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Meat Puppets - "Monsters" CD Review (MVD Audio)

DOWNLOAD: Meat Puppets - Live at Georgia Theater, Athens. GA 11-08-89



The Meat Puppets kicked off the tour for *Monsters* tour in December of 1989 at The Coach House in San Juan Capistrano and, in a review of the show, the *L.A. Times* said: "As individual and uncompromising as the band's approach is, it is still difficult to fathom why the Meat Puppets haven't found the larger success of the Replacements, Bob Mould and other contemporaries. There is a distinctive, imaginative song craft at work in the Puppets' recent material which, coupled with the trio's blistering musicality, could easily snare fans from such disparate camps as R.E.M. and Metallica."

The Meat Puppets released their 7th album, *Monsters*, in 1989 and, while the band came extremely close to signing with Atlantic, this disc was their final for SST. In the liner notes, Derrick Bostrom mentions that this disc was the Pups attempt to take their career more serious and "[court] the major labels in earnest". Listening to this disc for the first time in twenty years, I can hear the sound that band Nirvana and Soundgarden capitalized on in the early 90's. This disc was recorded instrument by instrument and Bostrom used a drum machine to lay down the initial drum tracks, all of which gives the music the sort of 'high gloss' radio-friendly finish first heard on *Mirage*. Derrick Bostrom comments in the liner notes: "We...kept the electronic drums a secret to see if anyone noticed. Not only did no one notice, but some people even said that *Monsters* was the 'livest' sounding album that we'd done yet!"

Monsters is a big alt-rock album that could and should have been the hit that *Nevermind* was...but the Pups seemed to be cursed by bad timing and a lack of interest in sticking with one particular style of music. In the liner notes to *Monsters*, Curt Kirkwood said "We could have done *Up on the Sun* the first time around, but we didn't want to. The sound of that first record wasn't an accident...we needed the debut to have a ferocity and weirdness to it."

As compared with *Up on the Sun*, Curt dominates this album with controlled vocals (that are in-key) and some chunky guitar riffs that are a mix between Billy Gibbons and Jimmy Page. "Attacked by Monsters" and "Party Til the World Obeys" are an indicator as to what Nirvana would become and "The Void" isn't that far off from Alice in Chains 1991 debut CD. Never keeping to one style, "Light" shows Cris and Curt singing in Byrdsian harmony. One of the disc standouts is "Touchdown King", which is the jangle-pop song that R.E.M. never wrote. Curt flexes his guitar hero muscles with the ZZ Top-style instrumental boogie "Flight of the Fire Weasel" and two very different takes of this song have been added as bonus tracks. The disc closes with the mellow, psychedelic and layered "Like Being Alive" which is a precursor to the similarly-veined bonus track "Wish Upon a Storm".

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