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Replacements, The - Color Me Obsessed: A Film About...

Reviewed by: Chris Collum (02/18/13)

The Replacements- Color Me Obsessed: A Film About The Replacements

What Were We Thinking Films

Release Date: March 26, 2011

My parents never know what to get me for my birthday, so in June of 2009 my dad dropped me off at CD Central in Lexington with \$80 and an hour and a half. I was ecstatic. First on my radar was the new Taking Back Sunday album, New Again--certain to be a great record, right? Next up were two Underøath albums my friend who listened to heavier music told me were awesome, and then Common Existence by Thursday. Common Existence was the first album I'd ever listened to and I had felt guilty for months about not buying it yet. After that I picked up a Bayside album on a whim, mostly because I liked that one song I heard on a Victory compilation years ago.

If my hasty math was correct, at this point I was thinking I should still have around seven or eight bucks left after sales tax, so I spent about twenty minutes poking around in the used section. At some point while I was poring over an Armor for Sleep album wondering if the music was as cool as the artwork seemed to be (I pirated the album a few months later; it was pretty bad), the record store had a shift change. The last guy behind the counter had more hair on his face than the top of his head and had been playing Pink Floyd's The Wall all the way through over the store's PA system. The new guy was probably in his late thirties or early forties, so some ten or fifteen years younger, and had the look about him of someone who woke up at eleven and has been smoking pot ever since. I had just about decided that I was going to just keep the rest of the money and buy a pack of guitar strings or something when the new guy changed the music, and what he started playing caught my attention. The song he put on was "Color Me Impressed," from The Replacements' second album Hootenanny. I probably stood there motionless for about ten seconds, transfixed by what I was hearing, before I approached the counter and asked the clerk what band it was. "The Replacements, dude," he replied.

Five minutes later I was out the door with the aforementioned five albums, as well as a used copy of Don't You Know Who I Think I Was? The Best of The Replacements. Over the course of that summer (also the summer I got my driver's license) I would slowly accumulate each of The Replacements' full-lengths and learn every word to songs like "Left of the Dial," "Unsatisfied," "Here Comes a Regular," "Alex Chilton," and yes, "Color Me Impressed." Whether it was Paul Westerberg's all-too-familiar achingly piercing howl, or something about Bob Stinson's halfway-unhinged, drunken buzzsaw guitar work, or the thunderous rhythm section of Chris Mars and Tommy Stinson, I was in love. That fall I also would discover 90s indie rock due to a video I saw of Jesse Lacey covering Modest Mouse's "Trailer Trash," and the progression from The Replacements to bands like Pavement, Guided By Voices, Superchunk and Archers of Loaf on to the present day started to make sense in my head. I began to realize that much of the music I listened to owed a huge debt to that ragtag group of drunken misfits from Minneapolis.

I got an idea stuck in my head that summer which hasn't really left it in the almost four years since. That idea is this: when we look at rock music, whether good, bad or other, both in the mainstream and the underground over the course of the last thirty years, The Replacements just might be one of the most influential bands, if not the most influential band. Simply looking at the list of musicians interviewed for Color Me Obsessed tells one that that theory, while certainly informed by my very strong personal bias in favor of the band and its legacy, may not be too off the mark at all. Colin Meloy (The Decemberists), Mac McCaughan (Superchunk; also founder of Merge Records), John Rzeznik (Goo Goo Dolls), Craig Finn (The Hold Steady), Brian Fallon (The Gaslight Anthem), Patrick Stickles (Titus Andronicus), and Eric Bachmann (Archers of Loaf) are among the artists who profess their undying love of and appreciation for The Replacements in the documentary.

Which brings me to this documentary I'm supposedly reviewing and why you just skimmed through several paragraphs of me going on about how great this band is. I began this review by telling you a story about why I like the band so much for a reason, not just because I like talking about myself. Color Me Obsessed eschews traditional "rock doc" format in that it does not make use of any of the band's music for the entirety of the film, nor does it feature pictures (save for the artwork of Let It Be) or videos of the band until the very end. This documentary is made by a fan (who also happens to be a professional filmmaker), features the story of the band as told by fans, and is largely intended for fans. If you have never listened to The Replacements then Color Me Obsessed probably isn't for you. Go pick up Let It Be and Tim and in a few years you will love this film, but as an introduction to the band, this documentary would probably bore a potential fan.

