

# DAILY CAMERA

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## THE SMITHS

*Under Review (DVD)* (Sexy Intellectual)

They never rose much beyond cult status in the United States, but the Smiths were a bona fide rock sensation in England in the '80s. Built around the one-in-a-million musical chemistry between guitarist Johnny Marr — whose lush, chiming style was influenced by '60s pop and English folk — and Oscar Wilde-inspired singer/lyricist Morrissey, the band took the charts by storm with romantic and completely unique singles such as "William it Was Really Nothing" and "Hand in Glove."

As its title claims, this British documentary takes a somewhat scholarly look at the band and its music through interviews with associates, radio DJs and producers like John Porter and Stephen Street, mixing in fantastic performance footage from BBC music shows such as "Top of the Pops" and "The Old Grey Whistle Test." The DVD doesn't contain any new interviews with members of the band, but it does feature segments of period interviews with Morrissey and Marr.

For Americans, it's an interesting look at a very English band: Not only does the film reveal the nature of the singles-driven UK music scene, but shots of '80s Manchester (taken from a Smiths video) and excerpts from the British "kitchen sink drama" movies that were a big influence on Morrissey's lyrics provide a visual counterpart to the band's moody music.

We learn that Marr was the band's musical architect, spending hours in the studio layering guitars and other instruments before Morrissey came in to lay down the vocals. The film details the recording of each of the band's four studio albums, particularly its self-titled debut, before studying the communication breakdown that led to the end of the Smiths and the posthumous release of 1987's *Strangeways Here We Come*.

Some perspective on the post-Smiths careers of Morrissey and Marr would have been nice (it is provided among the DVD's extra features), but overall, "Under Review" is a thorough look at a group that, according to one interviewee, "will ultimately be remembered as one of three or four great British bands."

— GREG GLASGOW/*Camera Music Writer*