gold smash, Radiohead went from "huh?" to **HUGE!** Today, their name is whispered among the greats, every new song or album greeted with the hushed anticipation of God's own gospels. It was and remains an incredibly strange and surreal journey, one that should make for an intriguing documentary overview. Unfortunately, the problem with the two disc

Radiohead: Arms and Legs (The Story So Far) is that only one of the presentations benefits from the band's signature sound. The other disc is left with a lame copycat, and the results are disastrous.

The Plot:

This two disc DVD collection is just that - two separate (and previously released) DVDs in one package. The first disc is a discussion of *OK Computer*, Radiohead's international award winning smash hit album. It is a standard song by song breakdown, with experts chiming in on lyrical meaning, melodic structure, social comment, and overall career impact. As they talking heads overdo the accolades, we learn the necessary bits about the record's remarkable approach and impact. As for the second disc, it's a joke. One of the worst documentaries about a band ever, the Radiohead overview features *NO* music from the band (apparently, they couldn't license it) and, instead, they use the excuse of "introducing" a new sound-alike group to the mix. Nothing is more frustrating than hearing a song referenced - "Creep," "Black Star," "Electioneering" - and not having the clip to cement the discussion. It's like talking about someone without having their picture or presence to prove they exist.

The DVD:

ARGGHHH!!!! There is nothing worse than the "Not Authorized..." label on a music documentary. Nine times out of ten that means that no music from the artist can be used and no performance clips or videos can be shown. Instead, we are stuck with so-called experts waxing away as if nothing else but their carefully controlled words matters. In the case of Radiohead, the rapid rise, slow fade, and sudden rediscovery and superstardom makes for a remarkable tale. Easily capable of carving out a niche as one of many '80s/'90s UK one hit wonders (right, EMF and Jesus Jones?), they instead used their amazing artistry to redefine who they were. They literally took back their media perception from a heavy rotation ride on a TV channel that used to show music videos. Today, they get a bit too much benefit of the doubt, but you can't actually hate on a band who delivered something as devastatingly beautiful as "Pyramid Song." For all their experimentation and outside the mainstream mannerisms, Radiohead defines the current age of rock and roll - fragmented, isolated, and less than linked universally.



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- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
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- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
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So the documentary on their rise is riddled with superficiality and factual inconsistencies. We never really get the gist of their problem with publicity or why, even after complaining about the overwhelming media frenzy over *OK Computer*, they would agree to documentaries dissecting their tour and an equally amount of sensationalism come follow-up time. The first film fails to deliver the kind of insight we expect from this level of overview. Instead, we sit back as smug commentators tell us why we should care. At least the *OK Computer* album breakdown delivers some interesting information. We learn, for example, that "Paranoid Android" was a challenge for the band, their decision to fuse as many divergent chorus and verse ideas together as possible inspiring a new kind of songwriting. We also get a chance to watch frontman Tom Yorke and other members compose and craft the songs, watching their work with an intimacy born of access. Indeed, what the career overview lacks is that ability to get inside the story. Instead, we must remain outside, learning things that any random magazine cover story could tell us.

Back to *OK Computer* for a moment. Of all the things this album reexamination fails to address, the "non-concept, concept album" issue remains at the forefront. We get mixed messages about whether the record actually contains a single storyline, why it would be called a concept album if it really doesn't fit into the definition of one, and even worse, a dry determination that "technology and today" equals a singular LP vision. In between musings on why "The Tourist" is so important (though it was recorded long before *OK Computer* even "came together" as an idea), the whole phenom element of the release is addressed. The argument, in essence, is that great works of art transcend time to click with the majority of the populace. Really? There's probably a bunch of hungry musicians/moviemakers who would argue against such a claim. It appears that all throughout the career, Radiohead were the beneficiaries of the right place, right time, right record, right public mindset to continuously claim the upper most of the topper most. This DVD collection offers some insights, but actually excels in something else - aggravations.

The Video:

Disc One offers up the *OK Computer* overview. It is presented in a fuzzy, often muddy 1.78:1 non letterboxed image. Only the video elements offer anything remotely resembling a sharp transfer. Similarly, the career document has a weak widescreen by way of 4:3 image. Sometimes, the faces and places look good. At other instances, obvious flaws in the production process (and age of stock material used) show through.

The Audio:

Another disappointing element here is the decision to offer both DVDs with nothing more than a standard Dolby Digital Stereo mix. Music as powerful and intricate as Radiohead's needs more than just a modest presentation. Sure, the discussions are easy to understand and decipher, but we want to hear the band's blending of styles (when offered) in a massive multichannel choice, not some twee and tinny take.

The Extras:

Disc One (*OK Computer*) provides a list of contributors to the piece and an interactive quiz. Disc Two offers a gallery of images from Oxford and a discography. Sigh. Aside for some ads for the DVD distributor, that's it.

Final Thoughts:

It's the weirdest thing. The *OK Computer* overview gets to reference everything from *Pablo Honey* to *The Bends*, and yet the documentary on the band is stuck with some no name also-rans as the soundtrack. We can hear examples of the band's referenced brilliance in the context of a single album, but not as part of superficial, scandal-free unauthorized bio? It doesn't make any sense, and neither do the commercial conceits of this release. While the *OK Computer* bit would easily earn a recommendation, the career overview mandates a skip it. Therefore, we land somewhere in the middle for a mild **Rent It**. Fans will be furious over how their favorite band is being handled. Others will be intrigued, but ultimately disappointed on what this set has to offer.

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