



## **The Smiths: Under Review**

Posted by [BarryF](#) on 05/29 at 02:02 PM

**The Smiths are long gone but hardly forgotten, and this “critical analysis” should intrigue fans old and new alike.**



*Under Review* is a new series of DVD documentaries from Sexy Intellectual and Music video Distributors highlighting the careers of an eclectic range of music artists spanning the last few decades. May saw the release of two documentaries on Captain Beefheart and the Velvet Underground, and coming up in June are entries on Kate Bush and the Smiths. The series is billed as “the ultimate review and critical analysis” of modern rock musicians who typically get categorized as having a so-called cult following and includes not just interviews but also rare and little-seen video of the bands performing live. This series, while at times seemingly dry and formulaic, manages to capture the heart of what these musicians were about and are a perfect introduction into the history of these bands.

*The Smiths: Under Review* is of particular interest, as lead singer Morrissey’s post-Smiths solo career has never been more high profile than the last few years. While the other three subjects are still mostly relegated to cult status (Kate Bush’s latest CD “Aerial”, while garnering critical praise and two Brit Award nominations, has failed to make a huge splash on the music scene), Morrissey’s star has seen a recent rise with the release of *You Are The Quarry* in 2004 and *Ringleader Of The Tormentors* in early 2006, garnering him more publicity than has been seen for the Mancunian singer since the break-up of the Smiths.

For the uninitiated, the Smiths were a four-member group formed in Manchester in 1983 by Johnny Marr and Steven Patrick Morrissey. They quickly rose to fame (or infamy, depending on your view) in their native land, due not only to Marr’s intricately beautiful

guitar pieces and Morrissey's very anti-pop lyrical sensibilities, but also Morrissey's outspoken views on pretty much everything. From vegetarianism to celibacy to his views on modern pop music, the British music papers were never at a loss for quotes when it came to the many proclamations of Morrissey. To fans, the Smiths represented an escape from the popular sound of the day, with the band's sound having little to do with the electric noise of such glossy chart topping acts as Duran Duran and WHAM!. Though the Smiths represented a breath of fresh air in the early eighties, they failed to "make it big" in their own time, only recently receiving vast critical praise almost twenty years after their demise as a group. Even now, many modern rock acts name-check the Smiths as one of their major influences, and Morrissey's solo career (which began almost as soon as the Smiths' ended) has risen to new heights.

At first glance, the documentary itself seems to provide nothing new for more hardcore fans, but for the casual listener it is a treasure trove of information. The use of talking heads, featuring a roll call of people who have at least some tangential relationship to the band but never the band members themselves (bar one Craig Gannon, who stood in as second guitarist for a short time), propels the story of the Smiths from beginning to end. The inclusion of said talking heads, such as journalist and author of "Saint Morrissey" Mark Simpson as well as Smiths producers Stephen Street and John Porter, does make for some interesting anecdotal storytelling and saves the show from becoming a bland repeat of information that anyone with an internet connection and time on his hands could easily dig up on his own.

The band footage is also of interest, digging up old promotional videos from Smiths appearances on various British television programs. From ancient early appearances on Top Of The Pops to the footage of Morrissey and Marr talking to school children on a bus (taken from "Charlie's Bus"), the archive video should be enough to retain the interest of even the most knowledgeable Smiths fan.

Included as extras on the DVD are biographical notes for all the contributors as well as a short quiz billed as "The Hardest Smiths Interactive Quiz In The World Ever". The quiz is indeed a challenge, featuring bits of trivia as obscure as Morrissey's first trip to America in the 1970's and Dead or Alive singer Pete Burns one-time stage appearance with the Smiths in 1985. Though the production value of the DVD is dry at best, don't let appearances fool you. Sexy Intellectual have done a remarkable job detailing the Smiths' legacy, and with any luck future releases will see the same kind of passion and care for the subject matter at hand.

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