



Dig! Discussion Guide

Director: Ondi Timoner

Year: 2004

Time: 107 min

You might know this director from:

Cool It (2010)

We Live In Public (2009)

Join Us (2007)

FILM SUMMARY

In 1995, filmmaker Ondi Timoner set out to film 10 bands on the verge of being signed by major record labels in order to analyze the relationship between art and commerce. Anton Newcombe of The Brian Jonestown Massacre was included in that mosh-pit of musicians. He also suggested his friends, The Dandy Warhols, and the rest became music history.

DIG! follows the bands over the course of 7 years as they traverse the turbulent music industry. Courtney Taylor-Taylor and his band, The Dandy Warhols, are filmed as they record albums, sign a major label deal with Capitol Records, make extravagant music videos, travel the wide world, and party with the hip and famous. Anton Newcombe and his band, The Brian Jonestown Massacre, are also filmed as they record albums, reject labels and listeners, and become more known for their raucous infighting and drug abuse than for their music.

Pure rock 'n' roll viewing, the film is a well-rounded examination of a particular time in popular culture. The choices of modern-day musicians play out over the course of time. Hell-bent to create uncensored music untouched by the corporate machine, Newcombe demonstrates the hard-toiled consequences of his decisions. Taylor-Taylor and band members, on the other hand, rise from strength to strength and luxury to luxury. DIG! proves that like oil and water, money and music just do not mix for some musicians.

FILM THEMES

An intimate story of the love-hate relationship between lead members of two different bands, DIG! brings many human matters to the table.

SELF-LOVE AND THE ARTIST

“I am the son of God. I take whatever I need,” stated Anton Newcombe, expressing his self-love. Such visions of grandeur, even referred to as “Lead Vocalist Syndrome,” are very common amongst the lead singers of bands. Listen to my music! I have something really great and important to say! Taylor-Taylor of The Dandy Warhols, primping and preening himself during a video shoot “more like a pop star than an indie act,” was also captive to an oversized ego. The role of a band leader, demanding center stage at all times, indeed calls for a certain sort of artistic ego.

ADDICTION AND THE CREATIVE SOUL

DIG! is littered with drugs and alcohol, unabashed partying, and utter mayhem. Without outright stating it, the film makes a case that booze, cocaine, marijuana, and even heroin go hand-in-hand with the music-making process. No one seems to ever be too far from some form of mind-altering substance, whether it’s at the rehearsal space, recording studio, or gig venue. That’s entertainment, the film insinuates. But the film doesn’t delve into why artists and musicians – social outcasts in a sense – are drawn to the escapist offerings of drugs and alcohol. Some creatives claim that the world is too inhospitable, and that art becomes more accessible once substances are added.

LOVE, HATE, AND COMPETITION AMONGST FRIENDS

Taylor-Taylor and Newcombe’s relationship has often been described as a love-hate affair. Like brothers, they wrote songs in the psychedelic and championed one another’s music. In the beginning, that is. As Taylor-Taylor stated, “No one likes to see their friends succeed.” Perhaps the rise of The Dandy Warhols, which Newcombe outspokenly opposed, was enough to make enemies out of the friends. From a position of comfort and power, Taylor-Taylor never spoke ill of Newcombe and his music. Yet rivalry lives in all of us, and from the floor of his life, Newcombe’s jealousy was masked in a seething superiority.

CREATIVE INTEGRITY AND SURVIVAL

“I love making music,” stated Newcombe. In it for the music, for the pure love of putting sound down on tape, Newcombe had contemplated the notion of “selling out” for years. Virtuously homeless, his struggle was a test of survival, one that many artists have battled since the beginning of time. While The Dandy Warhols boom-boomed to the corporate dotted line, they faced battles of a different sort. Taylor-Taylor’s bosses pressured him for pop singles rather than solid album material and rejected the work he invested his heart into. The intersection of business and art has, is, and possibly always will be a messy one.

“[Anton] is like this brilliant monster creator of art. He’s always ahead.”

Courtney Taylor-Taylor

“I don’t do anything wrong. That’s why I don’t say I’m sorry.”

Anton Newcombe

“We are a lucky band. They are a not lucky band.”

