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Bob Mould
Circle of Friends DVD
 MVDvisual, 2007

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 Written by Ted Chase
 Wednesday, 07 November 2007

While loyal fans wait for the delayed *District Line*, Bob Mould gives them the full live experience of his band rebirth with the *Circle of Friends DVD*. The alternative music icon has spent his nigh-on-thirty years in music constantly changing, but with 2005's *Body of Song* he seemed to come to peace with his musical legacy. This was nowhere more evident than in his live show, where he toured with a full band for the first time since the 1995 disbandment of his last band, Sugar – and played material from his first band, eighties punk rock foundation Hüsker Dü, for the first time since that band's epic 1988 break-up. And it's all on display on *Circle of Friends*, the live concert film of the Bob Mould Band at Washington, D.C.'s famed 9:30 Club on October 7th, 2005.



Before the concert begins, Mould and the rest of the band tell how they all came together. Keyboardist Richard Morel, drummer Brendan Canty, and bassist Jason Narducy describe, to a man, how Mould was quiet and reserved when they first met him, only to see him open up into the complete opposite as they got to know him better. While some of that was undoubtedly from befriending him, it's also evident that Mould himself has relaxed – he seems to smile more on *Circle of Friends* than he ever has in the past thirty years. With *Body's* excellent "Always Tomorrow" playing as background music, the ten-minute piece serves as a wonderful introduction to the concert, and a re-introduction to Bob Mould.

In concert, Mould and his band move fairly rapidly between pieces, with virtually no chitchat in between (it's something he does even when playing solo – [QRO live review](#)). Other than introducing the band and saying how good it is to be home (Mould currently resides in the D.C. area, where he first met Canty, the drummer for famed early-nineties post-core Washington act, Fugazi), it's pretty much just the music – even the two encore breaks feel abbreviated. What this means is that the band is able to fit in twenty-three songs in just over an hour-and-a-half – far more than you get out of most acts. Mould, Morel, and Canty might be older gentleman (Narducy looks more like he grew up on Mould's music, than as a contemporary), but they certainly haven't slowed down.

Circle of Friends opens with a powerful one-two-three in the first three tracks off of Sugar's incredible 1992 release, *Copper Blue*. "The Act We Act", "A Good Idea", and "Changes" serve as a torching start, reminding one how great Mould + band was – and is. "A Good Idea" particularly over-delivers its performance on *Copper Blue* – nowhere does Narducy earn his bones more than when he starts that piece by laying down it's driving bass line. In fact, one element that can really be gleamed from this live band recording is how much the backing vocals of Narducy and Morel really flesh out the sound of Mould's pieces. Not to take anything away from Mould's own voice, but just as Sugar material was so well served by the backing vocals of bassist David Barbe, and his Hüsker Dü work by drummer Grant Hart's (on Mould's numbers – they split the songwriting duty, with each serving as back-up vocalist for the other), so too is it now by Narducy and Morel.

After that, things go more recent, with *Body of Song's* opener/top single, "Circles". Many critics have complained that Mould's twenty-first century solo material hasn't measured up to his eighties and nineties work; however, most of that is directed at his forays into electronic music and DJ-ing with Morel, and if *Body of Song* was a real return to form, that was nowhere more so the case than with "Circles". The slower piece slides well from the more rapid-fire *Copper Blue*, and the following "Paralyzed" shows that Mould can still rock fast. Starting with "Circles", there are four *Body* pieces in a row, with then the record's three-four-five of "Paralyzed", "I Am Vision, I Am Sound", and "Underneath Days". The latter two lose a lot of the electronic nature they had on album, trading it in for hard rock, and are, in reality, better for it.

[Click here for Bob Mould solo photos from Bowery Ballroom on 4/16/07 in the QRO Concert Photo Gallery](#)

Following that comes an interesting threesome, Sugar's memorable "Hoover Dam", Mould's biggest single in the solo years between Hüsker Dü and Sugar, "See a Little Light", and *Body of Song's* "High Fidelity". "Hoover Dam" is a clear crowd favorite, with Morel's key ably replacing the strange backwards background of the track on *Copper Blue*. "See a Little Light" certainly holds up the flag for Mould's Bush 41-era solo work, but it is a bit of an obvious choice. And "High Fidelity", while nice, sort of brings things to a halt with soft, smooth, sadness.



