

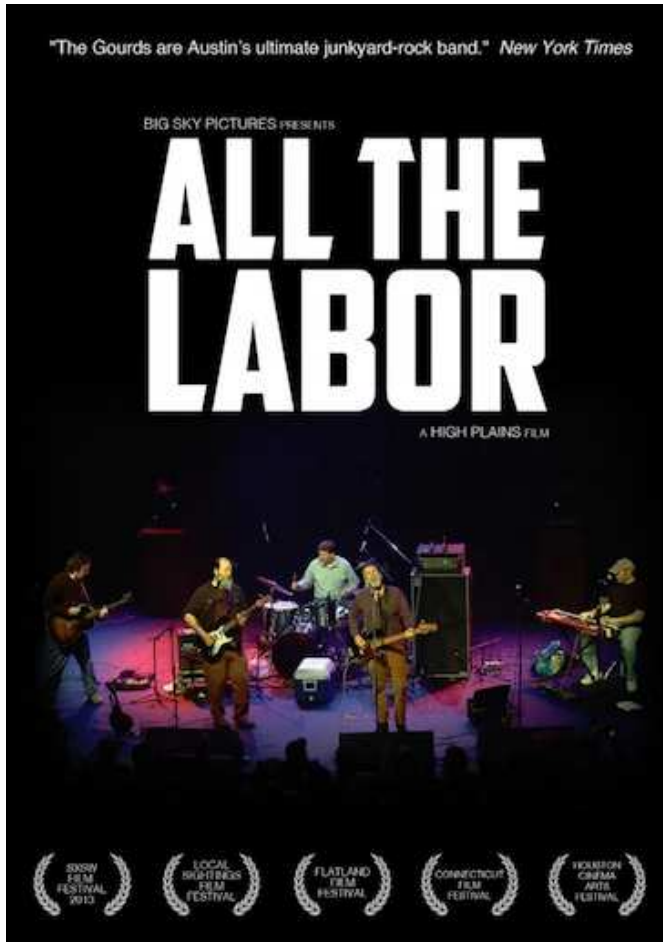
# Medleyville

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## LABOR OF LOVE

Film shows Gourds as witty guys who make quality roots music



Like **The Band** before them, **The Gourds** have been fine ambassadors of American roots music who possess instrumental versatility and focus on the ensemble over any individual.

There are other links between the groups, both direct and coincidental. The last Gourds studio album, 2011's *Old Mad Joy*, was recorded at Band drummer **Levon Helm**'s barn in Woodstock, N.Y. And with The Gourds announcing an indefinite hiatus that officially began after a late October gig, there's a bit of a *Last Waltz*-type aura surrounding **MVD Visual**'s subsequent release of the documentary *All the Labor* on DVD.

Maybe any feelings of uncertainty about the future of the Austin, Texas-based quintet will lead to its music receiving some belated and deserved widespread attention and appreciation. For those just discovering The Gourds, *All the Labor* is a good place to start.

There's a good balance of interviews, performances and life-on-the-road footage in *All the Labor*, and all of it shows a tightknit group of grounded, pretty modest and sometimes self-deprecating musicians. According to drummer **Keith Langford**, he and his band mates are "just good enough to make it work," while singer/guitarist **Kevin Russell** says The Gourds are "a difficult, tangled, complex, weird, awkward mess. But it's worth it." When Russell refers to the Americana music fans who think The Gourds write material "that seems like nonsense to them," his comments are positioned around a jovial performance of **Jimmy Smith**'s "My Name Is Jorge," in which a fruit-cart protagonist recalls making sales to the likes of

**William S. Burroughs, Lee Harvey Oswald and Muhammad Ali.**

Smith, the band's toothpick-toting bassist, occasionally adopts a British accent and provides some of the film's funnier moments and comments. The bearded Russell is quick to laugh at himself as well as generate some humor of his own in various ways: clowning for a photo shoot, recalling his early days as a guitarist ("I learned 'Proud Mary,' and then I wrote a song that sounded a lot like 'Proud Mary'") and breaking into some goofy dance moves onstage.

There's a cool segment with archival and recent footage that focuses on The Gourds' mandolin-fueled version of **Snoop Dogg's** "Gin and Juice." According to *All the Labor*, the cover became one of the most-downloaded songs on Napster, but the recording was credited to **Phish**, among other bands. Toward the end of the documentary, there's an inside look at the band's trip to Woodstock, N.Y., and the subsequent *Old Mad Joy* sessions at Helm's barn with longtime **Bob Dylan** guitarist **Larry Campbell**.

Austin bills itself as the "live music capital of the world," and throughout their concert history, The Gourds have contributed a great deal to that reputation. As *All the Labor* shows, they've also been a good fit for another slogan that's been featured on souvenirs sold in the city: "Keep Austin weird." And Russell is right when he says The Gourds' version of weird is worth it.

Bonus *All the Labor* features include in-the-studio radio-station performances of songs from *Old Mad Joy*, Russell hanging out with two Gourds bootleggers, a brief interview with the band's soundman and full in-concert performances (without interview cutaways) of songs that were featured in the main part of the documentary.

— By **Chris M. Junior**



*The Gourds, from left to right: Max Johnston, Kevin Russell, Claude Bernard, Jimmy Smith and Keith Langford*

\* From the *Medleyville.us* archives

[A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY: Kevin Russell discusses the latest Gourds album \(April 2009\)](#)

[DISC DISCUSSION: THE GOURDS — HAYMAKER! \(January 2009\)](#)

[THE GOURDS: Maxwell's — Hoboken, N.J. \(November 2007\)](#)

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