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# Hard Work Ain't Enough for the Gourds

By [Jedd Beaudoin](#) 20 January 2014

Let's get it out of the way: The biggest moment this stalwart band from Texas has experienced to date was its late '90s cover of Snoop Dogg's "Gin and Juice". Not only did the band not write the tune, it also has rarely received proper credit for covering it. Yes, that gets its play here, but the real crux of the film is that these fellas are some of the hardest working cats on the Americana scene, writing all kinds of songs that the masses will never hear and getting far too little reward for their efforts.

All the Labor follows the band over the course of a decade, starting in 2001, from performing at a SXSW showcase to tracking the Old Mad Joy album, to the subsequent tour to support it. Because it covers a broad span of time and because it doesn't seem to have much more to say than "You really should be ashamed of yourself for not knowing more about this band", All the Labor comes off as a bit of a mess.

There are dozens of bands just as good if not better than [The Gourds](#) who emerged from the mid-late '90s so-called No Depression movement, and their stories are much the same: not easy to classify, not easy to market, and too good for mass consumption. Lots of those band have been subjects of documentaries, whether The Secret to a Happy Ending ([Drive-By Truckers](#)) or Never Make It Home ([Split Lip Rayfield](#)), and none of them

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### All The Labor

Director: [Doug Hawes-Davis](#)

Cast: [The Gourds](#), [Kevin Russell](#), [Jimmy Smith](#), [Claude Bernard](#),

(US DVD: 19 Nov 2013)

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manage to provide the kind of context that might draw either the bands or the films a wider audience. The bands whose stories, like [Uncle Tupelo's](#), might make for the most interesting or most dramatic types of docs have not yet gone under the cinematic microscope.

This isn't an attempt to take anything away from *The Gourds*; the band has made some good records and is capable of impressive live gigs, it's just that this picture plays nice too often, without probing the interesting elements that drive the band. The "Gin and Juice" debate is an interesting footnote but gets far too much play in the film and the live sequences are hardly the stuff that riveting cinema is made of. The band's good. But dramatic? You'll get more drama out of a game of Candy Land.

The guys all like each other, they have families, they believe in what they do, blah, blah, blah. There's nothing inherently interesting in that and there's nothing that director Doug Hawes-Davis can do to make it so. That's not to say that you can't make a movie about people being nice, but it is to say that we'd better have a helluva good reason to invest our time in those nice guys. And *The Gourds*, sad to say, just don't have that kind of recognition.

Moreover, the band's 2013 announcement of an extended hiatus makes us question most of what we learn in this film. This would be a nifty souvenir for fans but it's not much for the rest of the world.

There's a bumper crop of deleted/alternate scenes for said fans. Otherwise, it's all pretty unnecessary.

Rating:  4  
Extras rating:  4



Jedd Beaudoin is an award-winning writer and broadcaster. He holds an MFA in creative writing (fiction) from Wichita State University and hosts *Strange Currency* six nights week for Wichita Public Radio. His writing has appeared in *No Depression* and *The Crab Orchard Review* as well as at websites such as [Ytsejam.com](#) and [Amazon.com](#).

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