

By Gary Dretzka

In the alchemy of rock-'n'-roll, there's nothing more cherished than purity of purpose. Look at any year-end top-ten list by a respected critic and, more often than not, at least half of the selections will be completely unknown to the majority of readers. Listen to the albums and it's just as likely that you'll wonder what all the fuss is about, after all. The critical search for integrity and clarity, along with the need to explain it in words, often runs counter to what's being expressed in the music. Why write, when you can dance? Why intellectualize, when you could be stage diving? "Color Me Obsessed: A Film About the Replacements" reminded me of this disconnect between head and gut when it comes to criticism. The Minneapolis punk band, a.k.a., Mats, disbanded in 1991, without a great deal of commercial success, but its legacy extends to this day. The rise and collapse of the Replacements are recalled in this 2011 documentary by Gorman Bechard. He found dozens of people, ranging from critics to hecklers, anxious to comment on the band and what it meant to them. Indeed, more than half of the quotes and anecdotes they provide would provide sufficient cause not to delve more deeply into the subject. Their favorite memories of the Replacements seem nightmarish by the usual industry standards, which demand semi-sobriety, at least, and a certain regard for themselves, their music and the audience.

What makes "Color Me Obsessed" stand out among the growing crowd of musical documentaries is the complete absence of music. Bechard has said that he fully intended his history of the band to be absorbed without the distraction of recordings or music videos. This decision doesn't seem to have worked in his favor. (I recommend watching the doc alongside a computer with easy access to YouTube.) It could just as easily have been explained by a reluctance to pay licensing fees, however. Boiled to their essence, the recollections and war stories – attempting career suicide on "SNL," for example — are what rock is all about, not the many complaints we hear about being underappreciated, unpublished and underpaid. Among the many witnesses here are members of Husker Du, Babes in Toyland, the Decemberists, Hold Steady, Archers of Loaf, Titus Andronicus and Goo Goo Dolls; celebrity admirers Tom Arnold, Dave Foley, George Wendt, David Carr; and critics Greg Kot, Jim Derogatis, Robert Christgau and Matt Pinfield. A second disc adds 19 deleted scenes, extended interviews, commentaries and trailers.

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