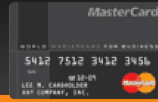


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### *Aural Amphetamine: Metallica And The Dawn Of Thrash DVD Review*

Posted by Mitch Michaels on 05.08.2008

*A cool flick about the rise and fall of thrash and Metallica's early years, with input from members of Diamond Head, Megadeth, Neurosis, Elixir and others...*

#### My Story

I'm a sucker for music history. Perhaps that's why I enjoyed my tenure doing Ask 411 Music so much, because questions to which I didn't know the answer allowed me to do a lot of research and understand certain band's or styles' place in the big picture. After all, music is just one big puzzle, and each piece has helped us move from one thing to the next. This new DVD, *Aural Amphetamine*, attempts to break down the genre of thrash, set to the backdrop of the rise of Metallica. Will all the pieces fit on this unauthorized look at Tallica's early days?

#### Its Story

In the very early 80's, a sound was coming to the United States care of the UK. It has since been referred to as the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, or NWOBHM, and it included bands like Iron Maiden, Motörhead, Angel Witch and Def Leppard, working class bands who were more concerned with speed and volume than melody. Because of this, NWOBHM was seen as a more aggressive second generation of early metal bands like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and even Led Zeppelin.

Once the NWOBHM sound was imported to the US, young metalheads began to embrace it almost immediately. The bare bones metal stood in stark contrast to glam, another subgenre which was standing at the forefront of American metal at the time. But glam's cock rock, spandex and make-up didn't set well with tougher metal listeners, and the disenfranchised began to fill that void with their own version of NWOBHM.

Interestingly enough, the biggest hotbed in the early days of thrash (before the genre had a name), was San Francisco's Bay Area, a geographical neighbor to glam's headquarters of Los Angeles. But from L.A. came a young man named Lars Ulrich, a teenager and aspiring drummer particularly enthralled with UK's new metal sound, so much so that he'd traveled to Europe just to buy records and sleep on Diamond Head's floor. In 1981, Ulrich placed an ad in an L.A. newspaper: "Drummer looking for other metal musicians to jam with." A local metal guitarist from the band Leather Charm named James Hetfield responded and Metallica was born.

Joining the core of Hetfield and Ulrich was guitarist Dave Mustaine. Thanks to some connections through Lars, the trio released the first Metallica track, "Hit The Lights", on a Metal Blade compilation called *Metal Massacre I* in 1982. The band began to gig around L.A., eventually bringing in bass virtuoso Cliff Burton to round out the line-up. By 1983, they migrated north to San Francisco, a city that was ready to burst at the seams with thrash power.

Also in 1983, Metallica released their debut, *Kill 'Em All* (with new guitarist Kirk Hammett), on Elektra Records. *Kill 'Em All* is considered the true beginning of thrash, the shot fired across the bow. From there, the genre snowballed. By the time Metallica released their classic follow-up, *Ride The Lightning*, thrash had broken out above the metal underground. Bands like Anthrax, Slayer and Dave Mustaine's Megadeth were proudly waving the thrash flag and drawing great reviews from metal critics everywhere.

In 1986, Metallica released what many consider to be their masterpiece, the deep and layered *Master Of Puppets*. The record was such a monster success that its follow-up, 1988's *...And Justice For All*, managed to reach the Billboard Top 10 with zero commercial airplay. That success sadly came with a price, as bassist Cliff Burton was killed in a tour bus accident just before the album was recorded. Metallica seriously considered hanging it up for good, but pressed on with a new sound – one which connected with a much wider audience.

With Metallica bursting into the mainstream, metal purists were ready to cry foul. When 1990's *Metallica* followed, overflowing with short and slick radio hits, the thrash sound was all but dead. Since then, Metallica has become one of the most successful bands in the world, with millions of albums sold and juggernaut world tours. Still, many metal fans consider their peak to have occurred back in 1986 with *Puppets*, when thrash ruled the metal world.

In 2008, Sexy Intellectual compiled a DVD that chronicled the rise and fall of thrash and Metallica's part in it.

#### The Album

On April 15, 2008, Sexy Intellectual and MVD Visual released *Aural Amphetamine: Metallica And The Dawn Of Thrash* on DVD. The film is in standard format and features stereo surround sound. The feature is unrated with a runtime of 95 minutes.



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#### The Credits

##### Cast:

Interviews with  
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 Malcolm Dome (British rock journalist)  
 Jeff Duran (comedian/DJ)  
 Dave Edwardson (Neurosis)  
 Elixir  
 Lonn Friend (Editor of RIP Magazine)  
 Aaron Jellum (Lääz Rockit)  
 Chris Kontos (Machine Head)  
 Joel McIver (British author)  
 Harald 'O' (Metallica photographer)  
 Chris Poland (Megadeth)  
 Sean Smithson (Sacrilege B.C.)  
 Brian Tatler (Diamond Head)

#### The Feature: 6.5

Aural Amphetamine is a completely unauthorized DVD, but its producers have done a great job putting secondary footage together to tell their story. The folks participating in interviews specifically for the DVD aren't giant names who would jump out at you, but they all have their own personal story of the early days of thrash, simply because they were there to watch it happen. All have their insights and biases, and those are on full display, from tales from the Bay Area clubs in 1982 to simple ruminations on the first time they heard early albums like *Kill 'Em All* and *Killing Is My Business...And Business Is Good!*. The best stories are perhaps from Diamond Head's Brian Tatler, who tells of a young American kid named Lars Ulrich who traveled to England just to see them play. In turn, they let him sleep on their floor for a couple weeks. It was the least they could do for a fan!

These interviews are spliced with archival Metallica footage, most of which comes from *Garage Inc.* interviews with Metallica, where the band talks about their influences. Some very grainy concert footage is thrown in too, which does reflect the bootleg nature of thrash's early years, but also manages to bring the production down with its poor audio and video quality.

As introspective as the DVD is on the rise of thrash (and even the most educated of fans will both be entertained and learn something), Aural Amphetamine falls apart in its second half, as our interviewees simply talk about their reactions to Metallica's first three albums (split on *Kill 'Em All*, loved *Ride The Lightning* and revere *Puppets*) and then lament the fall of Metallica as a thrash band. Well, at least no one uses the term "sold out". A little fun is poked at Dave Mustaine and Some Kind Of Monster as we close things up. Much like any conversation about Metallica by hardcore 80's metal fans, what is can never match what was.

#### The Extras: 6.0

Aural Amphetamine has a couple of interesting special features. Metallica will enjoy Harald O's stories of taking pictures of the band in "Snapshots Of Thrash". There's also "The Hardest Metallica Quiz In The History Of The World Ever", which will kill a few minutes. I scored a "mediocre" 12. See if you can beat me! Rounding things out are text bios of the interviewees and an advertisement for more unauthorized Metallica media.

**The 411:** Aural Amphetamine is a great way to learn about the early days of thrash from guys who lived it. The story of Metallica is used as the backdrop to describe the genre's rise and fall. As an unauthorized DVD, there's are lots of "personal collection" photos and video clips, but no actual input by Metallica. This can be forgiven as the DVD gets its point across without them. Unfortunately, much like Metallica, Aural Amphetamine peaks midway, as after Metallica began to break, there's nothing much more to talk about other than how much better they were then. It's like listening to any metal conversation ever. Still, its worth catching for fans and those hungry for music history.

**Final Score: 6.5** [ Average ] **legend**

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