



[Dinosaur Jr., BUG Live at 9:30 Club: In the Hands of the Fans](#)

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By J Howell

The bulk of *BUG Live at 9:30 Club* was shot by six fans who won an online contest to interview Dinosaur Jr. and film them performing their third album, 1988's *Bug*, in its entirety at the legendary DC club in June of last year. The subtitle of "in the hands of the fans" isn't just appropriate considering the film's production, though. In the hands of fans from way back is the best place for the DVD.

Fans of mid-period Dinosaur—when the cover of *Spin* once read "J Mascis is God;" when the charming, offbeat, Spike Jonze-directed video for "Feel The Pain" was in MTV rotation; basically the period when Lou Barlow wasn't in the band—will find a lot to enjoy, but may be confounded by the lack of "hits" present here. To be fair, though, the old guard who were there from the beginning could probably not care less.

The band is in fine form throughout this DVD if to my ears not quite as "on" as the last time I saw them, which was four years or so ago. This may be more a function of the set itself; aside from two encores following the main set and two additional bonus tracks from other records, the DVD is all about *Bug*. Lou Barlow's bass and Murph's drumming are tight, focused, and remarkably energetic throughout, and J Mascis's guitar still drops my jaw more than two decades after first hearing him. For listeners who came upon the band with *Green Mind* or *Where You Been*, it's almost jarring to hear Dinosaur Jr.'s earlier material—particularly in isolation—played start to finish. Later Dinosaur is almost preternaturally tuneful, but occasionally abrasive; conversely, *Bug*-era Dinosaur buried Mascis's way with a hook under so much distortion that, in retrospect, it's almost shocking.

It's not by any means bad—in fact it's arguable that the band may actually be at the height of their powers *now*—and there's an audio clarity here that might only be appreciated by those who have seen the band both with and without earplugs. If there's one thing that can be said about Dinosaur Jr., it's that they are LOUD.

The first time I saw them, I was no stranger to loud rock shows, but even from pretty far back in a reasonably loud venue, my ears were ringing for days after. The second time, I was smart enough to protect my hearing, was able to stand directly in front of Mascis,

and the band sounded perfect. Thankfully, this DVD sounds more like that second Dinosaur experience of mine.

The main difference in the two times I've seen Dinosaur personally was the set list of each. The first time, the band only played new songs and material that Barlow was originally present for, and it was not disappointing in the slightest. The second time, the band worked in some mid-'90s material that not only made for a more varied (and frankly just a little more fun) set, but was surprisingly fresh with Barlow on bass, a sublime midway point between the older, explosive Dinosaur and the pop genius of Mascis's later songwriting. If the set on this DVD is lacking the charm of later Dino Jr., it mostly makes up for it not only in recapturing the sound of the band circa 1988, but in giving a retrospective insight into where the band was relative to where it had been and where, in hindsight, it would go.

There's a lot to like about *BUG Live at 9:30 Club* besides the set. There's quite a bit of interesting interview footage here as well. Henry Rollins conducts a short Q&A segment onstage before the band begins, and while it's nice, the audio quality is a bit muffled, at times almost unintelligible, and sadly lacks subtitles. There's nothing viewers won't catch, but they may find themselves rewinding a time or two to clarify.

The fan interviews backstage are pretty good, though some of the six fans make for much better, more astute questioners than others, and it's a bit strange that of six winning contestants, all are male. It's nice to hear so much from Barlow and Murph, though there are a couple of moments that are ever-so-slightly awkward when discussing the band's initial run with this original lineup, the dissolution of which was notoriously acrimonious. Also, he's one of my heroes and I'll love him forever, but J is as laconic as ever here, and at times in the interview portions he sounds just enough like a mumbly Chris Griffin that *Family Guy* fans might become distracted from what he's actually saying.

Elsewhere, interviews with Mascis and director Dave Markey are a bit clearer, though it'd be nice to hear just a bit more from J. Rollins's recollections of the good old days and the original 9:30 are great, though, and one of the best moments happens when, during "The Wagon," one of the bonus tracks here, the camera cuts to Rollins furiously air-drumming along in the balcony above the stage. It's charmingly strange to see Henry Rollins, a notoriously intimidating figure, in such a disarming, fanboy nerd mode, and encouraging to see him still so obviously passionate about the music.

Overall, for fans of Dinosaur Jr., especially those following the band from back in the SST Records days, *BUG Live at 9:30 Club* is not only a lot of fun, it's essential and will do your heart good to see these guys in such fine form so many years on. For later Dinosaur fans, it's still a lot of fun, if far from being a comprehensive representation of the band and the breadth of their material presented live. For those new to the band, this DVD is probably not the best point of entry, but will likely be quite enjoyable once those listeners have familiarized themselves with the band, in particular with their aesthetic from early in their career.

For all fans of Dinosaur Jr., though, “Freak Scene” alone makes this DVD worth the price of admission. Very good stuff indeed.

BUG Live at 9:30 Club: In The Hands Of The Fans was released by MVD Entertainment Group on February 21 and is available to order from See of Sound in both [DVD](#) and [Blu-Ray](#) formats. For more on the *In The Hands Of The Fans* series, please check out this [website](#).

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