



Joy Division: Under Review

reviewed by *Si Wooldridge*

Documentary of Mancunian post-punk outfit Joy Division featuring rare performances, footage and interviews. Mike Middles (Ian Curtis biographer), Barney Hoskyns, Pat Gilbert, John Robb and David Stubbs contribute.

Introduction

Joy Division were a short-lived band whose legacy lives on today. Formed during the punk era, the band initially worked under the moniker of Warsaw, which is rumoured to be inspired by the Bowie track on his Low album. Joy Division consisted of Ian Curtis (vocals/guitar), Bernard Sumner (guitar/synthesisers), Peter Hook (bass) and Stephen Morris (drums). The band took their name from a group of concentration camp women who were used as sex slaves.

Perhaps because of his near debilitating epilepsy condition, Curtis' lyrics were more insular and gloomy than most of his peers and his stage presence both mesmerising and disturbing. Produced by Martin Hannett, the music was also quite cold but also enhanced by the use of synthesisers. Joy Division were initially a punk-ish guitar band, but slowly evolved into a pioneering electronics band.

Curtis tragically took his life prior to the release of the band's second album Closer, seemingly unable to take the pressures that life was now thrusting at him as his profile and that of the band was starting to build.

The DVD documents the short life of Joy Division.

Video/Visuals

Another documentary that's in 4:3, making it seem as if its real aim is to be shown on five or some similar cable channel. It's probably a budgetary thing because there's no excuse not to make something like this in widescreen these days.

Audio/Soundtrack

Stereo mix that is more than adequate, the only sound quality issues arising when poor live footage is shown. Still, the privilege of seeing archive stuff like this from an era where much is lost certainly overrides concerns of quality.

Extra Features

Full radio interview with Ian Curtis
Interactive Joy Division quiz – my score was pathetic
Text-based biographies of the contributors

Overall Opinion

I have to admit, I never really got into Joy Division at the time. I was more of a happy synth man, but I can now recognise what an influence Joy Division and Ian Curtis had. The remaining band members formed one of the bands of the decades in **New Order**, but the legacy of Ian Curtis lives on. Curtis himself appears to be an incredibly intense on-stage performer with the most mesmerising eyes. I've recently started to reappraise this band, some of the **music** is quite incredible, although in places not as melodic or well-produced as some of their contemporaries just breaking through at the time. This **DVD** is different from the Queen one I reviewed recently as this one really seems like a proper documentary on the **band**, from the beginning right through to the rise of New Order. As someone who never really understood that much about the band, this was a really interesting watch. In line with the Queen one, however, there is no involvement from the main protagonists. The nearest we get is Tony Wilson's ex-wife, which adds a certain amount of credibility to the whole thing. The other interviewee's are all journalists, but they are very knowledgeable on both the band and era. Recommended viewing for anyone who wants to know a bit more about Joy Division.