

Now Playing - DVDS

Iggy Pop, Moog, Story of the Year, The Stranglers

Iggy Pop: Live San Fran 1981 (Target Video)

Honestly, *Live San Fran 1981* concert footage DVD is probably not going to garner Iggy Pop any new fans. It's hard to picture an 11-year-old emo kid who finds meaning in the over-produced, commercialized hissy fit of a *Good Charlotte* album picking up this DVD and understanding that this is where it all began.

For those of us who remember the punk clubs of the late '70s and early '80s, though, *Live San Fran 1981* hits you like a blow to the head from a steel-studded leather bracelet wrapped around the flailing wrist of the girl jammed in the pit next to you.

Live San Fran captures Pop at the ragged edge of his early years, post-Stooges and Ziggy/Iggy collaborations. The Terrible Twig of Primal Punk slams and bounces onto the stage in leather jacket, miniskirt, garters, and black thigh-highs, and shows that his best moments have always been live. From the frenzied spider-monkey-on-acid power jumping of "Some Weird Sin" to the subtle, stand-and-deliver observation of "I'm a Conservative" and the strangely subdued encore of "Lust for Life," he walks you through each song at his own pace. Pop seems to have toned down his stage antics for this show, choosing to let his vocals and music do the work. There is a memorable moment of indie semi-irony, though, as Pop belts out "Eggs on Plate" at a girl taking drink orders for her friends while counting her dollars. The band, including Clem Burke of Blondie on drums, is tight and focused while maintaining an exhilarating exposed energy. The set was filmed towards the end of the tour supporting Pop's 1981 album *Party*, and the months of touring have fused the band into the perfect support for Pop's electrifying performance.

Given the recording date of November 1981, some roughness might be expected. The video work, however, is at times almost too good, too clean to fully capture the itchy essence of Pop's caged tiger strut across the stage. The format does succeed at driving home the immediacy of the show. The brutal and unforgiving colors of the video set off Pop's punk intensity excellently.

Soundwise, it's almost as good as being there, which isn't exactly a good

thing. Know the lyrics before you come to the show because Pop's trademark basso profundo screechgrowl renders them fairly unintelligible.

With both Pop and punk, there's no middle ground. They're both raw, infected, and as in your face as Pop's missing teeth. That's either their charm or their curse, depending on what lifts your skirt. To capture one of the leading figures in the punk sound at a fairly undocumented time in his career on the new medium of film, however, is a practically perfect punk trifecta. It may not wow the uninitiated, but it is a staple for anyone interested in the early solo years of a punk icon. | **Jonathan Peery**

Moog (Plexifilm)

It's hard to imagine where music would be today without the synthesizer. So pervasive is the instrument in almost every genre that a sonic landscape without it seems unthinkable.

"It changed the face of music," says Rick Wakeman in *Moog*, the fascinating documentary about Robert Moog, creator of the famed device. "For the first time, you could give the guitarist a run for their money."

Wakeman appears in a couple of important scenes in *Moog*, which was directed with obvious reverence by the Dutch filmmaker Hans Fjellestad. In one scene, he tells the inventor in person, "I'll bow before you forever." As well he should; Wakeman's career as a prog-rock veteran owes more than a little to the synthesizer, not to mention that of Emerson Lake & Palmer's Keith Emerson, shown here in a performance clip. Bernie Worrell, another keyboard veteran, chats with Wakeman and talks about how "everything on it has a function." The two men also jokingly compare playing the Moog to sex ("foreplay...climax...release"). "Yes, and I could only play short solos," laughs Wakeman.

Robert Moog is a distinguished, white-haired gentleman who wears thick glasses and often has an impish smile on his face. Born in 1934, Moog grew up in New York, where, during the '50s, he and his father built theremins, the unique instrument that provided appropriately spacey music for sci-fi films of the era. So Moog quickly developed an interest in new sounds. A graduate student in physics at Cornell University, Moog published an article explaining how to build a theremin and offering do-it-yourself kits for \$49.95. He sold 1,000 the first year, and the cash flow from this endeavor allowed him to do further exploration with electronics. Moog created the first modular synth in 1964 after being inspired by experimental composer Herbert Deutsch, who told him there was a need for user-friendly electronic instruments that utilized solid-state technology. The Moog used patch

chords to select waveform (the timbre of the sound) and frequency (pitch), and the user plugged in the interface—a keyboard—rather than having to deal with the binary code on paper that characterized an earlier RCA synth. Moog's was the first synth to use attack-decay-sustain-release (ADSR) envelopes.