RANDOM CONCERT PHOTO



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The Art of Love and War



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But then comes the real treat on *Circle of Friends*: four Hüsker pieces from four different Hüsker albums. It starts with maybe the least-surprising Hüsker track, *Candy Apple Grey's* "Hardly Getting Over It". The heartrending, heartbreaking slow number was somewhat out of character for Hüsker Dü, but fits right in with Mould's later work. "Could You Be the One?" was the top single on Hüsker's final record, the massive *Warehouse: Songs and Stories*, and while on that record, it felt a bit too 'single-y' next to everything else, live, its force is taken up a notch. *New Day Rising's* "I Apologize" likewise gets an extra oomph live, with the pair proving that the Bob Mould Band can even improve upon classic Dü. But maybe the most welcome blast from the past is the oldest, "Chartered Trips", off the band's epic 1984 double-LP, *Zen Arcade*. It isn't just that "Trips" is one of that top record's top tracks; it isn't just that it's been over twenty years since it was recorded (in the legendary three-and-a-half days-and-done *Zen* sessions); it's the way, more than anything else played on *Circle of Friends*, it lets the viewer know that Mould embraces his legacy as much as his long-time fans.

Unfortunately, Mould follows up that high point with "The Receipt", off of probably his worst record, *Modulate*. That 2002 album was where he let his electronic interests fly, and it wasn't exactly well received by his rock 'n' roll fans – and "Receipt" wasn't even the best song on *Modulate*. Live, the piece is reinvented as 'hard rock Bob', for the better, but one can't shake the feeling that Mould almost felt he had to include a *Modulate* track, or otherwise be disavowing that portion of his history. It's followed by *Body of Song's* "The Best Thing"; capable, but not 'the best', its inclusion is probably due to this show being part of the *Body of Song* tour, and wouldn't merit a spot otherwise.

But that all gets forgiven and forgotten with *New Day Rising's* "Celebrated Summer". Like "Hardly", it's an Hüsker song that Mould has been playing more these days, but it's a mix of punk rock Hüsker and slow build portions; perfectly suited then, perfectly suited now. What's more, Mould ends the piece and goes into the encore break by saying, "Thanks a lot, we'll see ya" – the exact same way he ended "Summer" on Hüsker's 1994 post-break-up live compilation (and previously the only place, short of bootlegs, one could find live Hüsker), *The Living End*.

The band returns with another good-but-not-great *Body* track, "Beating Heart the Prize", before hitting up "Egøverride", the single from Mould's self-titled 1996 record. While *Bob Mould* also faced mixed reviews, "Egøverride" did not, and in this case, picking the upbeat single to represent the record is a wise, wise choice. However, it can't help but be overshadowed by *Copper Blue's* own top single, "If I Can't Change Your Mind". Nothing encapsulated the poppy-er, radio-friendly nature of Sugar than "Change Your Mind", and it's still a choice crowd favorite today.

Bob Mould Band playing "If I Can't Change Your Mind" live @ 9:30 Club, Washington, DC:



While that would have been more than enough to close out any set, the Bob Mould Band returns for a second encore with *Copper Blue's* "Helpless". A little lagging between all the amazing pieces on that amazing record, the more straightforward rock single gets a boost similar to that enjoyed by "Could You Be the One?" But then comes Hüsker Dü's greatest single, *Flip Your Wig's* "Makes No Sense At All", the perfect combination of speed, power, and an up-tempo attitude. And the band finally closes things out, for real this time, with *Copper Blue's* eccentric stop-start anthem, "Man On the Moon".

With *Body of Song* and his Bob Mould Band tour, many commented that it was a 'return to form' for Mould, but it's been more like a 'summation of forms' for the storied musician, and *Circle of Friends* shows that. Drawing upon his whole career gives the concert a meaty presence you don't often find. Yes, there are naturally some spots from his past that don't get enough attention, like early Dü, between Hüsker-and-Sugar solo work, and Sugar's *File Under: Easy Listening*. And yes, some periods get too much attention, like, naturally, *Body of Song*, but also *Copper Blue* – with seven songs each, the two make up almost two-thirds of the set. There are also some

by Angie Stone

The fourth album for Stone was recorded at Marvin Gaye's original LA studio. [R&B, Soul]



less-than-perfect choices to represent a period. Moreover, there's a scandalous lack of an extras beyond the intro – not even a [booklet](#) inside the DVD!

But more than anything, *Circle of Friends* puts you [there](#). Hüsker Dü began their career with the speed-core live release, *Land Speed Record*, and ended it with the posthumous *Living End*. Sugar, even, ended things live, with *The Joke Is Always On Us, Sometimes*, the second disc of the band's final release, the *Besides* rarities compilation. And *Live Dog '98* preceded Mould's foray into electronic music. The live recording serves Mould well, but this time, it's not a eulogy, but a life story – and that life is still being written...

- *Ted Chase*
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