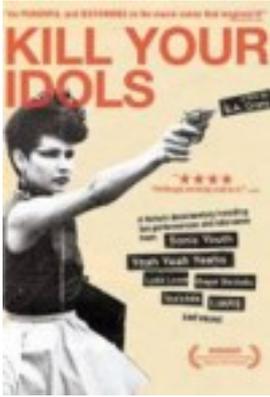


Brainwashed - "Kill Your Idols"

Written by Matthew Amundsen

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New York's No Wave scene of the late '70s was a brief but visionary moment in music history centering around bands whose members were frequently non-musicians but came from a variety of artistic backgrounds. While this documentary is by no means a definitive statement, it certainly sheds some light on what the movement was all about and what it meant to many of those involved, and how their pioneering spirit may or may not live on in the music of the generations who followed.

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The documentary begins appropriately enough with an interview with Martin Rev of Suicide. His description of how he and cohort Alan Vega were close to living on the street during Suicide's genesis is a similar influence to the urban decay that fueled Lydia Lunch and her No Wave peers. Lunch features prominently here, along with Jim Sclavunos, Glenn Branca, Arto Lindsay, Michael Gira, Thurston Moore, and Jim Thirwell. Their stories, supplemented with music and footage from the time, gives a general impression of what the scene was all about.

One of the criticism that's hounded *No New York*, the Eno-produced compilation that brought the scene to light, is that it's a mere tip of the iceberg and leaves out far more than it includes. Unfortunately, that trend continues here. One of the more noticeable omissions is Mars, who also featured on the compilation but only get the briefest mention here. Yet they're not the only victims. As evidenced by the family tree included on the inside cover of the DVD, there were dozens of bands mining the same territory who will never see the light of day. It's a shame that first-time director S.A. Cray didn't hunt down some of these more obscure artists since their views from the other side of the spotlight would surely be illuminating.

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Instead, Crary shifts gears after a mere 25 minutes and instead talks to current, younger bands like the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Gogol Bordello, Liars, Black Dice, A.R.E. Weapons, and Flux Information Sciences. At best, some of these artists seem to have little in common with their supposed forebears, and at worst are irrelevantly vain and clueless. Gogol Bordello comes across as sincere and earnest in their efforts to combine disparate elements to create new sounds, yet their philosophy is at odds with those of the No Wave bands, many of whom were purposefully anti-music in their approach. It's too bad that at the time of filming, Liars are pre-*Dr owned*

and still in their initial dance punk phase that thankfully gave way later to an uninhibited experimentalism that transcends their beginnings. Black Dice and Flux maintain respectability, but the likes of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and A.R.E. Weapons waste too much valuable screen time.

After interviewing the younger bands, Crary then starts interjecting barbed comments about them from the No Wave subjects. As justified as some of these comments are, I can't help but wonder why Crary spent half the film building the case for the newer acts only to have the main subjects tear them down. I would much rather have had the film focus exclusively on the No Wave bands and go into more detail rather than try to make some dubious connections between these generations that are ultimately negated anyway. No Wave's immediate scope of influence should have provided more than enough material to flesh out the documentary without having to resort to interviews with current bands, whose inclusion is a little baffling and suggests economic interests more than historical ones.

Despite these complaints, I'm happy the documentary exists at all. The relevant interviews are excellent, the footage is illuminating, and the editing of the feature cleverly reflects the aesthetics of the time in question. It's not perfect by any means, but it's enjoyable enough for what it is.