



TARGET VIDEO'S JOE REES

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE FILMED!

I HEAP EFFUSIVE PRAISE ON JOE REES BELOW, FOUNDER OF TARGET VIDEO, and, with JACKIE SHARP, SAM EDWARDS, JILL HOFFMAN KOWAL, etc., principal filmmaker/videographer of the West Coast punk/underground music explosion, 1977-1981. It's not sycophancy; music fans owe him a supreme debt of gratitude even if many don't know his name. Major, well-distributed albums, media exposure, and TV appearances then represented the famed New York and Ohio bands that played CBGB and Max's Kansas City, and most toured the nation/world. (Ditto the more infamous English outbreak.) But the equally *incredible* West Coast bands recorded and released little—usually a 1000-copies 7" or two, at best—and few played east of the I-5 corridor connecting San Diego with Vancouver, while their entire scenes went largely unnoticed or dismissed by the media. Were it not for two crucial newsprint mags, L.A.'s *Slash* and San Francisco's *Search and Destroy*—see my interview with the latter's editor/publisher, V. VALE, in issues 62 and 63; it's a primer for this one!—plus Target, much of what transpired in L.A. and San Francisco (and bits of Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver) then would be lost to history.

Besides, even those of us who loved those L.A./S.F. singles, occasional LPs, and posthumous retrospectives and/or still thumb through extent *Slash* and *Search & Destroy* copies (and early fanzines such as *Flipside* and *Creep*) would never know what it was like to experience many of these wild, crazy late '70s West Coast bands live were it not for Rees. Enthusiastic, excited, indefatigable, and understanding that something astounding was occurring even if the planet had little clue, he dragged his cameras to countless gigs around his Bay Area base whenever one could be arranged, then invited the bands into his Oakland, and then San Francisco studios. His vast archive forms our crucial record of so many too-brief, brilliant, challenging, and fresh outfits otherwise undocumented. Many are better appreciated now, and others, like the *Fresh Fruit For Vegetables* era/lineup **DEAD KENNEDYS**, were preserved in their peak prime. Plus, given his open mind from his sculpture/art school/teaching background (he still teaches college in Reno, NV), he took in the full panoply of punk, such as the furious, wall of sound synthesizer noise damage of L.A.'s ungodly **THE SCREAMERS** (his films are our source for that band's remarkable value; they disdained records) and his art school friends, the zany, sardonic **THE MUTANTS**. He also favored meatier guitar bands, such as **THE AVENGERS** and **NUNS** supporting the final original **SEX PISTOLS** gig, **NEGATIVE TREND**, **CRIME**, and L.A.'s finest, **THE WEIRDOS, GERMS, AND X**. And he did visit bands from the East, too, such as **THE CRAMPS**, whom, like Crime, he gleefully shot in a highly unusual "venue" north of town in 1978, early **TALKING HEADS**, **DEVO**, second album **CLASH**, and an outstanding 1981 **IGGY POP** concert since-released on DVD by MVD. Plus Rees spent three years shooting the early '80s English *post-punk* scene, including *BT* faves **THE SOUND**.

So much of his footage remains unseen, his archive is so vast, though he intends to address that some day. (Between teaching and avid fishing, when will he have the time?) As proof, scan the exhaustive "library" at targetvideo.blogspot.com, where you can also watch some of Target's best. But some of this was released on ancient VHSs ordered from old Target catalogs and DVDs. Much of this has been uploaded to YouTube without consent—some links are below—but it's like a time capsule, of when anything went, and everybody went for it, a untamed art attack/ rock 'n' roll scene and social critique that was so fun it's unreal.

We finally caught up with Rees three decades on, back in S.F. to donate films for the truck parked outside San Francisco's Punk Homecoming Festival in September. So we naturally lured him to *BT* writer **JERRY CONNOLLY**'s Mission district home. Jerry sat in on the interview, so thanks to he and wife **LISA**, who observed it with Joe's female companion, and to **JUSTINA DAVIES** for the ace transcription!

