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 New DVDs examine the musical lives and strange ends of Syd Barrett and G.G. Allin

~ By MICK FARREN ~



**O**n February 3, 1959, rock 'n' roll had its first dose of mortality when Buddy Holly's rented Beechcraft crashed into a frozen Minnesota field. At the same time, the newly-minted music discovered what jazz and blues had known forever: In death you could become an icon. Over the next 18 years, by the time Elvis Presley died in August of 1977, the lesson of potential icon status was so well learned that the cynics' oft-repeated comment on Presley's death – "great career move" – made sense. Rockers by the dozen have crashed cars, gone down in planes, blown their brains out, and, of course, overdosed or drunk themselves to death, and if they had any body of work, it's sooner or later immortalized by a compilation CD, a box set, and now, a DVD.



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Photographs by Gary Leonard

**7 DAYS**

November 8-14

**L.A.&E****Steve Aoki's Big Spin**  
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**DVD EYE****Diamonds and Excrement**  
New DVDs examine the musical lives and strange ends of Syd Barrett and G.G. Allin**TV from Another Place**  
Fans of David Lynch's

By synchronicity or mere coincidence, retrospective DVDs celebrating Syd Barrett and G.G. Allin arrived in my mailbox within a couple of days of each other, making it hard to ignore that both men were massive casualties, if polar opposites in their approach to rock 'n' roll self-destruction. Indeed, both are enshrined as examples of the extremes to which musicians can take their art, and their audiences' need to elevate them to a dubious pantheon.

G.G. Allin was destined to be an icon. Devoid of conventional talent, he set out to disgust and antagonize where no performers had disgusted before. With just feral thrash in back of him, Allin assaulted women, cavorted in ugly nudity, defecated on stage, and generally attacked his limited audience with screaming rage, racism, sexism, free-form abuse, and an obsession with shit and vomit that could only, most charitably, be described as fetid improvisation, and doing jail time for it. Despite repeated threats of an onstage suicide, Allin died of a heroin overdose at a Manhattan party in June, 1993, while party-goers posed for photos with his sprawled form, unaware he was already dead. Some of this final shambles makes history on Todd Phillips's DVD *Hated* (Mvd Visual), proving beyond doubt Allin's claim to the title "Nastiest Ever."

Syd Barrett, of course, did not actually die until July of last year. To achieve his rock 'n' roll icon crown, he went to perhaps a stranger place than simple death. While Barrett, as the prince of Pink Floyd, was the toast of 1967 London – the brightest star on the creative horizon and an irresistible groupie magnet with his pre-Raphaelite looks – his lights suddenly went out. He had vacated the premises and all that remained was a thousand-yard acid stare. The assumption was drugs had fried his brain – psychedelic schizophrenia, a full neural disconnect? Who knew? And Syd wasn't telling, plus he'd only left a musical legacy of unfulfilled promise. If G.G. Allin was the "Nastiest Ever," Barrett was the "Great What If." What if he had gone on playing and not vanished into the place where no one could follow?

The *Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story* (Zeit Media Limited) asks this question, but Barrett's friends and the other members of the Floyd provide no answer. Production quality is considerably better here than on *Hated*, but the subject dictates that. The Barrett DVD also has a musical core in the well-used "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," but both DVDs fall into the clichéd formula of TV/DVD music documentaries – assembled talking heads from back-in-the-day and old interviews punctuating all the live clips for which copyrights can be negotiated. Syd Barrett and G.G. Allin are interesting in that they traverse the absolute philosophical arc of rock 'n' roll, but very soon every band worth half-a-damn will have a DVD dedicated to its success or hard-luck history. Which is going to prove commercially interesting, because, after checking on impulse, I found music clips on both DVDs – or ones of equal merit – posted on YouTube making it possible to simply listen to MyIcons for free, doing what they were famous for, without all the third-hand analysis. ★

*Hated* (Special Edition). Directed by Todd Phillips. Mvd Visual, \$19.95.

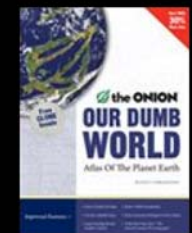
*The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story*. Directed by John Edginton. Zeit Media Limited, \$24.95.

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'Twin Peaks' finally get the complete series on DVD

**TV EYE**

**Strike Pay**

**STAGE**

**Blank Notes**

'City Kid' exemplifies the need for good writers of musicals

**LISTINGS**

- ~ ROCK, POP, ACOUSTIC ~
- ~ JAZZ, BLUES, LATIN ~
- ~
- ~ DANCEBEAT ~
- ~ CLASSICAL/DANCE ~
- ~ CABARET ~
- ~ CONCERTS ~
- ~ THEATER ~
- ~ COMEDY CLUBS ~
- ~ ART OPENINGS ~
- ~ MUSEUMS ~
- ~ READINGS, ETC. ~
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