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the ramblings of an editor out of control • by Jeff Clark

**Do first impressions** matter? Someone watching the documentary *We Fun: Atlanta GA Inside/Out* with no prior awareness of the recent Atlanta rock music scene would come away with the quite understandable impression that everyone in this city is thoroughly retarded. That may very well be accurate, depending on your perspective, but since *We Fun* focuses so heavily on the easy laughs of boozy buffoonery, you have to wonder if this is really what this scene is all about. And that's fine, for what it is. Why have a music scene in the first place if you're not having fun? Acting stooped and being outrageous have always been central components of youthful rock 'n' roll. In *We Fun*, they're pretty much the only components. So, does it matter to the Black Lips that they'll very likely be remembered not for a single song they wrote or played, but for being that band that kissed each other and peed onstage and shot fireworks into the audience? Does it matter to anyone?

Probably not, because such antics get attention. This film is full of so many people obviously desperate for it. I guess it's a big reason why folks start bands in

the first place. *We Fun*'s cameras cause some subjects to become even more self-aware – the participants' actions in several situations come across as exaggerated for the chroniclers, such as the whole episode with Cole Alexander setting off a fire extinguisher at a photo shoot and the ensuing argument with band-mate Jared Swilley. But it gets attention. That's what people notice and remember. What? These guys play music? Are you sure about that?



The lack of any historical context, beyond acknowledgment that the

Subsonics are still considered cool, is regrettable, but then *We Fun* – on DVD via MVDvisual – strives for nothing more than to be a snapshot of a certain segment of a certain scene at a certain time. And in that respect, there are sporadic bursts of juicy goodness here that will bring a grin and a sense of hometown pride to any bona fide Atlanta music fan. It's like home movies we'll watch in ten or twenty years and laugh about what idiots we were and yet how great it all was. It's funny, though – this footage is only a couple of years old, and yet *We Fun* already seems overwhelmingly nostalgic. It goes to show how quickly

music scenes shift and evolve. The Carbonas are no more. B Jay has passed away. The Rob's House day parties are history. The influence of '70s garage-pop and riff-raff power-rock now informs so many groups, from Gentleman Jesse to Biters to the Barreracudas. New bands are making noise, while many of those captured in *We Fun* that are still pushing hard – the Coathangers and Selmanaires, for instance – have progressed creatively to levels unforeseen in the movie. That's probably the best thing about this doc. It makes you realize that Atlanta's music scene isn't stagnant. And that it's probably even stronger right now, propelled by bands that either weren't around or were overlooked in *We Fun*. That's pretty reassuring.

Executive producer Bill Cody was also among the team behind the 1987 documentary *Athens GA Inside/Out*, hence the tie-in with the titles. By the time that film was made, Athens was basically experiencing the secondhand third wave of its music scene, spawning lesser bands both inspired by and reacting against the big guns that put the town on the musical map in the first place. Still, it managed to convey a sense of a scene developing out of a backwoods pocket that nobody'd paid any mind to before. And, looking back at that doc, it flutters by with an array of colorful, strewn-about variety.

By contrast, *We Fun* documents new blood and new attention invigorating a city's scene that's been rolling for years, but nearly everyone sounds like they're playing trashy, punky, drunk garage rock. The notable exception being Deerhunter, but Bradford Cox's statement early in the film that "I was never afraid of being a little bit boring" proves all too accurate, as the filmmakers manage to shoot some of the dullest Deerhunter footage one could imagine. It's unfortunate, because that band can be transcendent. It's also unfortunate how little female involvement is presented in *We Fun*. Basically, Jessica Juggs stumbles around topless and shoots fire from her twat, and the Coathangers get to sing "Nestle in My Boobies." I know it's a sausage party here, but seriously, is that all there is to it?

Any documentary like this is, by necessity, going to include certain acts while excluding others. Frankly, a film about the outsiders, the uncool kids, might've been a lot better. I'm not going to weigh in on any sour grapes debates, but I do find it interesting how some bands failed to merit a high enough coolness rating. There are live shots of Deerhunter and Black Lips from *Stomp and Stammer's* 11th anniversary show at the Variety Playhouse in 2007, which also featured Selmanaires. Those three groups get props in *We Fun*, yet Snowden, who also played, isn't mentioned at all. They're just not cool enough. Neither is this magazine, but that's OK 'cause Henry Owings gets to talk about how visionary he is for putting on shows in Roswell. At least Ort's not in it. —Jeff Clark

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