JOE: When I first started with **THE MUTANTS**, it was "Let's see what we look like on stage!" Because how else are you going to make creative decisions, when you make a presentation? And it was kind of a cool thing, like instant feedback, right?

JR: [Shows him 1979 issue 11 of *Search and Destroy*, with Mutants cover.] This issue has your filmography up to 1979, going back to 1973, with something called *Analysis Of A Pyramid* [a neon pyramid sculpture].

JOE: Yeah. That was my art performance days, when everyone was experimenting. I was going to art school, The California School Of Art in Oakland.

JR: What was it then?

JOE: California College Of Arts and Crafts, but I don't recall any crafts. [Laughter.]

JR: Is that how you got involved in filming?

JOE: Yeah, kind of. I'd played with the whole thing, with being an artist type which I accepted since I was a kid, and I went there because I wanted to learn how to become a creative professional. Actually I started out as an industrial designer student. I wanted to design machinery equipment. But then I fell in love with fine arts.

JR: You knew [machine performance artists] **SURVIVAL RESEARCH LABS** people.

JOE: Yeah, I worked with those guys for years. I documented about 12 of their events. I started out with **MARK PAULINE** before he had a crew. And we did a performance thing at Union Square, right downtown. I often show it in my movie. It was like a conveyor belt with political imagery attached to it, and it would move along horizontally and this robot knife would come out and stab them in the face.

JERRY: What year was this?

JOE: Oh, must have been '76, '77. He also used a metal sculpture device, like a huge popcorn popper. In fact, when we did the show together at MOCA in L.A., last year, "Under the Big Black Sun," he brought that piece out again. Basically, you put dead animals in it, and it had a big clear plastic dome, and it would grind all the things up and throw them all over on the inside ... it looked like a salad being tossed and ground to pate! That was about the only thing that he could put in the show that wasn't going to explode or threaten somebody's life. Come on! I tell you, shooting those SLR events was like taking your life in your own hands with explosions, shrapnel flying through the air, and machines the size of a VW occasionally out of control!

JR: **TARGET VIDEO** was unique in the original punk rock scene; I mean, there were people who filmed a little of the CBGB bands around 1976. But those bands had a critical buzz about them, and **TALKING HEADS**, **BLONDIE**, **TELEVISION**, **RAMONES**, etc.—they all got record deals and toured the world. Whereas the West Coast explosion, was utterly under-recorded. All these amazing bands with three albums' worth of material—only released like one single, or nothing when

Well there were art students, and then there was the weird art students. [Laughter.] And the weird ones like myself always tended to try to take the chances and do the unusual things, and I like that.

they were going. And there was little media documentation of them outside of *Search & Destroy* and *Slash* and some fanzines. But then there's Target Video's huge archive even then, giving us a chance to see the bands that never toured. Around two-thirds of the West Coast bands never even crossed the Rockies, let alone came to the East Coast.

JOE: That's true.

JR: Are you even aware of the unique position Target Video has in that sense? Of how much would have been left undocumented otherwise?

JOE: Well, I think so. The reason I got involved in it was because, liking beat poetry and rock 'n' roll music as I was growing up, and then at art school meeting my friends **The Mutants**, a couple of them were in art class together, [guitarist] **JOHN GULLAK** and **DAVE [CAROTHERS]**, the drummer, and [singers] **SUE WHITE**, **SALLY WEBSTER**.

JR: So you met them all en masse.

JOE: Well there were art students, and then there was the weird art students. [Laughter.] And the weird ones like myself always tended to try to take the chances and do the unusual things, and I like that. So I felt comfortable around them, especially John, because I knew right away after seeing a couple of his shows that we shared a lot of the same interests. He was really into **LOU REED** [R.I.P.], and I'd never met anyone else that ever really cared for Reed's machine music...

JR: [1975's double] *Metal Machine Music*.