

**Madonna Revealed: I'm Going to Tell You A Secret**  
**Documentary Review By Alan Bennett Ilagan**

When last we saw Madonna in a documentary, 1991's *Truth or Dare*, she was going down on a water bottle, flashing her boobs, and simulating masturbation. No such thrilling antics are on display in this year's documentary *I'm Going To Tell You A Secret*, but the film shows she's still got quite a bit of entertaining showgirl in her.

Following 2004's Re-invention Tour as it spans North America and Europe, *Secret* shows a vastly different Madonna from the often-difficult diva on exhibition in *Truth or Dare*. Today's performer is a family girl at heart, and a spiritually enlightened preacher. A surprisingly humble film in many respects, it shows a vulnerability that previous work only hinted at. Sure she knows the camera is on, but at this point in her career it's probable that she's no longer quite so aware of it, or simply doesn't care. Unlike *Truth or Dare*, in which she continuously played up for the camera's relentless presence, *Secret* offers a more intimate look at her life, particularly in its revealing portrait of Madonna's family life.

In 1991 her "family" consisted mainly of her dancers and back-up singers, while real family members made brief cameos. Today's Madonna is a wife and mother and daughter, whose real family is clearly first and foremost in her mind. The bits featuring her Dad are moving, and seem much more relaxed and genuine than the uncomfortable awkwardness so palpable in *Truth or Dare*. Her relationship with husband Guy Ritchie is a subtle grounding thread that runs through the film, and her assessment of their marriage is a genuine, almost mundane, take on the bliss and strife of marital life.

"There's no such thing as the perfect soul-mate," she says in a voice-over as the camera captures Guy and son Rocco fishing. "It's not easy having a good marriage, but I don't want easy. Easy doesn't make you grow, easy doesn't make you think. I thank God every day that I am married to a man that makes me think. That's my definition of true love."

It's interesting to compare her "family" in *Truth or Dare* to her family of *Secret*. A fully integrated woman emerges in the latter, a person who has finally reconciled her family life with her profession as an entertainer. It's a difficult balance, but she manages to pull it off. Whereas *Truth or Dare* showcased Madonna finding a substitute in her dancers for the family she never felt she had, here she's got the real thing, and it's a fascinating comparison.

While it may not be as over-the-top nor as provocative as *Truth or Dare*'s outrageousness proved to be, *Secret* is filled with hilarious moments and winds up being just as entertaining a film. (Her self-effacing shots at the Las Vegas crowd who go for hot dogs during her ballads, and her exasperated boredom in a pub while celebrating Guy's birthday, are some of the funniest bits.) It does get bogged down by Madonna's preachy speeches, and the last fifteen minutes of the film showing her trip to Israel should have been judiciously excised, but for the most part this one is a lighter, happier affair, even if the world around her has gotten a bit darker.

Technically the documentary lacks the unexpected cohesion that made *Truth or Dare* a critical success. Directed by Jonas Akerlund, the film has the modern choppy-edited style of today's usual MTV fare, which ends up largely a distraction. His direction works best in five-minute videos like "Ray of Light", but he has yet to prove that he can sustain a two-hour film. The musical numbers and background soundtrack suffer the most, and die-hard fans will be dismayed by the heavy editing of most of the Re-invention performances. (The lack of such favorites as "Crazy For You", "Express Yourself", and "Into the Groove" that were so brilliantly performed on the tour is a travesty). The majestic opening opulence of "Vogue" has been drastically reduced to an incoherent echo of its original glory ~ the inventive choreography splintered into a quick-flash montage of still shots.

In *Truth or Dare*, the musical numbers were mostly intact, and each had something to do with the narrative; here they are inserted haphazardly, and the result is a more disjointed affair, at odds with the flow of the film. This is especially disappointing, as it is on stage where Madonna truly shines. She is at her butt-kicking best when singing and dancing and putting on a proper show. One can only hope that she releases a DVD of the Re-invention Tour in its entirety.

Of course, as with all things Madonna, the excitement usually has to do with what's to come. Today's documentary is a neat re-cap of her last tour, but it essentially serves to re-introduce her to the public after a few years of lackluster output. This is the month she releases her new album *Confessions on a Dance Floor*, and judging by lead-off single "Hung Up" and the advance rave reviews, it looks like this is by far the most exciting of the year's projects. Madonna on record will always trump Madonna on screen. That's something that the provocateur of 1991's *Truth or Dare* still has in common with the lady of *I'm Going to Tell You A Secret*.