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Northwest recordings

Murder City Devils get their due on video

By Tom Scanlon

Seattle Times staff reporter

From 1997 until 2001, the **Murder City Devils** served as a precarious floating bridge between grunge and indie rock. It almost seems absurd to think of this reckless, derivative (Stooges disciples) band as "trendsetting," but remember that the difference between Seattle music then and now is like the difference between the Blood Brothers and Brooks Brothers.

At the band's zenith, the Murder City Devils — snarling singer **Spencer Moody**, bass player **Derek Fudesco**, guitarists **Nate Manny** and **Dann Gallucci**, drummer **Cody Willis** and keyboardist **Leslie Hardy** — were rivaled by perhaps only a young Modest Mouse as Seattle's most popular club band. They toured hard and often, developed a hearty national following and some solid press clippings and capped that off by signing to Sub Pop.

The rowdy (even by punk standards, perhaps even by devil standards) punk-and-roll band developed the usual personality clashes and added a growing feud with its label. The Devils called it quits after three Sub Pop albums, signing off with a farewell concert on Halloween night. That 2001 concert at the Showbox was subsequently released as a live album on Sub Pop, and now a DVD of the last MCD show is finally surfacing.

"Murder City Devils — The End: Final Show Halloween 2001" is being released Tuesday by Music Video Distributors (www.musicvideodistributors.com).

The individual band member's post-Devils careers suggest this band might have gone on to greater heights had it stayed together. Gallucci joined Modest Mouse just before — coincidence? — Isaac Brock's band released a hugely successful album. Fudesco co-founded **Pretty Girls Make Graves**, which took off right from its beginning and is now on Matador Records (third album coming out this year). Willis is in the hot new hard-rock duo **Big Business**.

As for Moody, he has been quiet, of late. He started a promising band called **Dead Low Tide**, but that

band broke up *even before* its first album was released. He now is in two bands, 1) **Triumph of Lethargy Skinned Alive to Death** and 2) **Smoke and Smoke**, though neither has been very active, as Moody is currently living in Brooklyn, and his bandmates are in this area.

With the release of the DVD, it's a good time to wonder: What might have been?

"We definitely were headed in a different direction, we probably could have made a living for ourselves without needing to be on a major label," Moody ponders. "I probably wouldn't be bussing tables now, if we hadn't broken up."

Moody expects to leave New York and the restaurant where he works for Seattle in the near future, and spend quite a bit of time here. Last Sunday he was at a friend's house in town, attempting to recover from being "crippingly hung over" as he talked about his old band.

"Musically, the stuff I'm doing now is a lot different. I'm really proud of what the Murder City Devils did and what we accomplished, but I wouldn't really want to do it again now."

Asked about the best and worst of the Devils, Moody paused, then responded: "I would say Sub Pop was probably the best thing and the worst thing. They were really good to us for a long time, and good for us. I guess the only thing I regret about that now is the way that relationship came to an end. That's the only thing that left a bad taste in my mouth about the whole experience."

Another positive: "Being able to travel so much, being able to go to Europe. We were on the road a ton, for quite a while."

If you've ever been on a long road trip with someone, you know how emotions can flare; so it was with the Murder City Devils, who perhaps toured themselves into an early band grave. "Just now everyone is starting to really get along, it's sort of nice starting to feel like a family again."

While Moody did vocals for Gallucci's new A Gun Called Tension project, and while he plans to work in the future with Gallucci and other ex-MCD members, those waiting for a Murder City Devils reunion show are advised not to hold their breath: "I don't think it could ever happen. I don't think I could really perform the songs, I think it would not be very honest and be hard for me to perform the way I used to, now. It would probably be better to remember the band the way it was."

The way it was is partially captured by the DVD (Moody and the band's merchandise salesman provide Beavis and Butt-head audio commentary). It shows the band's farewell concert starting off in fairly tame fashion, with nothing seeming unusual (save for a few Halloween costumes), and Moody introducing songs with generic phrases like, "This next song is called 'Rum to Whiskey,' I hope you like it."

Two-thirds of the way into the show, there is a distinctive "passing of the torch" moment, as Moody is

joined on stage by Andrea Zollo for a "Boom Swagger" duo; Zollo would go on to join Fudesco in *Pretty Girls Make Graves*. After "Dance Hall Music," Willis lights his drums on fire — as he often did during MCD shows — to kick off "Cradle to Grave."

From there on in, it's punk chaos. Stage divers galore. Audience members rushing the stage and aggressively interacting. A few weird make-out moments, tongue-in-cheek (literally).

On the last song, Fudesco gives up his guitar to an audience member and body-slams Moody — who, as Fudesco maintains a bear hug on him, continues singing from the floor.

Moody eventually makes it back to his feet to complete "Grace That Saves," which concludes with him almost catatonically repeating "This is a love letter" ... finally singing, "I gotta go now/I'm on my way" to bring the song, the show, and the Murder City Devils to an end.

- On May 24, Sub Pop releases its first **Sleater-Kinney** album: "The Woods." Producer **Dave Fridmann** (Mercury Rev, the Flaming Lips, recent Sub Pop album by Low) pumps some much-needed creative music into the Seattle-Olympia-Portland trio. This is very likely S-K's best work, and bands should be lining up for miles to work at Fridmann's up-state New York house of magic.
- Demo of the month: **Panda & Angel**, a new band started by **Josh Wackerly** (from Jenn Ghetto's S). Very Carissa's Wierd. Details and sounds: www.pandaandangel.com.
- **The New Mexicans** proved to be too confusing — see what happens when you try to be clever? — so that band is now called **Crutches**.
- **Headphones**, a side project from Pedro the Lion's **David Bazan**, has a self-titled debut on Seattle's Suicide Squeeze Records out this week: www.suicidesqueeze.net.

Tom Scanlon: tscanlon@seattletimes.com

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