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DVD REVIEWS



49UP

(First Run Features)



The most remarkable aspect of Michael Apted's transcendent documentary series is each installment's ability to be epitomized by its own tone and the thematic arc. (An observation echoed by Roger Ebert in his bonus-features chat with the director.) *49Up*, Apted's seventh visit with 14 British schoolchildren since they were 7, finds Tony, Suzy, Lynn and the rest of the group (even Neil) in predominantly peaceful periods. As can be expected, age has finally taken a substantial grip on them physically, something we're bluntly reminded of thanks to archived footage from *7-42UP*. And yes, there has been divorce, death and family strife. But the rather humbling lesson seems to be, as our elders always told us, there is always more to learn; and it may in fact take 49 years to approach feeling comfortable in our skin and with the worldly flesh that surrounds us. From a technical standpoint, Apted's inaugural use of digital equipment gives the series its first truly modern sheen, and once again, his editing instincts are pristine. One always gets the sense that his priority is on a truthful narrative, not emotional and factual-manipulation. Apted himself becomes an increasingly present character, with his participants often addressing him directly during interviews. It's Apted's bold way of saying, "I can be friends with these men and women and still do the job I came to do." He has nothing to hide. And fortunately, with the exceptions of—once again—Peter and Charles, neither do the fascinating array of individuals he's put under a lifelong microscope.

>>>KENNY HERZOG



JOY DIVISION—UNDER REVIEW: AN INDEPENDENT CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(MVD)

We hope you're sitting down, because here comes a doozy: Apparently rock critics—British rock critics, no less—love Joy Division! And thankfully we have this "critical analysis" of the band, in "limited collector's edition," to tell us they're influential too. In all honesty, this DVD appears to exist solely to stroke the egos of the UK rock press' infantile "we were there when it happened" mentality, tapping the co-authors of *Torn Apart: The Life Of Ian Curtis*, ex-*Mojo* and *Melody Maker* staffers, another independent journal-

ist and yes, one "Manchester punk musician." The interviewees offer scant critical judgment about Joy Division's motives, popularity, fanbase or influence (other than "they sure were influential"), instead merely retelling the history of the band with various video clips of the band—this DVD's best feature—along with clips of any other bands the critics mention (Frank Sinatra, the Doors, etc.), one of many time wasters. And unfortunately, as their only non-bootleg DVD domestically available, this will no doubt sell. Nevertheless, we recommend buying the utterly essential *Heartandsoul* box set, searching eBay for some bootleg vids and reading the *Torn Apart* book for your Ian Curtis fix. Sure, it all costs more than this DVD, but sometimes you gotta pay for unknown pleasures.

>>>KORY GROW



MARAH SOONER OR LATER IN SPAIN

(Yep Roc)



Though they're responsible for some of the looziest, most energetic and most charismatic rock albums in recent memory, none of Marah's excellent studio releases truly capture the band's actual looseness, energy or charisma. In theory then, a live DVD comprised of 21 blistering songs should serve as their essential document. Frustratingly though, *Sooner Or Later* doesn't quite hit that mark. Quality is a major issue: Filmed by a handful of fans, the recording looks like a bootleg—the lighting is poor; the limited camera angles become repetitive, then boring, then bludgeoning; the sound and picture go out of synch for a good long stretch. Watching straight through is an exercise in fan dedication. However, treated like a mid-August baseball game or an old Christmas film—i.e., if you press play on the DVD, listen and look up now and then to see what's going on—*Spain* achieves a sort of transcendence, ephemerally framing the intense, chill-inducing performance—from a band seemingly incapable of delivering less.

>>>MICHAEL PATRICK NELSON

THE KITSCH KORNER

TALES OF THE RAT FINK

(Shout! Factory)



This breezy doc covers the life of legendary hot-rod kingpin Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, who in the late 1950s and '60s, took his gearhead fervor to op-art heights by fashioning whole crazed car bodies out of fiberglass and, along with pal Von Dutch, pioneered pinstripping. Not only was Roth the face of drag race culture, but he basically invented the T-shirt design, coming up with Rat Fink, his infamous anti-Mickey Mouse, and sticking it on millions of snot-nosed kids' chests. This begat toys, stickers, comic books, etc., until it all skidded to a pop cultural halt—thanks to the more serious vibe of the psychedelic '60s, which, as this movie ironically implies, Roth helped ignite with his colorful exaltation of the social outcast. The film's inventive mix of animation, archival stills and live-action talking cars (voiced by Jay Leno, Ann Margret and others) straddle fun and cheesy, but so did Roth, gloriously so. Regrettably, the film skips over the whole punk era's rediscovery of Roth's slobbering, speed-obsessed iconography, especially within the '90s garage-punk scene via the reverential rock art of Coop and Kozik. Rather than roaring spazz-youth devolution, *Tales* opts for an irreverent nostalgia.

>>>ERIC DAVIDSON



NIRVANA LIVE! TONIGHT! SOLD OUT!!

(Geffen)



The latest in a booming market of "for the first time on DVD" concert films, *Live! Tonight! Sold Out!!* probably seems like an automatic purchase for millions of loyal fans. In reality, a one-time rental will likely suffice. It's still a fascinating time capsule, but it doesn't offer much outside of the original VHS material, apart from a few tracks recorded in Amsterdam, two of which are redundant from the main feature. And said main feature is a jarring mix of footage from different shows at different points across the *Nevermind* tour, the best portions of which are home-video-style segments of the band goofing around and the wealth of archival interview footage, including their classic *Headbanger's Ball* appearance. At some point though, the combination of these elements begs to be woven together into full-fledged documentary by an omniscient narrator, aided by some objective new interviews or perhaps even commentary tracks. The indisputable performance highlight is Kurt mangling "Smells Like Teen Spirit" for a completely oblivious audience during an overseas TV taping. And in general, for now grown-up Nirvana nuts, it will prove fascinating to clearly see Cobain for what he was: a naïve, confused kid who was in no way ready to handle the expectations of a generation. But that still doesn't mean you'll want to watch *Tonight! Sold Out!* time after time to revisit that epiphany.



PHOTO: Jill Furmanowksy