



**Captain Beefheart: Under Review** ★★★★★ Label: Sexy

Intellectual

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If ever there was a cult personality that had very little visual documentation to help tell his story, it's Don Van Vliet, a.k.a. "Captain Beefheart." Ever since offering up his last album in 1982, *Ice Cream for Crow*, Vliet has been living out in the desert, making more money off his painted artwork. It seems fitting, as his musical legacy is something you either "get" or you don't. Most people know the good cap'n from his landmark album *Trout Mask Replica*, whether they've heard it or not. It was one of those releases that pretty much came from way out there with no real precedent. It still divides listeners right down the middle to this day. But Vliet was much more about music than just that album before and after its release.

So it's great news for fans that Sexy Intellectual has released yet another five-star "Under Review" DVD, featuring Captain Beefheart. The program covers Vliet's entire career, from his first single all the way through to his final album. Along the way, former members of the various versions of the Magic Band (Vliet's band moniker) are interviewed, and cast great light on their opinions, recording sessions, and just how they managed to get all those crazy sounds.

Most notable of the interviewees is drummer John French, or "Drumbo" as he was known in the Magic Band. French was with Vliet pretty early on and would come and go in the band throughout the years. His drumming technique has always been a style that can leave listeners slack-jawed with its strange kinetic intricacies that sound like no one else, much like Vliet himself. French demonstrates a few songs that he worked on, and it's remarkable how the drum patterns came about, usually following an equally strange guitar pattern, instead of just being a 4/4 or other standard backing beat. Once Beefheart released *Trout Mask Replica*, though, hardly anything was "standard" in his music for quite a number of years.

It's also revealed through other bandmates, such as Mark Boston, that sometimes guitar parts would come from such esoteric ideas as an ashtray being thrown against a wall and rattling on the floor, or a bird's song. Boston points out that when he came to work on *Trout*, he needed finger picks on all his fingers for the bass parts, as the notes were always in these strange clusters that couldn't just be handled in a standard way. Beefheart would "teach" the band the songs by somehow telling the others what he wanted, and then John French would go and transcribe the ideas into actual notation.

Other highlights of the disc include super-rare videos and live clips from the Captain's tenure. We're talking about stuff like a video for his very first single "Diddy Wah Diddy" as well as original promos for the *Lick My Decals Off, Baby* album and much, much more. And no one album is just glossed over, either, which is nice. Even the low points of Beefheart's career, such as

*Unconditionally Guaranteed* and *Blue Jeans and Moonbeams* are covered in depth. Such attention to detail is sure to delight fans all over the spectrum.

So score another hit for the Sexy Intellectual company. Their previous "Under Review" of the Velvet Underground was quite exciting, and suffice it to say, this look at Captain Beefheart is even more so, if only for the fact this stuff gets seen even less than the VU's various bits and pieces of visual history. That said, "Captain Beefheart Under Review" is not only a terrific DVD for the artist, but is a great way to learn about his music and find different entry points into his music if you feel so inclined. Super groovy stuff.

***~Jason Thompson***

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