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BOOK REVIEW: SOFT IN THE MIDDLE; THE CONTEMPORARY SOFTCORE FEATURE IN ITS CONTENTS

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music moreso than the guitar histrionics and psychedelic excess often attributed to him.

Cross concludes with an intriguing if too brief discussion of what is arguably the most important component of the Hendrix legacy up to the present day. Although Hendrix died with his finances in disarray, today the Hendrix estate is among the most lucrative in popular music. It is also one that has been mired in legal acrimony and controversy almost from the moment Hendrix passed away. The \$80 million empire which has developed around Hendrix is now controlled by an entity called Experience Hendrix, and other parties have intervened as well, most significantly billionaire Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen, whose Experience Music Project in Seattle features an array of Hendrix artifacts of which Allen now has exclusive ownership. Given Allen's prominence in articulating the Hendrix legacy for contemporary audiences, it is unfortunate that Cross mentions him only in passing. While perhaps beyond the scope of the book, Allen's role is one that certainly demands further exploration.

This caveat aside, *Room Full of Mirrors* is the most comprehensive and authoritative treatment of Jimi Hendrix. While not the last word on the subject, it is well written and free of the hagiography that too often mars rock star biographies. It should prove a helpful resource to students of 1960s rock music culture and a useful supplement to popular music survey courses.

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Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts.
David Andrews. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006.

From the documentary films showing nudist camps in the 1920s, to the exploitation films of the 1930s and 1940s, the human body has been used to pique the interest of filmgoers. Burlesque and the "peep" films of the 1950s, and earlier, also influenced this genre. This is where softcore ultimately has its roots. Softcore films are not quite hardcore pornography, but they do rely on sexual situations and the showing of naked bodies, usually female. There are very few monographs that look

at the impact and history of softcore films. Luckily that is changed with David Andrews' *Soft in the Middle*. While Andrews, who teaches literature and film at the University of Illinois at Chicago, focuses on the contemporary softcore film (1970–2005), he also provides some historical background.

Although some feminists point to softcore features as just another attempt to degrade women for the entertainment of men, Andrews is quick to point out that many of these films portray heroines who have their own lives, and choose their own sex partners. In these films, the women are in control, not the men. Much of softcore filmmaking is "largely nonviolent and antisogynistic" (11). In the contemporary softcore feature, a unique subgenre, the softcore thriller, has become very popular. These films have their roots in mainstream films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992).

If softcore ever had the likes of a Stephen Spielberg, it would be Zalman King. His mainstream, steamy films like *9 Weeks* (1986), *Two Moon Junction* (1988), and *Delta of Venus* (1995) all did nicely. But it is King's softcore serials and features that garner the most interest and study. King's serial, *Red Shoe Dairies* (1982–89), played on Showtime to a wide audience and did well on video. King applies a unique structure and filmmaking techniques to his visual style, such as "soft lighting, lens and filters . . . saturated coloration, plush draperies and fashions, slow motion, and very languid pacing" (113).

Chapter ten, which looks at the modern softcore label, Seduction Cinema, a label of Independent Cinema, is one of the most interesting chapters in Andrew's book. Seduction has spawned its own empire in which most of the films are made for around \$50,000 and have done very well on the home video market. Seduction has its own list of "stars" which includes Misty Mundae, Darian Caine, and A. J. Khan, and it spoofs major feature films with titles like *Erotic Witch Project* (1999), *Lord of the G-Strings* (2003), and *Play-Mate of the Apes* (2002), among many others. Seduction respects its fans, many of whom are women.

While *Soft In the Middle* mentions horror's role in various softcore films, it does not study this phenomenon in any detail, nor does it look at directors like Jean Rollin, Jess Franco, Joe D'Amato, or Bruno Mattei, who have produced and directed horror softcore features. Softcore horror films like *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead* (1979) or *Porno Holocaust* (1981) are not discussed. However, they would not have fit very well into the context of this book.

Soft in the Middle is a fascinating study into a world of filmmaking that was never before examined, in any detail. Andrews has set a high standard for other film historians, critics, and academics to follow. *Soft in the Middle* certainly deserves to be in all academic libraries. It is suitable to be used as a textbook for courses in universities and colleges, and is recommended for anyone with a passing interest in softcore films.

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