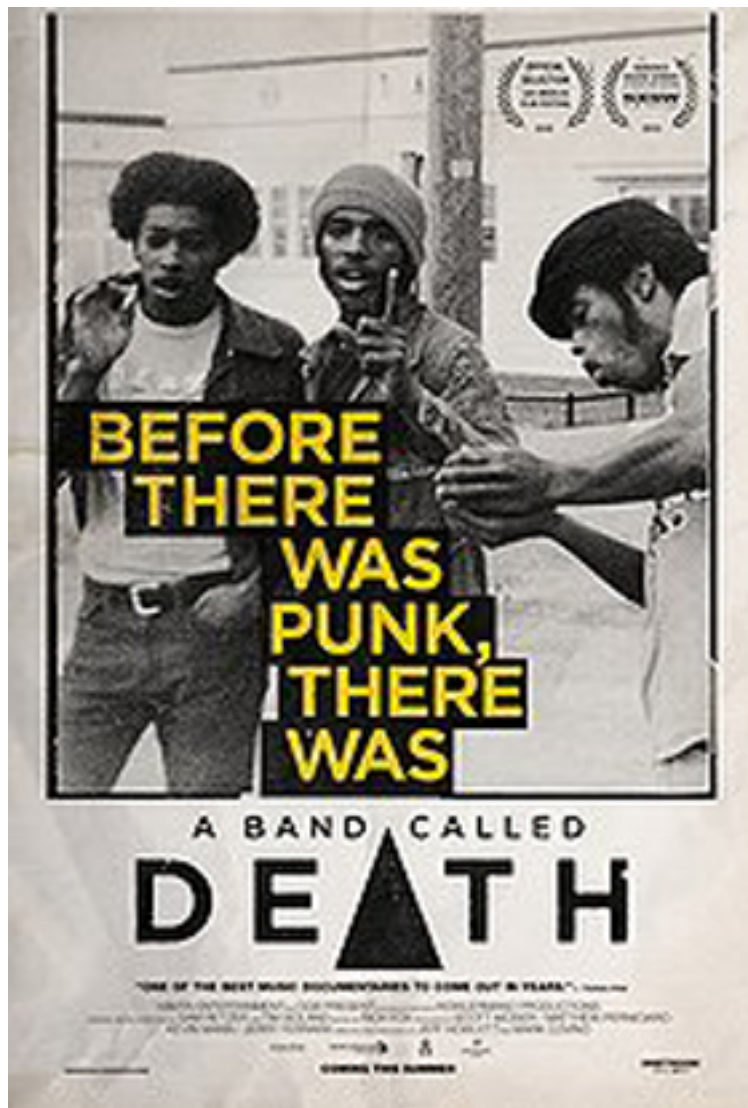


Reverential Rockumentary amounts to a very good movie about a very bad band

Written by Kam Williams



"A Band Called Death"

After hearing some heavy metal in the early Seventies, Dannis, Bobby and David Hackney decided to make a big change in the type of music they were performing. Up until then, the African-American siblings from Detroit had been playing a blend of R&B and rock as the Rock Fire Funk Express.

Then, the guys came up with a new name, Death, and a new sound perhaps best described as an atonal precursor of punk, although the genre hadn't yet come into existence as of yet. They signed a record deal with a prominent local promoter (not Motown), but the album was deep-sixed before it ever got pressed into vinyl. No surprise to this listener, judging by the demos.

Searching for a viable alternative career path in music, the trio eventually moved to Vermont where they did get to release a couple of gospel albums as The 4th Movement. But when that dream of superstardom failed to materialize, David moved back home, while Dannis and Bobby remade themselves as a reggae group, Lambsbread, with Bobbie Duncan replacing their brother on guitar.

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Lambsbread failed to capture the fans' imagination either. In 2000, chain-smoker David passed away of lung cancer, and that might've been the end of the story, given that Hackneys had barely registered a bleep on Rock & Roll's radar.

However, Death is now belatedly being put on the map with the help of such rock icons as Henry Rollins, Alice Cooper, Kid Rock, Questlove along with actor Elijah Wood. Are you a big fan of punk? Neither am I. Nor was I during my formative years when the atonal genre came of age.

Listen, the personal anecdotes in "A Band Called Death" are extremely entertaining, and often touching, especially when Dannis and Bobby express their irrepressible fondness for their dearly departed sibling. I suppose music is in the ear of the behearer, but as for the suggestion that this average garage band were somehow visionaries ahead of their time, I just don't think so.

Very Good (3 stars)

Unrated

Running time: 98 minutes

Distributor: Drafthouse Films

To see a trailer for A Band Called Death, visit:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDPDm9_nX0o