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The Archers of Loaf Onscreen Tonight (Tuesday, Oct. 2) at Cafe Nine, Thanks to Gorman Bechard

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The Archers of Loaf reunion in North Carolina last year, as caught for the feature-length documentary What Did You Expect? by Gorman Bechard, screening 9 p.m. Oct. 2 at Cafe Nine in New Haven. (October 2, 2012)

By Christopher Arnott

10:56 a.m. EDT, October 2, 2012

Around 15 years ago, Gorman Bechard tried to interest the New Haven Advocate in a series he was writing about “the best bands you never heard.” That phrase was already becoming trite, and as the paper’s Arts Editor at the time I told him so. But I was keen to have him write about one of his favorite bands, Archers of Loaf. Gorman had posted a list of “the best songs you’ve never heard” on his website, and two of them were by Archers of Loaf.

If you knew Gorman Bechard, there was no way you weren’t going to hear Archers of Loaf. He placed their songs (and those of the band’s leader Eric Bachmann) in his films, helped them get gigs in the New Haven area and went to see them at the drop of a hat.

In the late ‘90s, the local **opportunity** was a show at the Tune Inn (now a parking lot, on Center Street between Church and Orange streets). I was there early to see opening act Sense Field, a band I frankly liked better than Archers of Loaf. Sense Field was one of the bands successfully making the hardcore emo genre palatable for wider rock audiences. They were also from California, and hadn’t hit the East Coast much.

Sometime after Sense Field’s set, Gorman and his Archers of Loaf pals waltzed into the Tune Inn, fresh from a pizza dinner (presumably at Gorman’s favorite haunt, Modern). It wasn’t long before it was the band’s turn to play. This they did, with minimal set-up time and a reckless spontaneity. This was a time when a lot of bands—Sense Field included—felt they had a lot to prove. Even if they were wailing and screaming and pounding their heads, you felt a formalism, a thesis, behind what they were doing.

Not so Archers of Loaf. They felt genuine, and urgent, meant to be a band. They had some of the same impulses as Sense Field, but from a different part of the country Chapel Hill, North Carolina, which in the mid-‘90s was one of several cities vying for the title of “the next Seattle”) and a different part of the brain. They somehow stood apart from the burgeoning emo movement of Sunny Day Real Estate, etc., though they did some of the same quiet-to-loud, reflective-to-

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riotous things.

I still wasn't completely won over—I actually LIKE a level of preparedness and philosophy in my music—but I remember being impressed. Where other bands throbbed, the Archers of Loaf stabbed. Where others were rounded, they were angular. Where others cruised, they tailgated. Yet the intensity was inwardly driven. They were concentrating on themselves, not on the panic around them.

I know I spent much of Archers of Loaf's set watching Gorman watch the band, wondering what he was feeling. I'm often more fascinated by people's passions than I am by the things they're being passionate about. How did this Archers of Loaf show compare with others? Where were they hoping to go with a sound that seemed to favor introspection and solitude rather than the communal catharsis sought by so many bands?

Now, over a dozen years, a slew of albums and EPs and singles, a 1998 break-up and 2011 reunion later, we all can see Archers of Loaf through the eyes of one of their most devoted fans, Gorman Bechard. The filmmaker, flush with praise from his well-received documentary about The Replacements, Color Me Obsessed, filmed the surprise Archers of Loaf reunion gig at The Cat's Cradle club in Carrboro, North Carolina.

The results, What Did You Expect?—The Archers of Loaf Live at Cat's Cradle—screens tonight at 9 p.m. at Café Nine, 250 State Street, New Haven. (Admission is \$5.) The club has now been the location for screenings of three or four separate Gorman Bechard flicks. Unlike Bechard's Replacements doc, which feature no performance footage whatsoever, What Did You Expect? is predominantly a concert film, with interviews tacked on at the end.

The Facebook site for the documentary is here. A DVD version of What Did You Expect?, featuring tons of extras, will be released in November in tandem with the DVD of the Color Me Obsessed. A solitary viewing experience may in fact suit the Archers of Loaf well, but that's no reason to miss a rare chance to commune with fellow fans over concert footage of a band which, thanks to Gorman Bechard, you've heard.

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