

Reel Sounds – Vol.2: Crosby, Cuba and more in focus at this year's Doc 'N Roll Fest

The sixth edition of the music documentary festival Doc 'N Roll has some real heavy hitters in its line up this year. The festival opened with a screening the PJ Harvey documentary *A Dog Called Money*, which is fascinating look at the making of Harvey's most recent record *The Hope Six Demolition Project*. The album was created in a specially constructed studio at Somerset House where members of the public were invited to go and observe the musician and her collaborators as they set about making the record. Personally, that's where the film is most interesting. It's more problematic in its portrayal of Harvey's global journey to find inspiration to make the record, but that's been covered here on the Quietus site from the film's world premiere at the Berlinale earlier this year.

The other big hitter on the line up is the Cameron Crowe produced portrait of David Crosby, directed by A.J. Eaton, titled *David Crosby: Remember My Name*. It's as slick and high end as you'd expect from a Crowe produced documentary. Leisurely paced, rammed with amazing archive footage both familiar - live and television performances - and less so – incredible super 8 footage of Crosby out sailing in the mid 70s and early, already tense, behind the scenes footage of Crosby, Stills and Nash at Crosby's legendary Laurel Canyon house. In the film, Crosby visits the house that became iconic in so many photos of that famed period, to retell stories, most notably and lengthily of his relationship with Joni Mitchell.

The film spends a long time allowing Crosby to talk in revered tones about others, he comes across as artistically humble and generous and this is no more apparent than the Mitchell segment. It's clear the esteem he holds her in, and both he and the audience are grateful for the chance to spend time reflecting on her genius. Elsewhere there are gems to be found in learning that Crosby's Dad shot the Gary Cooper classic *High Noon*, that he really, really disliked Jim Morrison – a dork apparently – and how open and frank he is about his issues with drugs and his period in jail. The picture and footage of him leaving prison in Texas is astounding. Crosby is not afraid of being honest, even when it looks bad on him. Under the surface is the sense that he hates himself as much as others hate him.

The last third of the film addresses the absences at the heart of the film to that point. For someone who was a member of legendary bands who left a real imprint on popular music in the second half of the twentieth century, the lack of collaborators coming forward at the time this film is made to give him as much praise as he gives them, or any for that matter, is telling. The last third of the film is deeply moving and very sad, as Crosby reckons with his behaviour and its impact, leaving him alone and apart from his long-time friends, peers and partners in music. The rare honesty of a star of this stature in a film about them is refreshing and startling and makes for powerful viewing. He's self-aware about his luck and privilege, his selfishness and other flaws, his own brand of mental health issues and his lack in relationships prior to meeting his wife of thirty plus years, Jan. However, his story is so dense it leaves too little space for a real appreciation of his contribution to pop music, that incredible voice.

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of scale and notoriety is Olivia Emes's impressionistic portrait of Cuban maestro Marietta Veulens, *Passions and Rituals*. Veulens is a London based Cuban musician whose work crosses boundaries of jazz, classic and folk. The film focuses on the completion of what she sees as her life-work, a record twenty years in the making that she feels represents her life as an artist and her life in a broader sense. In being both the story of a long-gestating record and also the myriad contexts that inform it

and the road to making it, the film shares much with Rob Curry and Tim Plester's brilliant *The Ballad Of Shirley Collins*.

From Matanzas in Cuba, *Passion and Rituals* follows the musician 'home' as she reconnects with formative people and places and pieces her magnum opus together. Emes's film is a window into worlds too rarely seen. Cuba is an underrepresented country in most respects and its women far less than its men. Also, this film allows viewers to see other parts of a country where the capital Havana is often representative of all. The film is lovingly constructed like a dance piece, allowing viewers the chance to experience some of the rituals of the title and connects Veulens to her past, creating music for a dance theatre company in Havana. The film never states the importance of Veulens as an artist directly, instead this understanding grows through the words of her reverent collaborators – including Basement Jaxx's percussionist oddly – and the culminating force of the exposure to the music she makes.

Elsewhere, the programme is bursting with the usual array of familiar and unfamiliar names and genres being represented and without being too sycophantic the Doc 'N Roll is a really great showcase of all that's good in the music doc genre each year as well as shining vital light on films that might otherwise be missed, including *Passions and Rituals* for example. There are films about the Blue Note label, FOALS, Drum & Bass, Krautrock, Gordon Lightfoot, Gina Birch and young Norwegian popstar Aurora. It's not often that the adage 'something for everyone' is apposite but Doc 'N Roll gets pretty close.