



# Closer to the grim truth

## DOCUMENTARY

### Joy Division

(95 minutes, M)

★★½

**The players:** Ian Curtis, Peter Hook, Stephen Morris, Peter Saville, Bernard Sumner, Tony Wilson.

**Behind the scenes:** Directed by Grant Gee, written by Jon Savage.

**The plot:** The story of the brief flowering of Joy Division, often credited with the revival of pop music in the 80s.

→ In short: Joy to the world.

**T**HE Manchester post-punk group Joy Division, as we learned in last year's bleak biopic *Control*, was anything but a band of happy campers.

Raised amid the post-war gloom of industrial Manchester in England's grimy northwest, the quartet's charismatic lead singer, Ian Curtis, who was bipolar and suffered from epilepsy, eventually killed himself.

*Control* was based on the autobiography of his widow, Deborah, and detailed the trag-

ically short life of the tortured but gifted Curtis (played by Sam Riley), especially the events leading to the break-up of their marriage and the singer's suicide.

Intriguingly, this documentary does not invite Deborah Curtis on camera, although it does quote from her book, and the couple's break-up is barely acknowledged.

Instead, *Joy Division* sticks to the facts and presents a well-researched and detailed account of the band's brief flowering, with the grotty Manchester of old as a backdrop.

While things may have been grim "up north", there was obviously something in the water there in the '70s and early '80s.

TV host-turned-music-entrepreneur Tony Wilson — a

key player in Michael Winterbottom's raucous *24 Hour Party People* — was one of those going out on a limb to promote alternative music and became a key player in the band's success.

Wilson, who died last year, is among those offering their thoughts on the band between clips from performances in live venues and on TV.

Some of the clips zoom in on the jerky figure of Curtis, suggesting, as someone notes, "as if

he sacrificed something for you" in his physically and emotionally draining performances.

Writer Jon Savage, a veteran music critic, has diligently done his homework. Among the nuggets comes the revelation that Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner hated listening to *Unknown Pleasures* and Peter Saville, who designed an acclaimed LP sleeve, had never heard their music.

And it's Sumner who nails the reason why the band was so influential.

Noting Joy Division moved beyond head-banging punk anger for anger's sake to a more thoughtful brand of music, Sumner says: "Sooner or later somebody was going to want to say more than 'f--- you' ... to say 'I'm f---ed'."

CLARK FORBES



Looking back: Joy Division's bass player, Peter Hook.