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[DVD] Captain Beefheart Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis

Submitted by [DP](#) on Thu, 05/04/2006 - 12:48pm. [Album Reviews](#)

Captain Beefheart Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis DVD

Captain Beefheart is the quintessential musical enigma. The music produced by he and his "Magic Band" throughout their 20 year career encompasses an era of progression and innovation, yet there is little to say about "Captain Beefheart" himself, Don Van Vliet, that can't be found in a simple band biography. Unfortunately, this "Critical Analysis" only serves to reinforce the air of mystery in Beefheart's winding career, taking the audience on a twenty year journey that seems to lead nowhere.

Under Review attempts to follow the career ups and downs of the psychedelic group, from humble, bluesy beginnings in Lancaster, CA, to their rejection of an offer to be featured at Woodstock. Playing more like a detailed discography than a documentary on the band's experiences, the film alternates between performance videos and interviews with various members of the ever-changing Magic Band roster.

Die-hard Captain Beefheart aficionados will appreciate the care the filmmakers took in praising the group. Commentary by lauded critics such as Nigel Williamson, editor of *Uncut* magazine, serve to elevate the group to superstardom with their unabashed admiration of Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band's library of music, including the infamous album *Trout Mask Replica*, which upon its release was heralded by *Rolling Stone* as "the most important piece of art to ever be put on a phonograph record."

However, the film focuses too intently on praise and not enough on the lives and stories of the band members themselves. By concentrating on the band's various releases and lineup changes, the film alienates viewers wishing to learn about the artistic contributions of the genre-busting band that emerged from within an era of mainstream, arena-filling rock. After two hours of footage, the film ends abruptly with Van Vliet's withdrawal from the music world and an utter lack of closure.

To longtime fans, *Captain Beefheart Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis* may be an insightful look into the difficulties the band encountered in trying to release such challenging and avant garde music. Unfortunately, others may find the DVD's material banal, a striking contrast to Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band's colorful and boundary-breaking career.

- Meredith Frengs
KPSU Editorial Team

Rating: 8 of 10

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