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REVIEW

DVD Review: *DEVO Live 1980*

Posted by [Pete Blackwell](#) on September 07, 2005 11:18 PM (See [all posts by Pete Blackwell](#))

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[Devo - Live 1980](#)

Devo
 Music from *Music Video Dist.*
 Release date: 30 August, 2005

Imagine for a moment that there is no such thing as evolution. There is no progress; no teleological purpose in the universe. Instead, man's existence is marked by the inexorable downward spiral of devolution. Now put a flower pot on your head.

That's essentially what two Kent State art students, Mark Mothersbaugh and Jerry Casale, did after they developed this bleak and sardonic theory way back in 1972—

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**400 YEARS AGO SHE
KILLED 650 WOMEN...**

a theory that was quickly bolstered when the National Guard murdered four students at their university during an anti-Vietnam rally. They put flower pots on their heads and formed a band.

DEVO (short for de-volution, natch) officially formed in Akron, Ohio, in 1972, but they didn't make their first full-length recording until years later. Mothersbaugh and Casale, joined by their brothers (both named Bob) and drummer Alan Myers, honed their skills and dabbled in film soundtracks before releasing their seminal debut album, *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!*, in 1978.

DEVO was ostensibly a new-wave band in the vein of the Talking Heads but they had something in common with experimental noise freaks and fellow Ohioans Pere Ubu as well. DEVO was also hugely (and admittedly) influenced by German techno-electronic pioneers Kraftwerk, and they were consequently one of the first new wave bands to fully incorporate keyboards into their sound. Perfectly melding theme to music, Mothersbaugh sang about conformity, alienation, consumerism and, of course, whipping things, with a clipped and frenetic voice against a backdrop of mechanized and disjointed (but damned catchy) music.

Perhaps the song that best represents what DEVO was all about would be their brilliant cover version of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones, which appears on the debut album. It's actually less of a cover version

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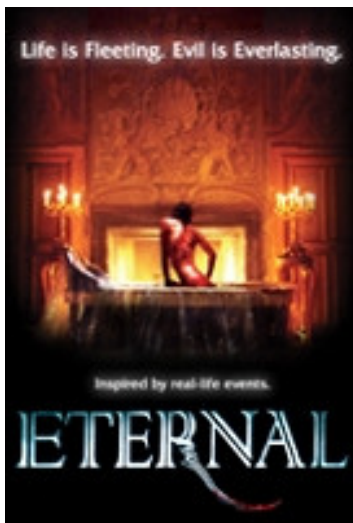
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than it is a total deconstruction. The DEVO version is all circular drum patterns and staccato guitar parts, with the signature guitar riff reduced to an eerie synthesizer line. The overall effect is to neuter one of the most sexually suggestive songs of the rock era, and without the sex, "Satisfaction" is really just about consumer culture. It's certainly one of the most creative cover versions of a rock and roll standard out there, but not everyone liked it. It was just this kind of quirkiness and irreverence that prompted *Rolling Stone* to label the band "fascists" (which only goes to show that the granddaddy of all rock music magazines has been consistently missing the point for at least 25 years now).

DEVO Live 1980 is a phenomenal live document that captures the band at their artistic and commercial peak. The show was filmed in Petaluma, Calif., on the tour for their third album, *Freedom of Choice*, and the band is riding high on the success of the album's single, "Whip It." This single was a double-edged sword of sorts for DEVO because it made them an (almost) household name (the track made it to #14 on the *Billboard* charts in 1980), but its popularity also reinforced the image of DEVO as a one-hit novelty act. *DEVO Live 1980* is here to convince you otherwise.

The band takes the stage in trademark matching white "corporate uniforms" and red flower-pot hats. They open with "Whip It" and work their way through some of the more keyboard-oriented

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songs from *Freedom of Choice*, doing their best automaton imitations. As the show progresses, the band loosens up a bit, moving into a set of more guitar-oriented material from the first album, including "Satisfaction" and the irresistible, driving "Mongoloid." The set finishes up with the strange and disturbing "Tunnel of Life" (replete with faux-Fifties video footage) and the "DEVO Corporate Anthem."

The DVD features the entire Petaluma show, complete with 21 songs. Most of the hits from the first three records are here along with a few obscurities like the bizarre "Pink Pussycat." The sound and video quality are quite good considering they were recorded 25 years ago, but the primary pleasure of *DEVO Live 1980* is in getting a chance to see the band's captivating and creative live show when they were in their prime. (Sadly, DEVO continued to record into the 1990s, but nothing they did after *Freedom of Choice* lived up to what they had achieved with the first three albums.)

The video portion of the disc tacks on exceptionally weird versions of "Praying Hands" and "Shrivel Up" that the band performed as "Dove-The Band of Love," which is DEVO dressed up in plaid sports-jackets and pretending to be a Christian band (I think). There's also a depressing promo for an upcoming video release of DEVO performing live in Japan recently. They look much, much older, but they appear to be doing the exact same stage show. If there's any question in your mind, definitely go for the vintage DEVO over the new stuff.

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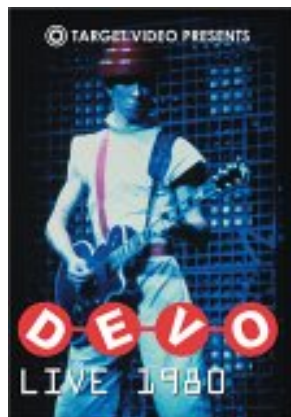
Since *DEVO Live 1980* is on Dual Disc, the flipside of the DVD is about an hour's-worth of CD audio culled from the same show as the video.

(parenthetical remarks)



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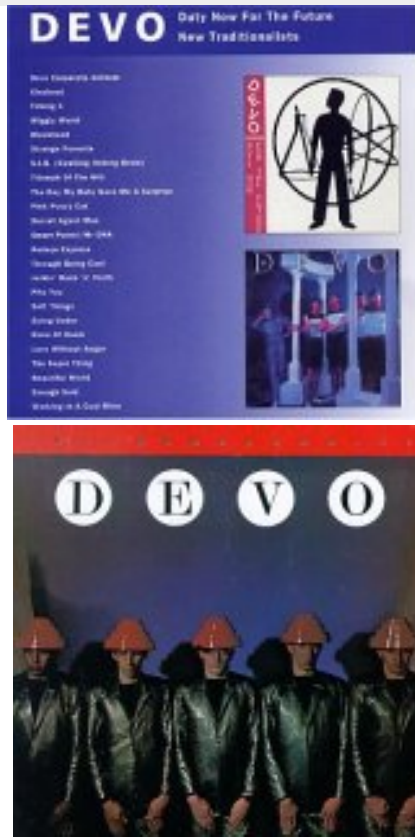
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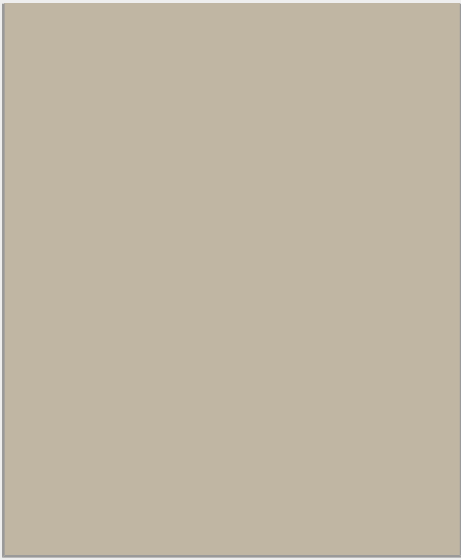
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