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Bob Mould

Bob Mould: Circle of Friends - Live at the 9:30 Club [DVD]

(Granary Music) Rated: N/A

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by Dan MacIntosh

Bob Mould brings back fond Husker Du memories.

True rock fans live in a fairytale dream world, wishing their favorite acts never breakup. It's like children crossing fingers and toes and hoping parents do not D-I-V-O-R-C-E. But even the best bands, such as The Beatles, called it quits with plenty of great music still in 'em. And don't even get me started on the divorce rate; parental splits are almost inevitable nowadays.

Okay, I know Husker Du was never as big as The Beatles. Had this Minnesota trio remained together, they certainly wouldn't have created Husker-du-mania. But to the faithful few who dedicated their Walkman batteries to albums like *Candy Apple Grey* and *Flip Your Wig*, drummer/vocalist Grant Hart, bassist Greg Norton, and guitarist/vocalist Bob Mould were pre-grunge equivalents to John, Paul, and George. (Sorry, please no Ringo). And similar to The Beatles, Husker Du had two great songwriters (Mould and Hart). (I know, I know! George was pretty darn good songsmith, too. But you have to admit that Lennon/McCartney was the first team, right?)

Also like The Beatles, listeners were treated to two starkly contrasting writing styles. Hart was sort of the McCartney, with his highly melodic, mostly lighter, but not silly, love songs. Mould, on the other hand, was their Lennon-esque tortured soul. This complimenting combination added up to brilliant albums. Along with Midwest state-mates, The Replacements, this abundance of great music almost made one SoCal boy (me) consider braving Minnesota's cold winters just to experience it firsthand. Yep, the scene was that good.

Sadly, the post-Husker Du world has been a woefully quiet one. Mould released the amazing *Workbook* in 1989, and then put out two fine releases under the group name Sugar. But he has still not been nearly as productive as he was with Husker Du. Hart battled drugs both with and without Husker Du, releasing only two albums per decade in both the '80s and the '90s respectively. And the last I heard on Norton, he was a chef at some fancy pants restaurant; although word has it he may get back into the music game soon.

Which brings us to this present live Mould solo DVD. On it, Mould is backed by drummer Brendan Canty (Fugazi), bass/vocals Jason Narducy (Rocket Over Sweden), and keyboards/vocals Richard Morel (Morel), for a gig tracked at the 9:30 Club in Washington, DC. The tight four-piece presents a healthy 23 songs, and spans Mould's career, both in and out of groups.

The highlights are many, and include the addictively melodic "I Am Vision, I Am Sound", one of the better tracks from Mould's solo *Body of Song* release. A pleasant set list surprise is the old Husker Du ballad, "Hardly Getting over It". This slow and sad song expresses Mould's tearful emotions over losing a parent. It's not the sort of song you expect at a rock show, where crowd-pleasing, upbeat numbers are the norm. But DVD viewers will be glad Mould bravely included it. Another fine inclusion is "Makes No Sense At All". "You sell yourself short but you're walking so tall," Mould sings to an obvious hypocrite. This one is, by the way, another great Husker Du chestnut.

The names of his players may have changed, but Mould runs this backing band in much the same way he fronted Husker Du. Though they're all talented musicians, nobody takes any show-off-y solos. Mould's guitar work is thick and powerful, as always, and his singing is pained but persuasive, as always.

The Replacements recently reunited to create a few new tracks for a 'best of' CD, but I haven't heard the same kind reunion talk about Husker Du. And while it would be fun to see these pioneering guys together again, Bob Mould is clearly still at the top of his game, with or without them. Mould, who finally released another solo CD on Anti- called *District Line*, is thankfully going through a new productive streak. But if you want to see how he got here, just take a look at this disc.

RATING:  8

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