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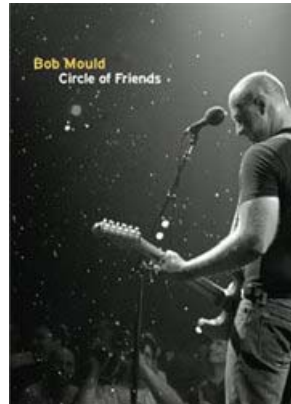
Friends

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10/15/07

Circle of Friends



Let me make one thing clear, to start with: I have unconditional love for Bob Mould. I have found something to be pleased with in his work, even in his most inaccessible projects (Modulate comes to mind, particularly for many who came up with him from Husker Du, but I'll hand you Sound on Sound and the Receipt as evidence that the album was better than they thought). This doesn't mean I won't be critical, but his music is going to have a lot of wiggle room with me.

This bias I have, however, doesn't need to extend to his recently released concert DVD, *Circle of Friends*. Chronicling the last night of his 2005 tour for *Body of Song*, the performance delivers everything his fans wish for and expect from an artist with the scope of work he's amassed over the years. A solid, lengthy, full-band set, a return to the form he's all but abandoned in recent years—leader of the band.

And it was a joy to witness, on a fan level, a critical level, a musical level.

For years now, his shows have been solo acoustic or solo acoustic/electric sets, and as much as I love the intimacy of those shows, some of those songs were written for bands to play, and hearing them played by a band again was like coming home. I saw this tour four days before this dvd was filmed, and I toyed with going down to DC to see this show as well. Having seen the film now, I wish I had.

From a long term fan perspective, the album *Body of Song* was such a treat, as songs appeared on that album that we had been hearing in acoustic form for years. The addition of other instruments and textural elements finally let us hear those compositions in finished form. We were all very familiar with the rough cuts of *Gauze of Friendship*, *High Fidelity*, and *Surveyors and Cranes*, staples of the acoustic set. The full band versions were simply glorious. Particularly *High Fidelity*, always such a simple song about longing and wondering about one's other half. The addition of chimes and organ gave it the feel of a wedding march, witnessed from the pews. It always makes me think of snow on Christmas Eve, actually, snow you watch fall alone. And the live version on this dvd keeps that richness. The addition of Rich Morel on keyboards for this tour added a depth to the songs that is often missing with a guitar-drum-bass trio, Bob's definitive set-up. This tour restored these songs to fullness in a live arena, so often hard to accomplish.

The title, *Circle of Friends*, is taken from the song *Circles*, but, when you watch the opening sequence of the dvd, it could also be the philosophy behind the tour itself. Morel, already mentioned, has been Bob's collaborator since moving to DC, helping him refine his ear for electronic elements and compositions. Jason Narducy worked with Bob in the 90s, and Brendan Canty came up with Bob in the post-punk scene of the early 80s. Fugazi and Husker Du ran parallel to each other, and in overlapping circles. It almost seems natural for them to collaborate at this point in their lives. And Canty's interpretation of some very familiar drum fills from older Husker Du songs seemed almost playful, winking at us, as if to say, "yeah, I know how it goes. Here's what I'm doing instead". And it was met with wild applause, and even laughter by the people I was watching with in Boston. Putting those of us in the audience firmly within Bob's circle of friends as well.

If there was anything I wish for from this dvd, it's that I wish more footage from other shows had been added, as introductory material or