“Once you have the envelope, it can control anything,” Moog tells us. “You can make it sound louder or softer, brighter or darker. That was one of the most important concepts of the synthesizer.”

Initial reaction to the strange new device was suspicion. The earliest models were bought by companies that supplied music for commercials. Moog said that they hoped to replace actual musicians and save money. General listeners didn't know what to think.

“People were freaking out,” said Moog. “It was the same sort of reaction we think of primitive cultures having—that a photographer might steal your spirit. You're destroying music!”

The breakthrough year was 1969, when Walter (now Wendy) Carlos released the Grammy-winning album *Switched-On Bach* with electronic renditions of works by the famed composer. That same year, the Beatles used a Moog on “Because,” from *Abbey Road*. And in 1971, the Stanley Kubrick film *A Clockwork Orange* featured a Moog-heavy soundtrack. But undoubtedly it was the '70s prog-rockers, who were able to take the refined mini-Moog on tour, that gave the instrument its widest fame. The unique sounds of the synth would soon grace classic disco tracks like Donna Summer's “I Feel Love” and new electronica like Kraftwerk's *Trans Europe Express*.

Moog features performances by a variety of musicians including DJ Spooky, Money Mark, Mix Master Mike, Luke Vibert, Keith Emerson, Stereolab, and others. These are entertaining, but the most memorable parts of the film are Moog's own insights into the evolution of the instrument, and some of the musicians talking about what the synth meant to their careers. It's definitely a kick to see rock stars treating Robert Moog like he's a rock star himself. And the bespectacled inventor seems to enjoy every moment of it. The film is unsurprisingly a bit talky at times, and it actually could have benefited from a few more examples of the diverse music the Moog is capable of conjuring. But overall, this is an entertaining documentary about a subject that, rather than being merely “a kind of crazy engineer who built this weird instrument,” as one interviewee states, was destined to profoundly

affect the way music is created, recorded and performed. And Moog has lived to see it all take place. | **Kevin Renick**

Story of the Year: Live in the Lou/Bassassins (Maverick)

There was a time in the not-so distant past when live albums were put out mainly by well-established acts, targeting an equally well-established fanbase. After a few studio albums, a band might throw together a live recording as a “gift” to their fans, not something primarily purposed to win new listeners. The live albums of the past were often plagued with spotty sound quality, weak vocals and a LOT of extraneous give-and-take with the crowd. My first exposure to The Misfits was a live recording, after which I thought at my young age that real punk music must be the purview of mumbling neanderthals who had no concept of how to even tune a guitar, much less play one convincingly (My subsequent experience with their studio albums kind of bolstered that opinion, but that’s another story).

In the 21st century, live recording technology has finally caught up with the live album, resulting in recordings that sound easily as good as studio-crafted releases. That, and the advent of the DVD has given bands the option of actually just giving you a movie of the performance along with the audio portion for pretty much the same price. Hence, a live album today is hardly the same animal as it was some ten years ago. That, and apparently bands feel they can release them any damned time they want now, established or not.

Screamo used-to-be-local radio darlings Story of the Year’s newest CD/DVD compilation *Live in the Lou/Bassassins* comes off as a gutsy move on the part of a band with only one album to its name, but damned if they don’t pull it off beautifully. Recorded over two nights last November at the Pageant, the audio CD is a good, energetic run-through of the aforementioned studio record *Page Avenue* (Maverick) and some newer material. Well-represented are the band’s hits such as “Until the Day I Die”, “Sidewalks”, and “Anthem of Our Dying Day”. While not exactly earth-shattering, the riffy, pounding-yet-light-on-its-feet band lays down a nice barrage for Dan Marsala’s raw, heartfelt vocals and the onstage banter is kept to a minimum. Even though this was the last stop on the tour, Marsala in great voice throughout. What does come as a surprise is the sheer amount of “fuck”s per sentence Marsala is capable of producing. An exhortation for the crowd to sing along becomes an unintentionally hilarious “I fucking know you know the fucking words to this fucking song. Now I wanna hear you fuckers sing!” Kiss your mother with that mouth? Even when taken alone, it’s a good time.