Author's Rating

Table with 2 columns: Category and Rating (8/8)

Final Verdict: 80%

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Color Me Obsessed also probably won't offer any incredible revelations about the nature of The Replacements or its fans to diehards either, however. There are certainly some unique anecdotes depicted in the film, such as a mention of Jon Stewart of Comedy Central fame tending bar at a club where the band cut their teeth, or an interview with the guy who was playing pinball with Bob Stinson for the first few songs of the infamous show Bob was late getting on stage for (many fans have a bootleg of that show on their hard drive; it's one of the band's most curiously "straight" shows). Additionally, interviews with Tommy Erdelyi (aka Tommy Ramone), who produced Tim, and Matt Wallace, who produced Don't Tell a Soul are certainly interesting and enlightening--particularly the latter which sheds some light on the creative process behind one of the band's most divisive albums. However, the bulk of the factual information about The Replacements that is presented by the film is not going to be new to anyone who knows a lot about them already, or alternately has read the chapter dedicated to them in Michael Azerrad's top-notch "Our Band Could Be Your Life."

The film opens and closes with a shot of a circa-1986 answering machine on a bedside table while a woman talks about her relationship with a man who seems by all accounts to be Westerberg, a cinematic move that is either brilliant or unashamedly manipulative of fans' emotions concerning the band. It also seems like a call-back to the infamous "Bastards of Young" video (something that is talked about later in the film) which featured a shot of a speaker playing the song for the entirety of the video. Throughout the documentary, the band's story is told in bits and pieces by those who were there at the time, from the Stinsons' garage with Westerberg listening in the bushes outside, to the Twin/Tone days and the band's now-infamous tour hijinx on to the sunset portion of the band's career: the post-Bob portion of the story not told by people such as Azerrad. It is in this last part that the documentary really shines, as instead of finishing the story with the band on top of the world, it helps the viewer make sense of why the band inevitably fell apart in the way that it did. The earlier part of the story is well-told also, partially by former manager Peter Jespersion, acclaimed rock critic Robert Christgau, and members of fellow Minneapolis punk rock legends Hüsker Dü, as well as random guys who saw the band at some bar back in the day, or who wish they had seen the band at some bar back in the day. Filmmaker Gorman Bechard makes excellent use of the ensemble cast of misfit fans, piecing together the band's story in a way that is engaging and entertaining--provided, that is, that the viewer has a preexisting interest in the subject matter.

Intermingled with the story of The Replacements is the story of their fans, and these fans' relationship with the band's music and legacy. If my drawn-out story that opens this review bored you to tears, you're probably going to find yourself itching to skip scenes multiple times throughout the course of the documentary's two hours and three minutes. Be prepared to hear how one guy developed a fictional friendship with Westerberg akin to the kind one might have with an imaginary friend, and multiple stories about how the band appeals to the misfit element in many people who don't feel at home in the everyday ebb and flow of society.

Most interesting and enlightening of all the subjects interviewed, however, is Bob Stinson's ex-wife. As I have alluded to previously, the documentary does not tiptoe around the edges of the "Bob issue," instead addressing his role in the band head-on from the get-go, and finally giving the viewer an understanding of the kind of person he was, and how this lead to the eventual fall-out with Westerberg and by extension the rest of the band. This unwillingness to airbrush over one of the more uncomfortable parts of the band's history (that is: what the hell even happened to Bob?) is certainly appreciated and refreshing when it would certainly be many directors' tendency to focus solely on the positive aspects of the band.

All in all, this documentary essentially serves as a rewarding and entertaining film for fans of the band, presented in a mostly unique fashion. It's not unlike a televised word-of-mouth campaign hyping some underground band, albeit a campaign which involves some of the biggest movers and shakers in today's rock landscape. If you've ever wondered how Westerberg packed so great of a punch into the simple word "unsatisfied" or if you know every word of "Here Comes a Regular" and will sing them too, perhaps from atop a table at 3 a.m., or if you wonder sometimes if Paul didn't unknowingly predict the future and write "Alex Chilton" about himself, then this film is for you. Welcome, you have found many a kindred spirit, we're all here together, and no, none of us know why Tim has such awful production, and no, Tommy Ramone doesn't answer that in the film. If, however, the last sentence makes no sense to you, then pick up Let It Be or Tim or Pleased to Meet Me, and let this band be your life much like the title of the Azerrad book.

Within a few years you'll get it.

8/10

Additional Information

Directed by Gorman Bechard
Run time: 123 min.

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Wow. Great review Chris.

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