

VARIETY

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I Trust You To Kill Me

(Documentary)

A Motion Picture Group presentation of an MRB Prods. production. Produced by Pliny Porter, Matthew Brady.
Directed by Manu Boyer.

With: Rocco DeLuca & the Burden, Kiefer Sutherland.

By **JOE LEYDON**

Deftly mixing alternating tracks of playful rowdiness, thoughtful introspection, ferociously slamming rock and not-so-quiet desperation, helmer Manu Boyer scores impressively with "I Trust You to Kill Me," arguably the best rockumentary since "Some Kind of Monster." Surprisingly compelling pic accompanies Kiefer Sutherland on tour as road manager for Rocco DeLuca & the Burden, up-and-comers signed to the actor's Ironworks Music indie label. But even though Sutherland figures prominently, and confides revealingly, doc's theatrical and homevid prospects may rely more heavily on whether DeLuca and his group can achieve breakout chart and concert-hall success.

Frequent performance sequences showcase the dynamic DeLuca -- wailing Robert Plant-style vocals to sliding Dobro guitar riffs -- as a soulfully intense talent who fuses jazz, rock, blues and folk elements to potent impact. Off-stage, however, the sad-eyed singer-songwriter comes off as far more reserved, if not downright melancholy, as he candidly discusses his ambivalence about the music industry, and recalls an unhappy childhood spent neglected by distant parents.

Without ever pushing too hard, helmer Boyer pointedly suggests that Sutherland's own mixed feelings about his famous father, Donald Sutherland, may have led him to view DeLuca as something of a kindred spirit. Sutherland virtually admits as much during interview sequences shot in moody black-and-white.

Pic is appreciably livelier when it is more colorful, literally as well as figuratively, while detailing the difficulties faced by any unknown band -- even one backed by a widely recognized film and TV star -- during its first international tour.

"I Trust You to Kill Me" (the name of group's first CD) is consistently amusing, and occasionally hilarious, as it follows DeLuca and bandmates Ryan Carman (drums), Dave Beste (bass) and Greg Velasquez (percussion) through a series of demanding gigs in small clubs scattered throughout London, Dublin, Reykjavic and Berlin. A highlight is their performance of "Soul," the best tune on their debut CD, which nearly blasts the paint off the stage in a Berlin basement club.

At every stop, Sutherland exploits his celebrity as star of worldwide TV phenom "24" to grant timely interviews that will enable him to plug the band. And whenever that proves inadequate, he's not ashamed to simply patrol the streets outside a club and give away tickets to amazed passers-by who can't believe they're seeing who they're seeing.

Sutherland's avid support for the band borders on the obsessive -- at one point, he gets an elaborate tattoo to express his zeal; in fact, his willingness to risk look ridiculous on camera emerges as his most engaging trait during the pic.

Cynics might be tempted to dismiss "I Trust You to Kill Me" as a feature-length promotional tool. But pic can be enjoyed, and respected, by auds who care little for DeLuca's music. At its frequent best, the artfully crafted doc earns respect as an insightful and arresting behind-the-scenes look at what any band must endure to make that first lunge at the brass ring.

Camera (color/B&W, DV), Francois Buren, Jerome Blois; editors, Jennifer Tiexiera, Erin Nordstrom; sound, Dave Wagg. Reviewed at Nashville Film Festival (Music Films in Music City), April 23, 2006. Running time: 105 MIN.