The DVD portion of the package, with video of the performance and the *Bassassins* section is where the fun really is. After hearing the show, actually seeing it, and the energy these guys put out, actually made me a fan of the band when I hadn't been before. As visual and frenetic as they are musically tight, it's amazing these guys don't down Ritalin after each performance. Trading instruments, jumping off anything higher than four feet (the bass player actually climbs to the balcony and jumps down into the crowd at one point), slinging guitars around their backs, and mugging for the cameras, these guys have power to spare. Even with all the action, you can't help but notice how incredibly tight and mistake-free their particular brand of good-natured punk-pop is being performed. Nary a bad note or monstrous deviation from the recorded version is heard. This is a damned good band, that's obviously used to performing.

The *Bassassins* section is something altogether different. An amalgamation of tour video diary, independent film, and Jackass-style comedy all mashed together in some truly hilarious ways. After viewing the entire thing in one sitting, what stands out in recollection is footage of nearly every band member puking at some point, a fish that attacks and kills the bass tech in a noir-style montage, everyone accusing everyone else of being gay while filming one another naked in the shower, someone getting drop-kicked and what I'm pretty sure was a close-up of someone's peterhead. It's a lot to assimilate at once, so repeated viewings are in order. Also included are music videos, a "making of" section and the band's performance on "AOL Sessions". Quite the package, and a hell of an introduction to those not familiar with the band.

While *Live in the Low/Bassassins* might be seen as a cocky move from a band that's hardly established itself as an enduring phenomenon, the band actually pulls it off and produces a package strong enough that not only should cause extant fans to all but have a seizure from a pleasure overdose, but can actually draw in and hold the newcomer as well.

The Stranglers: Live '78, SF (Target Video)

I was packing it in around minute 15 of this 30-minute DVD. It brought back memories of my youth. No, not of spending time at Stranglers' concerts; instead, my misspent youth took place at a public-access cable TV studio. The very rough videos of The Stranglers' show in San Francisco has all the markings of early videotaping. The burn across the screen from any light source on stage, the crappy picture, and the shaky camera work all speak of a time when cameras were bulky and cameramen (and women) were geeks.

Second viewings, though, reveal this video to be a treasure. It is a dusty relic of a time and place of which we are lucky to have any mementos. The song selection is spotty. Oddly enough, the recording of “Get a Grip” features only the audio over the final credit sequence, which probably means the video was too poor to show. There are some choice moments in the video, though, as when the cameraman starts to pogo with the rest of the crowd during “Bring on the Nubiles” or when Hugh Cornwell calls the crowd pathetic because KSAN had not added the band to its playlist. The video also contains some painful, artsy video effects that make *Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert* effects look positively brilliant.

The point that we should not overlook is that much of what Joe Rees and Target Video did was document the growth of the punk/alternative movement. From a nearly 30-minute highlight trailer on the DVD (that I almost dismissed as a poorly edited commercial for Target), I was impressed to glimpse all that Target saw in the late ’70s and early ’80s. The quality of the camera equipment improved, but the quality of the camerawork never did. That is easy to overlook when you consider all the amazing things they did cover: The Cramps, The Screemers, Throbbing Gristle, far too many Johnny Lydon press conferences, Iggy Pop, and so many more.

History, kids, is a cool thing. Though this DVD is one you might want to skip (unless you have every misogynistic scrap of Stranglers’ memorabilia), there are not a lot of places willing to release concert footage of the more obscure bands. Catch them before they turn to dust. | **Jim Dunn**

Visit [Now Playing](#) — for all the current film reviews in PlaybackSTL

[HOME](#)

PLAYBACK:stl