Peter Holmström

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Before watching DIG!, were you a fan of either The Dandy Warhols and/or The Brian Jonestown Massacre? Has your idea of the bands shifted after viewing the film?
2. Do you play any instruments? If so, have you ever played in a group? What was that experience like?
3. Does an artist have to “sell-out” in some capacity in order to make it big time, or just to make a living?
4. Many musicians are known to have heavy substance addictions. What is it about music and drugs or alcohol that go so well together?
5. After watching DIG!, would you rather have a conversation with Courtney Taylor-Taylor or Anton Newcombe?
6. What is the relationship between artistic genius and ego? How does one affect the other?
7. Why are more men than women apart of touring rock ‘n’ roll bands?
8. When it comes to music, are you more interested in the lyrics or the sounds? Which one carries a greater message for you?
9. Rather than vying against one another, how could The Brian Jonestown Massacre and The Dandy Warhols have worked together to the benefit of both bands?
10. How did Courtney Taylor-Taylor’s narration of the film inform your viewing? Did his voice engender more compassion towards his band than Newcombe’s?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- DIG! was awarded the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004.
- Over the course of 7 years of filming DIG!, director Ondi Timoner collected 1,500 hours of footage. She self-funded the project, which cost \$500,000, by working as a director of television shows and music videos under the time she was filming. Although she sought out editorial direction at one point, Timoner directed, shot, and edited the film in its entirety on her own.
- The Dandy Warhols, who created their name as a play on pop artist Andy Warhol's name, formed in 1994 in Portland, Oregon. Once Courtney Taylor-Taylor's cousin Brent DeBoer joined the band as the drummer in 1998, the core members were fixed. The band released their first live album, "Thirteen Tales from Urban Bohemia Live at the Wonder" in 2014 and continue to record and play live. In addition to writing songs, Taylor-Taylor sells his own red wine, Chateau Taylor-Taylor, "a perfect compliment to spicy foods."
- The Dandy Warhols' drummer sings and plays guitar in Australian band, Immigrant Union.
- The Brian Jonestown Massacre, who created their name as a combination of The Rolling Stone's guitarist's name (Brian Jones) and the mass cult suicide in Jonestown, Guyana, formed in 1990 in San Francisco, California. Anton Newcombe now lives in Berlin. He has been the only continuous member throughout the years.
- Courtney Taylor-Taylor allegedly earned \$1.5 million in royalties from Vodafone's usage of "Bohemian Like You." He used part of the earnings to purchase a quarter of a city block in Portland and transformed it into The Odditorium, a psychedelic playhouse, recording studio, club, and rehearsal space.
- Anton Newcombe of The Brian Jonestown Massacre founded his own record label in 2001, The Committee to Keep Music Evil.
- Filmmaker Ondi Timoner graduated cum laude from Yale University with a major in Film, Theater, and Literature Studies. She founded A Total Disruption, a web channel for people who use technology to "disrupt outdated industries, empower people, and change the world." In 2011, Timoner directed the opening film for President Bill Clinton's birthday fundraiser concert at the Hollywood Bowl, which starred Jay-Z.
- In 2005, the U.N. estimated that over 50 million people worldwide regularly used cocaine, heroin, and other synthetic drugs. Heroin is taken for its relaxing properties and ability to induce intense euphoria. Injecting cocaine and heroin together is referred to as a speedball. Smoking the two drugs together is known as moonrocks.
- When Newcombe shouted "You fucking broke my sitar, motherfucker!" – the most famous quote from DIG! – he was referring to his 20-string sitar instrument that came from India.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others a chance to dive into the world of music.
2. Make an effort to discover more independent music. Try websites like [Soundcloud](#), [Mixcloud](#), or [Bandcamp](#).
3. Read "One Model Nation", a graphic novel co-written by Courtney Taylor-Taylor of The Dandy Warhols.
4. Be aware of that no matter how cool or hip musicians may appear as they indulge in bad habits, drugs are not necessary for a successful music career. [Recovery](#) has many tips to help people stop abusing drugs and alcohol.
5. Try to imagine yourself encouraging those around you, rather than competing negatively. Positive breeds positive, and good towards others brings good back toward yourself.

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.