

Reviews

DVD Review

Green Day

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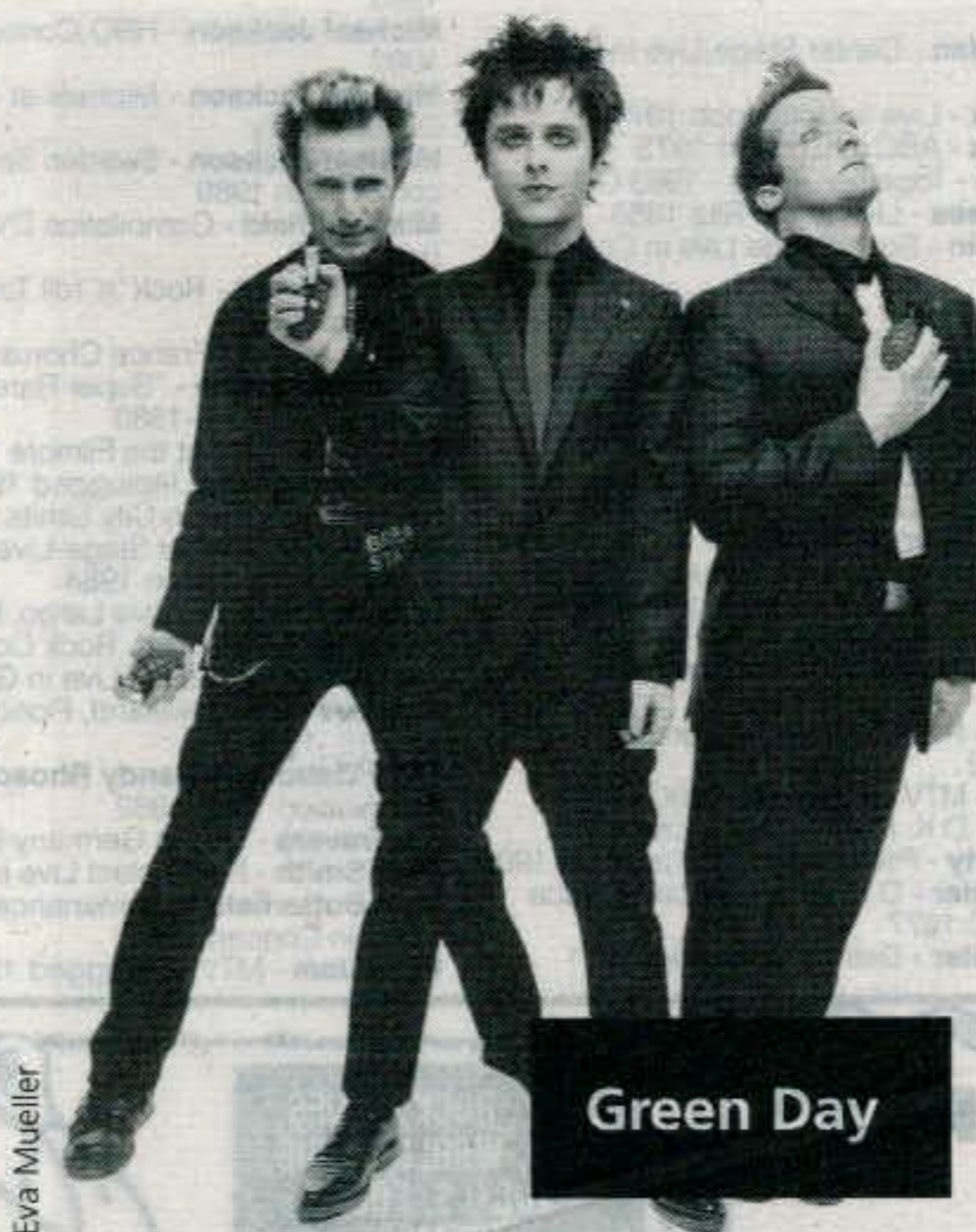
Under Review 1995-2000 The Middle Years

Sexy Intellectual (SIDVD 514)

Grade: ★★★

This DVD focuses on the least commercially successful period of Green Day's major label years, when their career was presumed to be on the decline due to the continually decreasing record sales of *Insomniac*, *Nimrod* and *Warning*.

