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Posted December 4, 2012 by Jeff in Flicks

How director Gorman Bechard made a movie about the Replacements without the Replacements

Just out on DVD, director Gorman Bechard's *Color Me Obsessed: A Film About The Replacements* (2011) is a terrific documentary chronicling the trials and tribulations of the Replacements, one of post-punk's most notorious bands. The film's narrative commences with the release of the band's first demo tape in the early '80s and concludes with its break-up in Chicago in 1991. We recently phoned Bechard, who's currently at work on a new documentary about animal abuse (you can make a donation to the Kickstarter campaign here) for a feature for a weekly. Here's more of our conversation.

I imagine you are a big Replacements' fan. Talk about how you first discovered the group.

Actually, it was 1983. I saw R.E.M. at Toad's Place in New Haven, Connecticut and the Replacements were opening. My girlfriend and I were right up against the stage and the stage was literally pressing up against our chests. When this band came out, the guitarist was wearing a dress and they were drunk out of their minds. I had no idea who they were. No joke, they were the worst band I ever saw. We turned our backs on the band and folded our arms and ignored them through the whole show. Jump forward three or four months and I go to the record shop I went to every week, it was Phoenix Records in Waterbury, and the guy at the record store hands me a package of vinyl he thought I would like and it included the 12-inch of "I Will Dare," and I fell in love with it. I made no connection that it was the god-awful band I had just seen a few months earlier. But then *Let it Be* comes out and that pretty much changed everything. Rock n' roll in the mid-'70s was Elton John, the Eagles, and Billy Joel. Punk saved that. But by 1980 someone gave punk a synthesizer and it became lame and became new wave. Here was this amazing sounding guitar record with songs that were so varied. You put on a Ramones album and it's ten versions of the same song. With this album, you almost had ten bands on this album. The same band that did "Answering Machine" did the Kiss cover and "I Will Dare."

And R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck played on "I Will Dare."

And that's probably why the guy at the record store gave me that single in the first place. I still have that 12-inch.

If people can believe in God without seeing him, I should be able to get people to believe in the Replacements without hearing them.

And what made you want to tackle a documentary feature about the band?

I had written a bunch of books and done narrative features, and I always wanted to do a documentary. I had written about the band in my first novel and was interviewed for a Replacements film. One of the characters is your typical 18-year-old and her favorite band was the Replacements. In 2008 or so, the film's director Hansi Oppenheier writes me and says I can finish the movie. I looked at what she had and didn't like any of it. I liked the idea, but I wanted to do it in a way that interested me. I was lying in bed one night and I said, I don't believe in God, but I believe in the Replacements. If people can believe in God without seeing him, I should be able to get people to believe in the Replacements without hearing them. I've had people say there is no music in the film because I couldn't get music rights. That's simply not true.

You don't interview any of the members, either. Was the band involved in any way?

Nope. I never contacted them and never wanted to contact them. [Twin/Tone Records cofounder] Peter Jesperson gave me the figures on sales. There are a couple of people we wanted to get but didn't. I would have loved to talk to Bill Sullivan, their famous roadie, but it just didn't happen.

I was surprised to read about how the early albums sold so poorly. What was the key to the band's eventual success? Was it the *Village Voice* cover story?

The *Voice* cover story was definitely the linchpin. That pushed them into the mainstream. I've always lived in the Connecticut area and would pick up the *Voice* every week when it came out. It was hugely influential.

You interviewed some 145 critics, musicians and fans. What was it like trying to organize all that information?

My favorite part is editing. I love putting the movie together in the editing room. The next narrative feature I did without a script. I said, "Let's make a movie like we're shooting a documentary." I wanted to tell the story from demo tape to break up. I wanted to use the albums as chapters.

What's one of the most surprising things you discovered about the group?

I think that probably how little some of these albums sold and how influential they were. Their best-selling one sold like 300,000 copies and that was *Don't Tell a Soul*.

I think it's a really fascinating film. Why do you think it didn't get into some of the major festivals?

The only major festival that I thought it should have gotten into was SXSW. I imagine some young kid watched the first five minutes and said something like "Who is the band that all these middle-aged guys talking about?" When you look at all the documentaries that came out and played at the festival, we got more publicity and better release. Try to name one from that year. They're all long gone. My wife always said we did it better on our own. That same week, *Rolling Stone* called us one of the best documentaries of the year. There are people who have a problem with the lack of music. My argument is that this is a band whose first video is a shot of a stereo speaker. That was in 1985 and 1986 when MTV was at its height and R.E.M. became gazzillionaires. The Replacements just did the Replacements thing.

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