

# 'The Velvet Underground' is brilliantly constructed rockumentary

By Jocelyn Noveck

As a young man starting college, director Todd Haynes fell immediately for the Velvet Underground — the band which, musician Brian Eno famously said, didn't sell many records, but everyone who bought one went and started a band.

It sounds like the storyline of a great fictional music film: Amidst the flower-power hippie era, a rock band emerges from the New York avant-garde art scene with the opposite ethos, dressed in black with an outsider vibe, singing about drugs and seedy sex. This group of unlikely personalities and unwieldy talent collaborates with Andy Warhol on edgy shows that meld music, visual art and performance — a unique mix that brings little commercial success. But the band will be credited as one of the most influential in rock history.

"The Velvet Underground," Haynes' wonderfully idiosyncratic, brilliantly constructed rock doc — or rockumentary? — tells just that story. And it's true.

Unless you are, like Haynes, a diehard fan of the band that launched the career of Lou Reed and was managed by Warhol, you might find it surprising that some refer to it in the same breath as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. But such is the regard in which the Velvet Underground is held by many, who point to its influence on punk and other styles — even though it lasted some six years before the mercurial Reed walked away in 1970, and never achieved real mainstream success.

Whatever your level of familiarity, Haynes' doc — the first for this accomplished director — is so stylistically compelling, it doesn't really matter what you knew coming in.

His aim is not merely to tell the story of the Velvet Underground,

through interviews and an astonishingly vast collection of archival material (all shot before the early '70s), including generous snippets of avant-garde filmmaking. He seems, in his idiosyncratic, non-linear style, to be trying to create the documentary version of a Velvet Underground show.

Most importantly, Haynes uses a split-screen technique for virtually the entire two hours, an effect that is much more than technical. It's as if one viewpoint would never suffice; there's always another, even if it's just a photo of a pensive Reed, implicitly casting skepticism over what someone is saying. Or munching on a Hershey's chocolate bar.

## Visuals

And we don't just mean two screens. At points, there are 12 screens telling the story, combinations of still and moving images. The spirit seems aligned with those multimedia shows in the mid-'60s, where Warhol would project his dreamlike screen visuals as the Velvets played and an eclectic audience danced (even Rudolf Nureyev.)

Haynes' dazzling visuals are grounded by interviews with the two living band members — most extensively John Cale, the Welshman and classically trained violinist who formed a potent partnership with the Long Island-born Reed. The other is drummer Maureen "Moe" Tucker, who has a great line when describing how the Velvets diverged from hippie culture: Peace and love? "We hated that. Get real," she says dismissively.

One man who couldn't be interviewed: Reed himself, who died in 2013 after a long solo career. Haynes has gathered up seemingly every audio clip and piece of archival footage he can, and is able to capture the dangerous energy of a young Reed — someone who, rather than perform a show he didn't feel like doing, smashed his fist into a pane

of glass.

Also gone, of course, is Warhol, who died in 1987 and pops up in quick clips, and Nico — the German singer whose blonde allure and stage presence helped secure the group its first record contract.

Haynes begins in the early '60s when the group didn't have its name or its sound yet, playing to such little acclaim, Reed says, that "we had to change our name a lot because nobody would hire us."

But, we learn, Reed knew what he wanted: "I want to be rich and I want to be a rock star."

The film tracks the band's history from its founding to that 1967 first album, "The Velvet Underground & Nico," their downtown shows, touring performances, a West Coast stint, the second album "White Love/White Heat," and the departure of Nico. "She was a wanderer," Cale says.

The temperamental Reed fires Warhol, then forces Cale out. "I didn't know how to please him," Cale says. "You tried to be nice, he'd hate you more."

Finally, Reed himself walks away. "We weren't getting anywhere near what he wanted us to achieve," Tucker explains. "It was, 'Damnit, when is it going to happen?'"

But they made an impact. Perhaps the best line of all comes from Danny Fields, music manager and publicist. "They had shined so brightly that no space could contain that amount of light being put out," he says. "You need physics to describe that band at its height."