But of course, to provide context, this 68-minute documentary covers the band's other albums, too: the two released on indie label Lookout!, their major label debut, *Dookie*, and their rightly heralded "comeback" album, *American Idiot*. Most of the interviewees have only a tangential relationship to the band, being journalists and DJs, though at least two of the journalists (Jaan Uhelszki and Ben Myers) have actually met the group. Accordingly, the most informative interviews are with those who have a more personal



Eva Mueller

connection, like Jesse Townley, who ran the legendary punk club, the Gilman Street Project, where Green Day played many early shows, and Larry Livermore, who signed them to Lookout!, and Winston Smith, who designed the cover of *Insomniac*.

Green Day themselves appear via live and interview footage that's all too brief (the DVD's cover points out the release is not authorized "by Green Day, their record label or management"). But within those limitations, it's a pretty fair critique of the period, which, being bookended by *Dookie* and *American Idiot*, is largely overlooked, and a period that casual fans of the band won't be as familiar with. And if there aren't a lot of unexpected revelations (more substantial interviews with those who knew the band would've helped), it probably will inspire you to dig out the band's albums again, while waiting for *American Idiot*'s long-awaited follow-up.

— By Gillian G. Gaar

Indeed, *Welcome Back*, as its title aptly implies, was a return to the buoyant, unaffected pop approach that marked Sebastian's best work with the Lovin' Spoonful and his first efforts on his own. Like *Tarzana Kid*, it was an album centered in its time, filled with well-crafted singer/songwriter fare tailor-made for Top 40 airplay. Naturally, the title tune opened the door; tapped as the theme song for the ABC series "Welcome Back Kotter," it typified the unpretentious, unassuming attitude that was his signature style. Indeed, the album as a whole seemed to find him in a comfortable groove, without the strain caused by compromise on the one hand or experimentation on the other.

A willowy redo of the Spoonful's "Didn't Want To Have To Do It" fit the flow nicely, as did a pair of country-sounding songs, "You Go Your Way, I'll Go Mine" and the succinctly-titled "A Song A Day In Nashville," a sort of "Nashville Cats" revisited. "One Step Forward Two Steps Back" borrowed from the Southern funk groove he dal-

lied with on his cover of "Dixie Chicken," while the mostly instrumental "Let This Be Our Time To Get Along" ended the album with a more emphatic edge.

In terms of its consistency, *Welcome Back* ranks with Sebastian's eponymous debut as his best work to date. As his final album for Warner Brothers, it also marked the last of his pure pop efforts and, for that matter, his final flirtation with chart success.

— Lee Zimmerman

The Grateful Dead

Three From The Vault

Rhino (R2 162812) 2 CDs

Grade: ★★★★★

On hiatus for 15 years, the Grateful Dead's *From The Vault* series seemed, well, dead in the water after only two releases. But how could that be? With all the recording of shows that the Dead is famous for, there had to be more live recordings on the way.

Now comes the third installment,

a 1971 concert of the Dead in Port Chester, N.Y., and it's typical Dead, going off on long, extended jams, where only Jerry Garcia seems to know the directions. Seamlessly blending country, blues, jazz, rock and folk in a rich, flavorful, psychedelic stew, the Dead take the scenic, free-form route through a 14:42 take on "Smokestack Lightnin'" and a 16:10, three-part "That's It For The Other One."

A warm glow emanates from the pristine remastering, which clearly defines the band's musical chops, especially the down-home guitar picking on "Dark Hollow," the easygoing chordal sequences of "Bird Song" and the renewed vigor given to "Casey Jones." This is a must for the faithful.

— Peter Lindblad

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