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CINEMA » loudQUIETloud - Communication, they say, is a two-way street. With the Pixies, as a new documentary suggests, it's a four-way intersection where the stoplights are out, the cars are at a standstill, and there's no cop on the scene directing traffic. [12.06.2006]



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Rating: 7.5/10

Communication, they say, is a two-way street. With the Pixies, it's a four-way intersection where the stoplights are out, the cars are at a standstill afraid to honk at one another and there's no cop on the scene directing traffic. Kelley Deal, sister of Pixies bassist Kim Deal, accompanied the band on its sold-out 2004 reunion tour and remarked, in a conversation between the two women during a scene in the recent documentary *loudQUIETloud*, "You four are the worst communicators ... ever!" Her first clue should have been the way they broke up the first time around.

During an interview with the BBC in the early-90s, bandleader Black Francis, whose real name was, and is, Charles Thompson, declared the Pixies were breaking up, though he hadn't discussed it with the rest of the band. Later, he faxed them a statement that said they were through. Not much had changed by the time they reconvened for a tour they glibly dubbed, "The Pixies Sell Out." There's a scene in *loudQUIETloud*, the new documentary that chronicles the tour's on-stage glory and behind-the-scenes dysfunction, where Deal, Francis, guitarist Joey Santiago and drummer Dave Lovering are waiting in a back room for the start of one of their shows. Not a peep is heard from any one of them. As Francis admitted in a phone interview caught on film, they don't talk much.

It isn't that they hate each other, as Francis would also go on to say, although escalating tensions between Francis and Kim Deal did cause the band's untimely dissolution in 1992. At least this time around, the problems seem to stem from issues going on in their private lives. On the road and away from his family, including a newborn child, Santiago is trying to finish a film score he's contracted to do. A recovering drug addict, Kim Deal was struggling to stay clean and sober during the reunion tour. Meanwhile, Lovering, whose father dies of cancer during the tour, is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, drinking too much and losing it on stage. The film captures one particularly uncomfortable live moment when Lovering continues drumming long after the rest of the band has quit playing a song. Francis asks him, "Are you high?" The answer: nobody's sure.

Formed in the mid-80s by Francis, the Pixies were a wonderfully weird mix. On one hand, they straddled the line between melodic, if quirky, and abrasive alternative rock with a tightrope walker's sense of balance; just as often, they indulged their idiosyncratic muse and peeled the paint off walls with their noisy skrees. As the title indicates, they employed unpredictable loud-soft dynamics to startlingly original effect in hits like "Gouge Away," which goes from unsettlingly calm to screaming ferocity in the blink of an eye, and the demon-spawn pop of "Monkey Gone To Heaven." Jagged blasts of buzz-saw guitars from Santiago and Francis mingled with delicate acoustic textures often tinged with Spanish accents. Hooks were everywhere, spilling out of the insanely catchy "Here Comes Your Man" and "Gigantic." Traditional song structures were taken apart and put back together in new, oddball pop architecture, and Francis sang songs about UFOs, religion and strange goings-on in the Heartland of America with the voice of a madman.

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Having been away for 12 years, The Pixies' return was greeted with open arms. Their shows sold out in a matter of hours. On *loudQUIETloud*, the crowd shots show the band is still beloved by many. Inside packed houses, fans are losing their minds, doing "the pogo" and singing every line in rowdy synchronization. For the most part, the band, with the exception of Lovering's lapses, is on, roaring through updated versions of favorites like "Nimrod's Son," "Gouge Away," "Monkey Gone To Heaven" and "Wave Of Mutilation." Just for the live footage, *loudQUIETloud* is worth it, but it's the voyeuristic nature of the film that makes or breaks it. And sometimes, it does both.

Filed in the same cinema verite style that made Bob Dylan's *Don't Look Back* and the Rolling Stones' *Gimme Shelter* so compelling, *loudQUIETloud*'s realistic approach provides a sociological study of four fragile human beings trying to get along for the good of the team. If that seems altruistic, it isn't. The four band mates make no secret of why they're back together and it involves money. At the start of the film, Lovering is unemployed, and Francis, whose solo career has been stuck in neutral for a while now, and Santiago have families to support. It would be hypocritical to criticize this one-time cash grab, but it does taint the reunion a bit. Still, it's fun to see Deal get excited about the wild crowd response from the first show and sometimes life affirming to witness family get-togethers on the road. What throws cold water on the project is the sometimes stilted interaction between band members away from the stage. The Deal sisters even travel in a separate bus. Essentially, *loudQUIETloud* is another in a long line of movies about the road and the toll it exacts on bands. It is artfully shot with narrative clarity and is a revealing portrayal of a band that hasn't necessarily forgiven each other and moved on. The distance between them is palpable and while that realism is mostly captivating, it can also make for dull moviemaking at times.

SEE ALSO: www.pixiesmusic.com
SEE ALSO: www.loudquietloud.com

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Peter Lindblad - *Peter Lindblad lives in Appleton, Wis., and bleeds green and gold just like all the Packer fan nutjobs in the area. He does draw the line at wearing blocks of cheddar on his head, or any other body parts for that matter, though. His professional career has taken weird twists and turns that have led him to his current position as an editor at a coin magazine. He hopes his stay there will be a short one. Before that, he worked as an associate editor at a log home magazine. To anyone that will listen, he'll swear that Shiner was one of the greatest rock bands to ever walk the earth. Yet he also has much love for Superchunk, Spoon, DJ Shadow, Swervedriver, Wilco, Fugazi, Jawbox, ... And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead, Queens Of The Stone Age, and Modest Mouse, among others.*

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