

FILM / VIDEO REVIEWS

Dead Boys Live DVD review [MVD]

By

Oct 18, 2006, 15:17

DEAD BOYS LIVE! AT CBGB 1977 directed by Rod Swenson; Music Video Distributors, 2004 DVD

In the 1980's, long before cult followings were manufactured overnight by a couple of internet bloggers, when the idea of a retail chain that only sold coffee was laughable, and before there was a hit Broadway show called *Hairspray*, there was a movie called *Polyester*. Director John Waters delivered something in *Polyester*, which seemed to speak directly into my teenage ear. Much to my mother's disgust, that film regularly filled the screen of our living room TV. It was practically a religious experience for this high school outcast who played in a naive punk rock band. My favorite character by far was Bo-Bo Belsinger. At the time, I had no idea Bo-Bo was played by Stiv Bators and I would soon discover that Bators was the typecast front man for the Dead Boys... an ever-present band in my adolescent years.

Fast forward 25 years as I pop this Dead Boys DVD into my new broadband enabled MacBook Pro with my HD television glowing in the background. Instantly time warped to 1977, I witness Cheetah Chrome attack his guitar with precision guided machine gun picking as the band kicks off the set with "Sonic Reducer." Still fucking kills. Immediately apparent is that *this* CBGB signified something other than a t-shirt logo and Hilly Kristal's epic landlord dispute. Looking across the audience it's hard not to notice all the crossed arms and bored faces, proof that the NYC underground music scene was just as jaded in 1977 as it is today. Could somebody please invent a legitimate form of time travel so I can send a message to this "too cool for school" crowd? MESSAGE: "Dear 1977 hipsters, Dead Boys? "Sonic Reducer"? You are currently witnessing a musical force that is contributing to the shape of popular music so please stop looking at your wristwatches."

Within the first two songs Stiv Bators reiterates the point that he holds the crown as an over-the-top front man by eating snot and pouring beer down his pants (eats pre-chewed gum later). However, through all the punk bravado and gross-out antics, Stiv and company deliver something their contemporary English counterparts the Sex Pistols struggled with live—solid musicianship. Even with crappy 70's recording equipment the band's raw energy and musical ability shine bright. By the last song of the set, Dead Boys have almost everyone in the room jumping. The most jaded New Yorkers in the crowd could not deny the fact that they were witness to something great.

The DVD extras include talks with Jimmy Zero (guitar, backup vox), Cheetah Chrome (guitar, backup vox), Johnny Blitz (drums), Jeff Magnum (bass), and Stiv Bators (lead vox). Cheetah and Blitz come off more like very sweet and dedicated utility musicians, whereas Stiv and Jimmy come off more like introspective rock stars who know exactly what is going on. Ole Magnum seems like he stumbled into the gig and would have been just as happy laying carpet.

Cheetah's obvious love for Stiv Bators makes the 2004 interview footage bittersweet. However, Chrome indignantly states that he would never do the Dead Boys without Stiv (Bators died in 1990 after being struck by a car in Paris) but Cheetah did just that. Chrome resurrected the band in 2005. One can only agree with him saying that the one band that could follow Dead Boys at that time was The Ramones. A big-bellied Hilly takes partial credit for finding the band, which is questionable since CBGB was arguably the hottest NYC club at the time and probably every band on the planet wanted to play there, though Hilly was certainly instrumental in getting the band their record deal with Sire.

For straight freak value check out the bonus Steel Tips footage: their song opens with Joe Coleman lighting a fuse sticking out of his shirt, igniting a brick of firecrackers on his chest. Trying that in CBGB today would probably get you a night in jail. This could probably be another DVD in of itself if you were to scratch the surface with this wacky crew... some very enjoyable weird shit going on there. The *Village Voice* deemed them a "Must see..." back then.

Stiv Bators mentions his influences in the interview, which include Iggy Pop, Paul Revere and the Raiders and The New York Dolls. However, the mention that was most poignant for me from this 1977 interview... yes 1977 interview, was when Stiv says he digs "early Rolling Stones." The key word from Stiv is "early." Remember, this is 1977 folks! He's referring to The Rolling Stones as an old rock band. So, to think: The Dead Boys are a distant yet provocative star shining within the rock universe while here on planet earth in 2006 there is no hesitation to flip the channel when we see Mick Jagger's cratered face during the Super Bowl half time. Maybe I should be writing this indie zine article on The Rolling Stones.

-Jason Harper



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