



The Smiths - Under Review (DVD)

Rating: ★★★★★

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Label: Music Video Distributors

A couple of years ago I scored a couple of tickets for my wife to see Morrissey at the famed Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York City. Was I going to the show? Hell no. It was the last place on earth I wanted to be. So being the loving husband I am, I sent her and a friend off to one of the more dangerous parts of Manhattan (for a couple of white girls). After watching this Smiths documentary, she told me the tickets to that show was one of the best presents she's ever received.

On the back of the dvd box for The Smiths: Under Review, it says "The opinions on this dvd are completely independent. This dvd is not authorised by The Smiths or individual members thereof, or any record or publishing companies associated with the release or ownership of The Smiths music." Any real fan of the band however, would not be surprised by the main points of the documentary... Morrissey was difficult but a great lyricist and guitarist Johnny Marr was a genius. As a whole, what kept my interest was the level of in depth analysis.

The best stuff centers around stories behind the music. For instance, great detail is given to "Suffer Little Children" from their self titled album. Apparently there was a major backlash when the song was released due to it's content surrounding the murders of teen and preteen children in Manchester, England in the 1960's. Through record producers, authors and journalists, a story is woven about the media attempting to find meaning in Morrissey's lyrics and how it's the media who usually have the story completely wrong when it comes to artistic interpretations of real life events.

Unfortunately there is too much history given to the singles and albums of The Smiths and not much attention is paid to the band's beginnings and live shows which were said to be the cornerstone of their success. Also, the documentary focuses way too much time on the relationship between Morrissey and Marr, leaving behind the band's other two founding members, Andy Rourke and drummer Mike Joyce. Not so strangely, a good section of the dvd talks about a not so seminal time in the group's history when fifth member Craig Gannon, who agreed to talk on camera, was a member.

The Smiths, with Morrissey in the lead, ended up being a band with strong political beliefs. It's obvious from watching Under Review, songs like "The Queens Is Dead" and "Meat Is Murder" resonated with the music papers and the pop charts alike, a feat unparalleled in the Margaret Thatcher/Ronald Reagan "me me me" generation of the 1980's. Back that with Marr's ever expanding repertoire of musical capabilities and I guess you can begin to understand the importance of The Smiths and their place in that era.

While interesting for the most part, this dvd mostly comes across as a less than stellar PBS (or BBC) special. That's not a completely horrible thing because these networks tend to put out highly credible material (at least I can say that for PBS). After watching, my wife said she felt inclined to rediscover The Smiths, a band she fell in love with 15 years ago. For her, she feels she can now understand the meaning of the music on a different level, as an adult, and not simply relating it to high school and the drama that comes with teenage angst. As for myself, I can say I'm starting to open up a little bit more as to what The Smiths had to offer and how it can affect my opinion of the music I listen to today.

Reviewed by: Eddie Cash & Sue Mazz

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