

Posted: Fri., Aug. 10, 2001, 4:29pm PT

Won't Anybody Listen

Docu



A Seventh Art Releasing release and presentation of a Gestating Pictures production, in association with Integrated Entertainment. Produced by Dov Kelemer. Executive producers, Frank Rogala, Vince Rogala. Directed, written by Dov Kelemer.

With: Art Aviles, Robert Aviles, Roxanne Aviles, Lori Graves-Bartolini, Mark Billes, Hugo Burnham, Robin Canada, C. Tucker Cheadle, Keith Dean, Bob Diamond, Bruce Duff, Len Fagen, Lonnn Friend, Danny Goodwin, Rich Heaton, Nina Heller, Chuck Hohn, Lance Hubp, Jeff Jampo, Tom Kidd, Chris Martin, Lena Michaels, Ron Perron, Doug Priestap, Frank Rogala, Rose Rogala, Vince Rogala, Billy Rose, Barry Squire, Katherine Turman, Jim Washburn.

By SCOTT FOUNDAS

That rare film about a talented band that tries but fails to "make it" in the music biz, Dov Kelemer's "Won't Anybody Listen" chronicles nearly a decade in the lives of SoCal hard-rockers NC-17 and emerges an intriguing, cautionary parable about the fickle nature of stardom. Docu, which follows the heavy-metal sextet from its arrival on the Los Angeles club scene in the early 1990s through a grueling, multiyear struggle to make ends meet while constantly writing, recording, performing and chasing ever-elusive A&R execs, is a potent antidote to the current "Behind the Music" vogue. There are no overnight success stories here, no tales of stunning midcareer comebacks, no cinders turned into Cinderella stories. Such events, Kelemer suggests, are less likely than a camel's passage through the eye of a needle. Strong returns from specialized venues should await niche docu distrib Seventh Art.

Kelemer begins by introducing us to NC-17 front men Frank and Vince Rogala, brothers hailing from spec-on-the-map Mackinaw City, Mich., (population 1,600) who travel to California in hopes of finding an audience more receptive to their loud, aggressive rock music. Pic resists the temptation to sentimentalize the Rogalas' journey or to position NC-17 as modern rock music's one great undiscovered act. Instead, while celebrating the dedication of NC-17's members and, particularly, the Rogalas' all-consuming passion for playing music, Kelemer takes the long view -- that there are literally thousands of gifted, dedicated acts striving, with equal force, to keep their heads above water in the overcrowded rock gene pool.

Through interviews with an all-star lineup of rock critics, entertainment attorneys and surprisingly self-critical major-label A&R execs, Kelemer hits upon a series of unguarded revelations about the inner workings of major record labels: the understaffed A&R divisions; the scouts who would rather stay in their hotel rooms than go out to see a band; and the execs who won't listen to unsolicited material.

Just getting that first record deal is battle enough (and one that NC-17 has yet to win), but then there are the "creative accounting" protocols that bill the costs of recording an album directly to the artist. It may be, as one interviewee suggests, the only business in the world whose employees pay to work there.

"Won't Anybody Listen" is richly satisfying both as subversive, music-biz primer and as gritty, true-life underdog story. Kelemer and cinematographer Dominic Pereira photograph the NC-17 bandmates and their significant others in low-light, black-and-white environs that offer the look of a second-generation surveillance video. Pic is rousing, without ever getting too corny, in its depiction of six guys who just want to quit their blue-collar day jobs and play music for a living.

Camera (color/B&W, video), Dominic Pereira; editor, Richard King; sound, Randy Crawford, Josh Ling, Brett Wettlaufer, Doug Whitney. Reviewed at Hollywood Film Festival, Aug. 4, 2001. Running time: 73 MIN.