

Netflix's *Wham!* is fizzy fun with a serving of music history

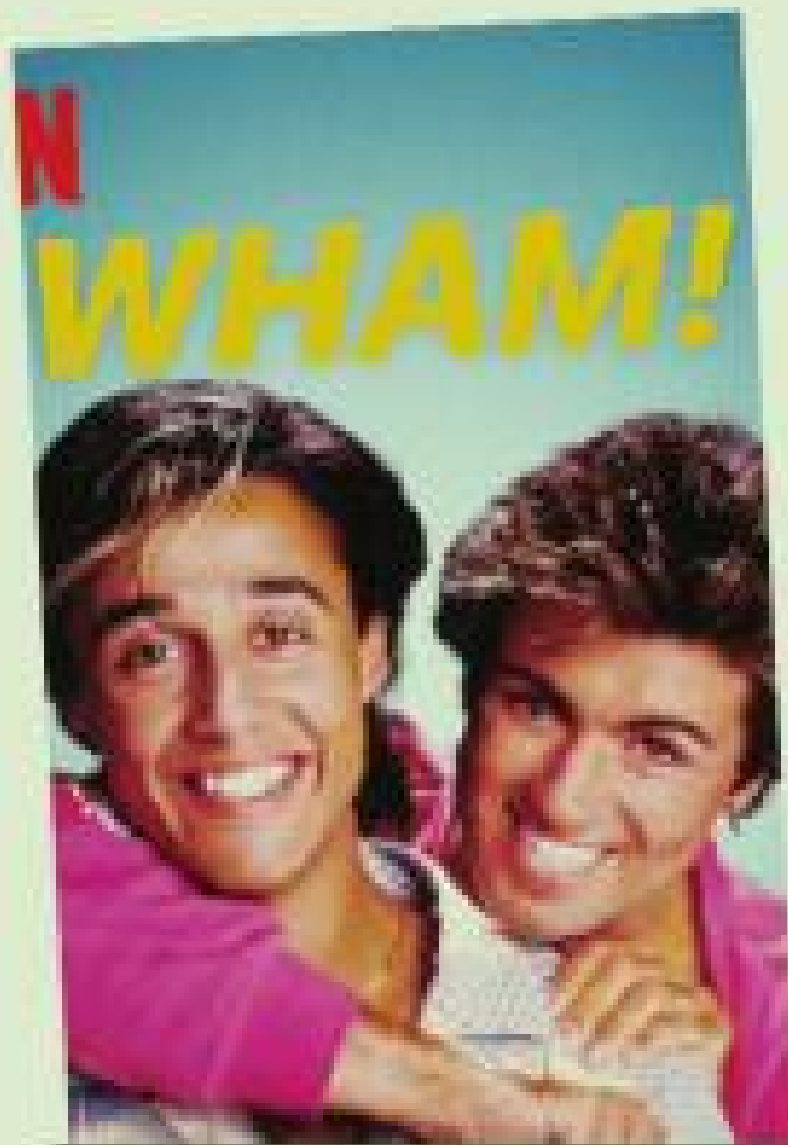
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A poignant Netflix documentary, "Wham!" documents the glorious phenomenon of pop culture in the 1980s with a focus on the pop supergroup.

Helmed by Chris Smith ("Fyre," "Operation Varsity Blues") we watch George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley as they create sensation after sensation on a journey that began with a school band called Executive in the late 1970s. The two, close friends since their boyhood days, describe their musical adventure in archival footage — a fantastic element of the roughly 90-minute work.

The documentary traces their careers from their first outing as Wham! in 1982 until 1986 when they parted. It is indeed a pleasure to relive that era when even songs rich in social commentary could be played on the dance floor. We are privy to much of the meanings behind the music from the meticulous scrapbooks which Ridgeley's mother maintained.

We also see them fondly talking about their youth, their early days of struggle as artists, and later the excitement that came with their great success. Particularly interesting is the exploration of the music itself — for example, the documentary dives deep into



the making of classic hit "Careless Whisper" and its creation, with fans and new listeners alike offered the chance to witness the Michael's talent and dedication up close. Michael took control of the recordings and the songwriting, while Ridgeley focused on curating the group's image. All in all, it is both a fascinating story about Wham!, but also about Michael's transformation into a more mature musician.

Michael died on Christmas day in 2016 at the age of 53 and besides a small cameo in 2019's "Last Christmas," Ridgeley lives the quiet life. That reality is mirrored in the documentary, with its heavy

focus on essaying Michael's talent as a solo artist.

The only disappointing factor is that Smith tells us virtually nothing after Wham! shut shop in 1986. The film could have been a limited series and we could have had many more anecdotes to savor. Instead, it stops at 90 minutes and this may be one reason why it seems so hurried, even jumpy at times. Members of the backing crew were not interviewed in any great depth, providing more of a two-dimensional view of the duo's stratospheric rise to success, but beyond that it is a fizzy, fun watch that will offer up a slice of music history.