

# NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Filmmaker Bechard crafts cinematic paeans to two bands he loves — one legendary, the other not so much

**Color Me Obsessed: A Film About the Replacements (2011), and What Did You Expect?: The Archers of Loaf Live at Cat's Cradle (2012). Written and directed by Gorman Bechard. \$19.95 each. What Were We Thinking Films (www.wtfilms.com).**

**H** amden's Gorman Bechard (NHM, December 2012) makes films and writes novels for a living. But his true artistic touchstone is rock 'n' roll music. He plays guitar — though not well enough, he says, to get paid for it. But what he does really well is tell stories about bands that inspire him.

Over the last 18 months Bechard has released two documentaries about bands he has loved. One, Minneapolis-based '80s legends the Replacements (which he calls the "last best band") is well known to alt-rock fans. The other — the Chapel Hill, N.C. quartet the Archers of Loaf — to the extent that it is known

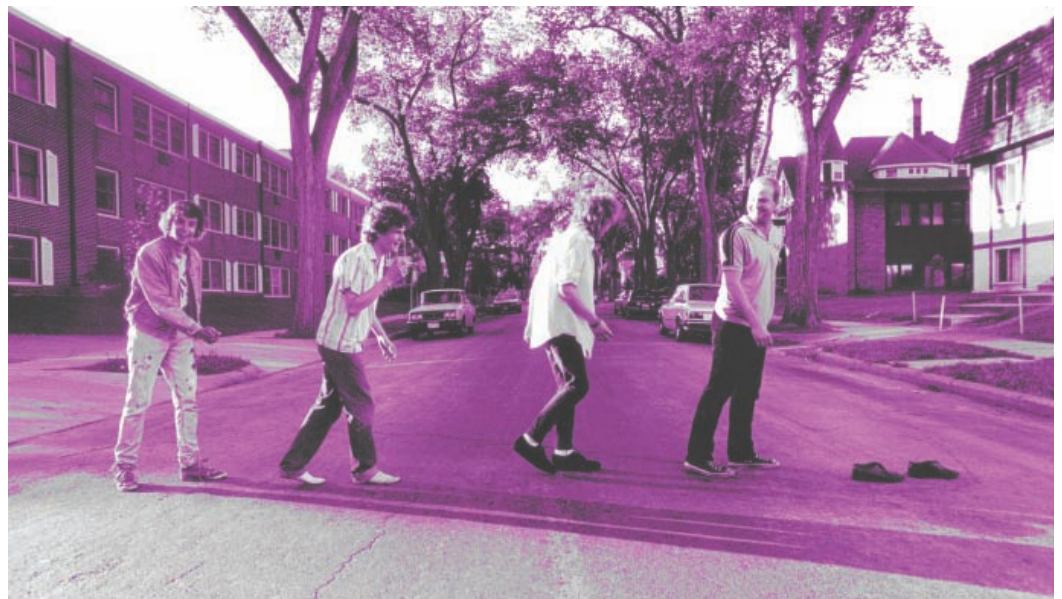
at all is known mainly for having perhaps the worst name (provenance unknown) in the history of American popular music.

What the two bands have in common is easy to hear (and see). Both are loud, coarse, brilliant, maddeningly erratic. Led by mercurial singer/songwriter/guitarist Paul Westerberg, the Replacements were as likely to show up drunk for gigs and play Led Zeppelin covers for two hours as they were to put on transcendent shows that left listeners slack-jawed. (With characteristic understatement Wikipedia calls the band "a notoriously wayward live act, often

performing under the influence of alcohol and trashing their instruments.")

The central conceit of *Color Me Obsessed* is that, unlike every other "rockumentary" ever filmed, the title characters are entirely absent from the film. No Replacements concert footage, or interviews with the former bandmates — no nothing. Just a whole host of Replacements lovers ruminating about the band and what it meant to them during the band's meteoric rise and inevitable fall.

The Replacements were formed in 1978 by brothers Bob and Tommy (then age 11) Stinson and high-school dropout Chris





# The Archers of Loaf

— dreadful name, great band.

◀ The Replacements channel the cover of the Beatles' Abbey Road, circa 1984.

Mars with the screw-you-any-hope-of-a-record-deal name of Dogbreath. A janitor named Paul Westerberg used to walk past the band's rehearsal space and listen to them practice, day after day. Before long he had leeches into the band itself, soon renamed the Impediments.

They quartet never actually gigged under that name. Before their first show, at a sober house, the group changed their name to the Replacements. Recalls musician/producer Kevin Bowe, who was at the show:

"I remember thinking two things very vividly," he says. "The first was that they were the worst rock band I'd ever seen. The second was that they were best band I'd ever seen. I really couldn't figure it out."

Regardless, following the gig the band was enjoined never to return due to what Bowe recalls as "an incident involving alcohol" in the dressing room.

Sneaking hootch into a gig at a sober house is so quintessentially Replacements that I can't even stand it. (The band's intoxication would be famously replicated on a January 1986 appearance on Saturday Night Live, which got the band banned from show in perpetuity.)

To call a motion-picture "talky" is no compliment. If you had told me a documentary about people talking about a band I liked could

make compelling cinema, I would have said you were nuts. But Color Me Obsessed is riveting — and yes, totally obsessed. In a good way.

Which brings us to What Did You Expect? If making an 89-minute

documentary about a band few have ever even heard seems a little, well, nutso, that's just par for the course. After all, Bechard is a filmmaker who made his bones with 1986's Psychos in Love, a slasher pic tarted up in the guise of a sendup of slasher pics.

This writer was not familiar with the music of the Archers of Loaf, who released four albums in the 1990s before drifting apart. (They reunited to play an unannounced set at a club in Carrboro, N.C. in January 2011, which What Did You Expect? documents.)

Bechard regards them as "the greatest indie rock band of the '90s," and his affection for the group is evident here. Using seven cameras (four handheld) Bechard has crafted a very urgent and compelling piece of rock 'n' roll cinema.

"You will as if you're at the show," the director says, "right up against the stage, moving and sweating in unison with the hundreds of fans pressed up against you."

And he's not even exaggerating. ❖

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