"The Velvet Underground," an Apple TV+ release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America "for language, sexual content, nudity and some drug material." Running time: 121 minutes. Three stars out of four. (AP)

Film

## Variety



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Judy Greer, (from left), Jamie Lee Curtis and Andi Matichak in 'Halloween Kills,' directed by David Gordon Green. (AP)

## Film

Sequel is bloody, violent and chaotic

# 'Halloween Kills' is a gruesome mess

By Lindsey Bahr

The poor folks of Haddonfield, Illinois, are having the worst and longest Halloween ever. It seems one movie wasn't enough to contain Michael Myers' 40th anniversary rampage.

"Halloween Kills" picks up at the moment David Gordon Green's 2018 "Halloween" ended. Deputy Frank Hawkins (Will Patton) is bleeding out from a neck wound. Michael Myers is burning in a basement and Jamie Lee Curtis' Laurie Strode is riding in the back of a pickup truck to the hospital with her guts literally spilling out alongside her daughter Karen (Judy Greer) and granddaughter Allyson (Andi Matichak).

The big problem is that "Halloween Kills" is less of a sequel than a half-baked interlude before the finale. It is a bloody, violent, chaotic and cynical mess and not even in a good or particularly scary or insightful way. Poor Laurie Strode is stripped of anything exciting to do and is instead confined to a hospital where she's recovering from having her organs put back together.

While it is admirable of Green and his co-writers Danny McBride and Scott Teems to commit to the reality of Laurie's injury and not have her conveniently, immediately and miraculously recover, it is still a bummer that Jamie Lee Curtis doesn't have more to do, especially if this is her penultimate showing in the role.

"Halloween Kills" attempts to tie the present to the past once more, often reflecting on the events of 1978 (there is probably a dangerous drinking game to be played for every time someone says "40 years ago"). This is done through flashbacks to 1978, where a young, more skittish Deputy Hawkins (Thomas Mann) botches a chance to kill Michael, and by bringing back minor characters who evaded his knife the first time around.

So they have Kyle Richards, who has gone on to "Real Housewives" infamy, back as Lindsey Wallace, and Nancy Stephens as Marion Chambers.

Tommy Doyle, the little kid Laurie babysat in 1978, has been recast again and this time is played by Anthony Michael Hall, who has a little support group going with his fellow survivors. They gather at a dive bar on Halloween to remember and pay tribute to the victims, but soon their ritual is interrupted by breaking news: He's back and making his way through the town. Tommy rallies a vigilante mob to ensure that "evil dies tonight."

The previous film was smart to delve into the idea of the generational trauma for characters like Laurie and her family. But this installment botches its loftier ambitions. As Michael racks up a remarkable kill count, "Halloween Kills" tries to get us to consider whether \*WE'RE\* the real monsters.

## Parody

This would all theoretically be fine if we were following humans that we either cared about or who were at least entertaining to watch. These characters talk exclusively in trailer-ready quips that sound like parody. Aside from Laurie, the only people that I cared to know more about were the couple who live in Michael's house and spend Halloween night watching John Cassavetes' "Love Streams," smoking marijuana and eating charcuterie. But like most everyone we meet in the film, Big John (Scott MacArthur) and Little John (Michael McDonald) are not long for the world.

It's hard to overstate just how cluttered and ugly the film is too. How could it possibly be from the man who made lyrical and poignant indies like "George Washington" and "All the Real Girls"? But perhaps the biggest sin is that it doesn't feel like a movie. "Halloween Kills" is a board-clearing pit stop.

"Halloween Kills," a Universal Pictures release in theaters and on Peacock Premium Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language, grisly images, some drug use, strong bloody violence." Running time: 105 minutes. One and a half stars out of four.

## Also:

**LOS ANGELES:** The union representing film and television crews says its 60,000 members will begin a nationwide strike on Monday if it does not reach a deal that satisfies demands for fair and safe working conditions.

A strike would bring a halt to filming on a broad swath of film and television productions and extend well beyond Hollywood, affecting productions in Georgia, New Mexico and other North American shoots.

