



loudQUIETloud: A FILM ABOUT THE PIXIES (2006)

Category : MUSIC DVD

Directed by Steven Cantor and Matthew Calkin
 Review by Chris Barry



Released by MVDvisual
 Running Time: 85 minutes
 Rating: NR
 Color format: Color
 Audio/Subtitles: English, Dolby 5.1 Surround
 Region Code: 1 NTSC
 Aspect Ratio: 1.78:1 Widescreen
 16:9 Enhanced: No
 Special Features: Commentary featuring directors Steven Cantor and Matthew Galkin with editor Trevor Ristow; bonus footage; 16-page booklet with directors' notes and an essay by Ben Sisario.



loudQUIETloud: A FILM ABOUT THE PIXIES addresses the reunion of a band on the brink of success in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Alt rock fans from that time period surely know of the Pixies and are probably – to this day – their staunchest supporters. So loudQUIETloud may have deeper meaning to fans than to casual observers who may come upon the movie looking for a “tell-all” style rockumentary or one that exposes the alt rock scene that all but imploded by the time the Pixies flamed out in 1992.

loudQUIETloud is a strange film because we don't really gain any knowledge about who the Pixies were and why they wielded such strong influence over other rock bands of then and now. Although in hindsight – based on the strength of their music – it's obvious.

The truth is, bands that have practically been deified such as Nirvana (arguably, Nirvana's influence became stronger after Kurt Cobain blew his brains out) – admit it or not – don't hold up as well today as the Pixies because the Pixies knew how to mold the lyrically sublime (I dare anybody to fully explain what “Monkey Gone to Heaven” really means) with subtle melodious interjections that are both haunting and infectious. So it's not surprising when a quote from Cobain hangs across the screen at the start of loudQUIETloud: “I was basically trying to rip off the Pixies.”



In a sense, its Cobain's admission of failure.

But the film only addresses the band's world tour reunion of 2004 and doesn't attempt to explain any artistic inspiration, the caverns from which such heady, blistering rock pop comes from, their past accomplishments, nor their earlier “moderate” success. The irony is that the Pixies are revered more now some 15 years after they broke up. The thing we do learn is that they splintered mainly because of an ego war between lead singer Charles Thompson (aka Black Francis aka Frank Black) and bassist/back-up vocalist Kim Deal.



In the early 90s, Deal was doted on by critics and fans through her band the Breeders, which she developed with her twin sister Kelley. Thompson – a hard rocking, harder working singer/songwriter had trouble dealing with her outside success because, it seems, his focus was the Pixies. One day in 1992 and closing in on success, Thompson – fed up with Deal – announced on a BBC radio show that the Pixies were over before telling the rest of the band, who were left pretty much high and dry if not devastated by the news.

In 2004, Thompson decided it was time to get the band back together and tour. The other members – drummer David Lovering, guitarist Joey Santiago, and Deal (the Breeders have since split although Kim and Kelley remain close) – were all going through financial and emotional strain when they got the call to

reunite.

Lovering was broke but was working as a professional magician, Santiago was eking out a living composing music for documentary films and Deal was living with her parents, writing poetry, making cutout snowflakes and sleeping all day.

Except for Thompson, who has consistently toured as Frank Black since the break up, the rest of the band needed money, artistic expression and exposure. Deal and Lovering were both fighting personal demons that needed quelling while Santiago and Thompson were raising families.

To the band's surprise, their first show on the tour sold out as did all their subsequent shows from London and a city in Iceland to Chicago and New York City. The surprise comes from the fact that hardly anybody – except for other musicians, critics and a cult contingency of fans – knew who they were back when they recorded records – five to be exact, all too critical acclaim. But their following now is legion.



Certainly not as incendiary as Ondi Timoner's DIG (2004) – about the destructive ego-crushing competition between alt pop rockers the Dandy Warhols and the brooding, biting Brian Jonestown Massacre – loudQUIETloud is about how youthful arrogance and bad-tempered behavior can move toward a spiritual redemptive quality when the Pixies decide to road trip together as paunchy, weary adults. The weirdness is that when the band is off the stage, they barely speak, subjecting one another to mind-numbing surliness.

When directors Steven Cantor and Matthew Galkin point their cameras at the band as they retreat from each other while in the same room, the overall feeling is emotionally heavy. But the truth is – the members of this band are great communicators and, by not speaking off stage, they're saved on stage, where they're luminous.



The only thing close to communicating outside of performance is when Thompson tells Lovering – who is popping too much valium and drinking too much red wine before shows – that he should consider psychotherapy so a doctor can prescribe the proper medications at the proper times instead of attempting to self-medicate, which is causing a rift in the game plan of touring. Lovering agrees – he stops valium and saves his wine consumption for more appropriate moments – especially out of the way of Deal, a recovering substance abuser.

Upon first viewing loudQUIETloud seems, well, too quiet. But that's the point – this isn't LET IT BE, GIMME SHELTER or, for that matter, THE FILTH AND THE FURY – A SEX PISTOLS FILM – it's a contemplative exercise in the redemption

of music, the divine moments of touring and performance and the potential transcendent qualities of a relationship that really does work albeit in the most dysfunctional of livelihoods – that of rock musician.