

the basementtape

REVIEW Don't Look Back

TYPE: Docudrama Video
DIRECTOR: D. A. Pennebaker
GRADE: A
FIVE WORDS: Dylan fans need this video.

Dylan's 'Don't Look Back' video re-release a true rock classic

By Josh Krauter

Staff writer

Movies about rock 'n' roll are usually pretty bad.

Whether they're romanticizing a bunch of spoiled brats, poking fun at rock clichés or honestly trying to capture the spirit of the music, most rock movies are missing that indefinable magical quality that makes the best music mean what it does.

There are a few notable exceptions; "This Is Spinal Tap" and "Sid and Nancy" come to mind, but fictionalized or dramatized rock movies are usually a travesty ("The Doors," "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band").

Most of the time, it takes a documentary to get rock 'n' roll right. Partly it's because rock is already dramatic, so most dramatic films only succeed in watering it down.

But mostly it's because rock's story can't be told in linear stories connecting one event to the next. Rock's story is best told by a series of singular, important moments.

So, rather than a "Behind the Music" style "rocker claws way up from the gutter, does important things, becomes alcohol-drug-sex addict or loses money to greedy manager, loses favor with public, then dies or makes comeback" story, a successful rock documentary usually captures a small slice of time.

A handful of these are truly memorable. Martin Scorsese's "The Last Waltz," a document of the Band's farewell concert, is a moving film that shows better than any other piece of cinema the joy musicians who are also friends get in playing together. The Maysles Brothers' "Gimme Shelter," captures the dark end of the 1960s and the helpless and horrified reaction of the Rolling Stones as a fan is murdered on-camera by the Hell's Angels at the Altamont festival.

There are a few others, such as "Woodstock," a colorful and vibrant take on the original festival and "The Decline of Western Civilization," a brutal document of the early 1980s confused, violent and sometimes inspirational hardcore punk scene.

Docurama video recently released a collector's edition of a film that belongs near the top of the rock-doc list. D. A. Pennebaker's "Don't Look Back," is a candid look at Bob Dylan's three-week tour of England in the spring of 1965.

It is a rock film unlike any other for three main reasons: the ability to get very close to the subject, the unglamorous, realistic take of life on the road and the important context of this period in Dylan's career.

Pennebaker and his camera were able to gain extremely candid footage of Dylan, his bandmates, his then-girlfriend Joan Baez and his manager, Albert Grossman. Some of this footage is very unflattering, some isn't. But Pennebaker was able to present his subject as a human being and not the myth that Dylan's image has become.

Dylan was 24 years old at the time, and like most young people, was fraught with contradictions. He chastises a Time magazine reporter for having an uppity middle-

class readership that doesn't help the poor in any way, but earlier in the film, his manager is seen using sneaky, possibly even illegal tactics, to get Dylan a huge amount of money for a BBC broadcast.

Later, Dylan is shown playing for a black audience in the segregated South singing about murdered civil rights leader Medgar Evers in the film's only pre-1965 footage. His sincerity

shines through. Later, he is complimented by an African BBC reporter for his humanitarian efforts. However, his treatment of Baez and the Time reporter borders on the cruel.

Dylan's philosophical sparring with a young reporter is sophomoric and immature, but his lyrics are profound.

He is kind and giving to a trio of teen-age fans and even smiles when one criticizes his latest single, but he

is nasty and brutal to anyone who interviews him, though a few deserve it, especially the newspaper that labels Dylan an anarchist, despite his traditional liberal politics, just because he's a difficult interview.

Rock tours have long been mythologized as a non-stop whirlwind of sex, drugs and television sets thrown into swimming pools. This film dispels a lot of that myth before much of that myth was even formed.

Much of the film is Dylan sitting impatiently backstage or in hotel rooms, forced to do interview after interview, impatient with the limitations of the way he is being labeled.

No one gets laid. No one snorts coke. No one drives a car into the Holiday Inn pool. The most drama occurs at a small party when an inebriated friend tosses an empty bottle into the street and gets yelled at by Dylan.

The dramatic tension in the film comes from an issue that isn't even mentioned.

Shortly after this tour, Dylan abandoned the acoustic folk sound of old. He debuted his new, electric rock sound at the Newport Folk Festival in 1966 and immediately polarized the audience. Folk purists screamed "Judas" and "sell-out," and the most fertile period of creativity in Dylan's career had begun.

None of this is in the film, but the specter of the idea haunts it throughout and is spelled out explicitly in the film's title. Dylan repeatedly tells reporters and friends, "I'm not a folk singer." He is restless and ready for his next move, like an Olympic diver waiting to jump off the tower.

This moment is expressed best when Dylan talks to a band member.

"You know, I realized that I don't give a shit if the audience claps or not," he says.

"Yeah, wouldn't that be something if they just sat there and waited," his friend says.

"Don't Look Back" is full of great moments like this. In another great scene, a young man at the aforementioned party (maybe the same age as Dylan, but with a more youthful face), who probably knows the rock star through a friend of a friend, listens to Dylan yell about the bottle that has been thrown in the street.

"Who's going to clean it up now?" Dylan asks. "I suppose I'm going to have to go out there and clean it up."

"I'll help you clean it up," the young man says, his face beaming at the opportunity to be in the same room as his hero.

Never has a moment in film better expressed the cult of personality we build around our rock stars.

"Don't Look Back" is rock 'n' roll.



Scott Eastman/DN

Shakespearean protagonist awakened

The tale of the two star-crossed lovers becomes a sequel at the Johnny Carson.

By Jason Hardy

Staff writer

Since William Shakespeare first wrote "Romeo and Juliet" in 1593, it has been dealt with in many different fashions.

But never before has our tragic hero found himself alone and in the trenches of a World War I battlefield.

Such is the case in "Romeo Sierra

Tango," a solo theater piece written, directed and acted by Rinde Eckert. The piece will be performed by Eckert on Feb. 16-17 at the Johnny Carson Theater as part of the Lied Center for Performing Arts "Discovery!" series.

In "Romeo Sierra Tango," Romeo awakens in his tomb several hundred years after he tried to kill himself with a lethal dose of poison. It seems the poison actually made him age very slowly, so when he wakes up, his mind is able to replay the events leading up to his death.

Much of the piece is, therefore, a

retrospective exploring Romeo's tragic follies.

Eckert said he wanted to elaborate on some of the themes in "Romeo and Juliet" by abstracting Romeo from his surroundings and giving him time to reconsider what had happened.

"I felt the real folly was dying naive," Eckert said. "So one of my objectives was to talk about romantic idealism vs. modern sensibility."

Eckert said by setting the play in a WWI no-man's-land, Romeo was able to rerun the play in his mind without any distractions. To accomplish this Eckert took about 15 percent of the

dialogue directly from "Romeo and Juliet" and wrote the other 85 percent himself, thus adapting Romeo to his current age.

"In the end he learns a great deal about himself," Eckert said, "about his youthful love vs. his more mature love. This is a much wiser Romeo who's had time to reflect on his follies."

Despite being a relatively complex concept for a one-person performance, Mark Moore, senior events coordinator for the Lied Center for

Please see ROMEO on 7



Courtesy Photo