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees International President **Matthew Loeb** said Wednesday that the strike would begin at 12:01 a.m. Monday unless an agreement is reached on rest and meal periods and pay for its lowest-paid workers.

Loeb cited a lack of urgency in the pace of negotiations for setting a strike date.

"Without an end date, we could keep talking forever," Loeb said in a statement. "Our members deserve to have their basic needs addressed now."

A strike would be a serious setback for an industry that had recently returned to work after long pandemic shutdowns and recurring aftershocks amid new outbreaks.

"There are five whole days left to reach a deal," said **Jarryd Gonzales**, a publicist for the group representing the studios. "Studios will continue to negotiate in good faith in an effort to reach an agreement for a new contract that will keep the industry working."

As in other industries, many behind-the-scenes people started reevaluating their lives and the demands of their professions during the pandemic. And now that production is ramping up again, union leaders say the "catch-up" is resulting in worse working conditions.

"Folks have reported working conditions deteriorating and being aggravated," **Jonas Loeb**, IATSE's director of communication told the AP last week. "And these 60,000 behind the scenes workers that are under these contracts are really at a breaking point." (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** More than a decade after it last aired, "Law & Order" is coming back to NBC.

The network has announced that it is bringing the cops-and-courts police drama back for a 21st season. When the show left the airwaves in May 2010, it was tied with "Gunsmoke" for the longest running prime-time TV drama.

NBC says the series will keep the split format of focusing on police officers investigating crime and the prosecutors who take the cases to court. No cast or premiere date have been announced.

"There are few things in life that are dreams come true," series creator **Dick Wolf** said. "This is mine."

The "Law & Order" franchise lived on even after the original series was canceled, through several spinoffs including the popular "Law & Order: SVU."

Wolf's shows remain a popular draw for NBC, with his three prime-time "Chicago" series making up the network's Wednesday night schedule. The popularity of those shows help NBC beat out other networks as the new fall TV season get underway, especially with the crucial 18 through 49-year-old audience. (AP)

**CHICAGO:** Five alleged gang members have been indicted on murder charges in last year's shooting death of a Chicago rapper that prosecutors say was part of ongoing violence over gang territories on the city's South Side, officials announced Wednesday.

The US Attorney's Office in Chicago said in a news release that the O-Block gang gunned down **Carlton Weekly**, also known as "FBG Duck," in August 2020 in the fashionable Gold Coast neighborhood, and "claimed responsibility for acts of violence in Chicago and used social media and music to increase their criminal enterprise."

Charged with committing murder in aid of racketeering, assault in the aid of racketeering and various weapons charges are Chicago residents **Charles Liggins**, 30, **Kenneth Roberson**, 28, **Tacarlos Offerd**, 30, **Christopher Thomas**, 22, and **Marcus Smart**, 22.

At an afternoon court hearing, Liggins, Offerd, Thomas and Smart entered pleas of not guilty, and the judge ordered that they

remain in custody pending detention hearings. Roberson was not in court and the US Attorney's Office said his initial hearing was not scheduled.

Weekly was standing outside a store on Oak Street in broad daylight when two men climbed from two vehicles, opened fire, then climbed back into the vehicles and



Weekly



Wolf

drove off. Weekly was killed and a woman and another man were injured. Police said it appeared to be a "targeted" attack on either Weekly or another man nearby. The Chicago Tribune reported that police determined the 26-year-old Weekly may have been targeted because days earlier he had made a video in which he disparaged rival

gang members who had died. Liggins, Offerd, Thomas, and Smart were arrested Wednesday morning, and Roberson was already in custody in **Cook County Jail**, according to the release.

The federal murder count carries a mandatory minimum sentence of life in prison and a maximum sentence of the death

penalty. Investigators have said for years that most killings in Chicago have tie to gang conflicts, which sometimes begin as online beefs that spill into real world violence. Arresting suspects in gang killings can be especially difficult because witnesses are reluctant to come forward. (AP)