

Music Film on the Big Screen?

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Sunday, 15 February 2009
Last Updated Friday, 19 June 2009

2008 saw the welcome return of the concert film to our cinema screens. What with Martin Scorsese's Shine a Light, featuring The Rolling Stones during two nights at New York City's Beacon Theatre in 2006 and, a little closer to home, Sheffield's Arctic Monkeys Live at the Apollo, recorded in Manchester and shown around the country courtesy of Vue Cinemas. But one concert film released last year may well have escaped your notice. Namely, Lou Reed's Berlin.

Shown only in a handful of cinemas including the Showroom in Sheffield, this 82 minute account of Lou Reed's masterpiece shot 33 years after the release of the album and directed by Julian Schnabel - check out his film Basquiat if you've never heard of him - is a masterpiece in itself. It's also as raw as a concert film should be and reminded me very much of the films of Murray Lerner (Festival, Bob Dylan - The Other Side of the Mirror - Live at the Newport Folk Festival 1963 -1965 and The Who - Live at the Isle of Wight Festival 1970).

For those in the know, Berlin was never an easy listen and, to be frank, neither is the film an easy watch. But the way in which the film has been shot, with mostly handheld cameras, makes you actually feel as if you're right there in the audience. Add to that the footage shot by Schnabel's daughter, Lola, which fleshes out the characters from this collection of heartbreaking songs, and what you have here is something very special indeed.

If you weren't one of the two other people who attended the early showing on day one at the Showroom, Sheffield, then shame on you! I just hope for your sake that you managed to catch it during its seven day run. Luckily for you, the film was released on dvd via Artificial Eye last autumn and is retailing at around a tenner at the moment. Well worth the money, especially for the heartfelt rendition of Candy Says from Antony Hegarty from Antony and the Johnsons, plus Lou Reed again with Rock Minuet!

So, where does the concert film go from here? Perhaps the halcyon days of the concert/festival film are long since gone, though, in saying that, director Julien Temple did have a go with his film Glastonbury a few years back. But music fans will never forget the likes of Woodstock, Monterey Pop, The Concert for Bangladesh, Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars, Gimme Shelter and The Stones in the Park, which both featured The Rolling Stones during turbulent times. Maybe it's just that these types of films will now, in the main, be destined to go straight to dvd without a big screen showing, even at the level of Lou Reed's Berlin.

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