

sometimes going through the motions when inspiration was lacking in some of the later live shows.

Even Cobain admits that he's not an especially interesting interview subject. On tape, he comes off as frank but self-absorbed. There's rarely even the smallest stretch of humor, and it's hard to develop an appeal for Cobain as a human being. He admits that he sometimes will purposefully ignore people out of hand.

This turns out to be another of the paradoxes with **About a Son**: it's hard to sustain interest in someone whose charisma is everywhere but the interview. Except, of course, when he's talking about his music. Then, his voice becomes animated. It's only at the end of the film that the audience finally sees a short collage of images of late-life Kurt Cobain, and it's mostly then that I could finally get a sense of connection to him. Too little, and way too late.

In his interviews, Cobain isn't particularly appealing. If anything, he admits to being fickle with friends, and rude to those he sensed might be trendies. He had one important relationship (with Courtney Love); we hear her voice in the background at the very end. It only serves to remind you that the filmmakers may have passed over the more interesting subject. Director Nick Broomfield had investigated the couple years back with his great **Kurt and Courtney**, and his story was funny and as riveting as a suspense thriller.

About a Son is one of those projects perfectly suited for another medium. If there's a cache of interview material, a good editor or biographer can flesh out characters with immense skill. You may have to judge for yourself whether the film works.



LONDON'S BURNING WITH BOREDOM NOW

This month I saw three very different types of musician documentaries. The first **Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten** is the most straightforward of the group. It tells the story of Joe Strummer from birth to death in the utmost detail. I read an interview with director Julien Temple where he stated back in the day that it was either The Sex Pistols or The Clash. He chose The Sex Pistols. That decision comes across in his attitude toward Joe Strummer. He attempts to point out all the contradictions and inconsistencies in Strummer's character. Temple may succeed initially, but as the story goes on and Strummer faces his post-Clash life, he becomes a better person than Johnny Rotten could ever imagine being.

Unfortunately, Temple uses too many filmatic gimmicks in **Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten**. They are distracting and annoying. The one that bugged me the most was shooting all the interviews around a campfire whether in London or under the Brooklyn Bridge. The flames of the fire are always in the foreground, immediately reminding me of Temple's interview gimmick in **The Filth and The Fury**. In that film he backlit all the Sex Pistols interviews so the band members' faces were completely dark. Both probably seemed like a good idea on paper. Strummer was fond of having gatherings around a campfire in his post-Clash years. However, these shot styles completely ruin the viewing experience. The other terribly distracting thing was the film's intro where he is presenting the birth-through-youth of Joe Strummer. This should have been a very interesting part as Strummer lived in many places throughout the world as a child. His father was a diplomat. Temple quickly cuts between clips of movies and television and photographs of Strummer as a child. It is impossible to focus on any of the images and even harder to pay attention to the narrative. The scenes fly by and suddenly Strummer is at boarding school in England.

The strongest aspects of **Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten** is the seemingly unlimited archives of photographs and film or video of Strummer at every point of his life. Strummer may never have had commercial success after

the Clash, but he did everything for the right reasons. (<http://www.joestrum-merthemovie.com>)

Kurt Cobain About A Son is a much harder film to focus on. The film juxtaposes audio interviews Cobain did with Michael Azerrad for the book *Come As You Are: The Story of Nirvana* with current day film footage from the places Cobain lived: Aberdeen, Olympia, and Seattle. There are shots of average people on the street and different locations. It all looks nice, but it just isn't too interesting to watch. I found my eyes wandering around the theater, checking out the soundproofing tiles and thinking of what chores I needed to do at home while watching the film.

The interviews in **Kurt Cobain About A Son** are the fascinating part. Cobain who the media has always told us didn't like being famous is quite open about his personal life. He recalls growing up, his parents, trying to convince Krist Novoselic to start a band with him and meeting Courtney Love. The most heartbreaking part is when he was talking about when his father remarried and then stopped paying attention to him. Cobain says it was like his father gave up on him. He then says he would never do that to his daughter. Yet he does, just in a different way. (<http://sidetrackfilms.com/films/cobain/>)

I'm Not There may not be an actual documentary of Bob Dylan. None of the characters in the film are even named Bob Dylan, but it follows the lives and legends of Bob Dylan. Six different actors play Dylan at different stages of his career. He has had quite an interesting career, but the story lines don't work together smoothly, which is an odd thing to say since they actually happened. Most people's life stories probably couldn't be easily adapted into a film.

You have to be a Bob Dylan fan to get all the intricacies of **I'm Not There**. I am not, and had a hard time caring about any of the characters and what they were doing. It was cute every time one of the Dylan incarnations spoke using a quote from one of his songs. I also found it amusing that the guy sitting in front of me asked before the movie started if I had already seen the film. I hadn't. He seemed kind of annoyed, which I found weird since the film had only been in the theater for three days. (<http://www.imnotthere-movie.com>)

Have you ever been in a room where a group of people (usually boys) is talking so intensely about something so boring like guitars or guitar pedals? Do you tune it out? Perhaps you play guitar and like to see old, cool styles of guitars and pedals, but you'd rather be playing them than talking about them. That's how I felt during **Fuzz The Sound That Revolutionized The World**. All these vintage pedals look and sound really cool and I wouldn't mind having one to play. In fact, I have a vintage Fuzz Face which I love using. It sounds fantastic. But that's all I really have to say about it.

Fuzz The Sound That Revolutionized The World presents the world of men who obsess about guitar pedals. Some are manufacturers who make new ones trying to emulate an older fuzz sound. Some use them. Some hoard them. J. Mascis has amassed a collection of over forty Big Muff pedals. I would have liked more of a history lesson or even a how to build your own fuzz pedal demonstration. Instead, it's just a bunch of dudes flapping their gums. (www.brink.com)

Who's Been Talking? Johnny Thunders In Concert is a live show recorded in Osaka, Japan on April 3, 1991, twenty days before Thunders would die in New Orleans. The performance is very lackluster. There are thousands of fans, yet Thunders can barely go through the motions. After performing "a brand new song I just wrote," "Society," Thunders asks the audience if they are falling asleep. The guitar solos have been replaced by saxophone solos. Thunders barely plays guitar at all. The band performs embarrassing medleys of "Hit The Road Jack/I'm Not Your Stepping Stone" and "Louie Louie/Hang on Sloopy". What is that outfit he is wearing? All filmed with a professional three camera video set up.

You'd have to be a huge Johnny Thunders fan to even get through this DVD without cringing. Conversely, if you are a Thunders fan, you need to see this if only to see for yourself how drugs ruined your idol. (www.mvdvisual.com)

I am always looking for films to review. If you made one, send a copy to Carolyn Keddy, PO Box 460402, San Francisco, CA 94146-0402. If your film is playing in the San Francisco Bay Area, let me know at carolyn@maximum-rocknroll.com. I will go see it. www.carolynkeddy.com