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Scott Walker: 30th Century Man

(U.K.-U.S.) A Verve Pictures release (in the U.K.) of a Missing in Action Films, Plastic Palace production. (International sales: Moviehouse Intl., London.) Produced by Mia Bays, Stephen Kijak, Elizabeth Rose. Executive producers, David Bowie, Mark Vennis, Gary Phillips, Colin Burch, Julia Short. Directed, written by Stephen Kijak.

By [EDDIE COCKRELL](#)

A reclusive musician steps out from the shadows in absorbing docu "Scott Walker: 30th Century Man." Longtime fans of Walker's warm, sepulchral baritone, startlingly evocative songwriting and lushly imaginative instrumentation will rejoice at this revealing docu, while pic will garner converts via fest play, limited arthouse exposure and rich ancillary.

Though he hasn't performed publicly in three decades, Walker writes and performs original albums roughly every 10 years. Sparse output, combined with roller-coaster industry history and That Voice, has resulted in a cadre of disparate yet influential fans that include onscreen acolytes David Bowie (pic's lead exec producer), Radiohead, Brian Eno, Ute Lemper, Jarvis Cocker, Lulu, Marc Almond, Damon Albarn, Allison Goldfrapp, Gavin Friday and even Sting.

Born Noel Scott Engel in 1943, the singer had brief fame as a teen idol before joining up in 1964 with John Maus and Gary Leeds to form the Walker Brothers. String of hits included "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine (Anymore)" and "Make It Easy on Yourself."

Band's dissolution in 1967 led to an up-and-down solo career for Walker that included a brief mid-1970s reformation. He's made three albums since 1980, each showcasing music that is confrontational, even frightening, while remaining seductive and unique.

Helmer and fan Stephen Kijak had cameras rolling as Walker prepped his 2006 disc "The Drift." "I'm not a get-up-and-sing-a-song singer," Walker says at one point. And, later: "Can we listen to (song playback) on the big speakers? I have no intention of listening to it ever again, and I'd like to remember it this way." Walker's unorthodox approach to capturing sounds is epitomized when he encourages a session percussionist to pound out a beat on a pig carcass.

Kijak's most interesting wrinkle is to have animators illustrate passages from the artist's unclassifiable songs. Balance of tech package is admirably unflashy, allowing Walker's distinctive music -- one talking head calls it "beauty in melancholy" -- to remain at the fore.

Camera (color), Grant Gee; editors, Gee, Mat Whitecross; music, various; music supervisors, Fiona McBlane, Sophie Urquhart, Tanya Sweeney; sound, Rashad Omar; sound designer, Joakim Sundstrom; associate producers, Gale Harold, David Sefton. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Panorama), Feb. 16, 2007. (Also in Dublin, Glasgow, South by Southwest, Thessaloniki, NatFilm Denmark, HotDocs film festivals.) Running time: 96 MIN.

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