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## Flipper: Live - Target Video 1980-1981

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**List Price: \$14.95** [[Buy now and save at Amazon](#)]

Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted April 16, 2008 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

### The Product:

Lasting musical legacies are usually forged out of one of two dynamics - the creative canon left behind, or the behind the scenes antics involved. An unusually nasty break-up can create such a myth, as will an untimely death. In the case of Flipper, the former element clearly applies. In an era where three chord garage chaos was giving way to the slick polish of New Wave, these California caterwaulers reinvented the genre by turning the anger and aggression into a sort of slacker jam band. They were Phish without the formal training, New Order with the bass-lead dynamic but none of the English act's portentous doom. In fact, Flipper was as indefinable and generic as the cover of their first album - oddly enough, entitled *Album - Generic Flipper*. Yet today their particular noise resonates with a fanbase fed on Trent Reznor and his Nine Inch nailing. The death of founding frontman Will Shatter should have ended their career on a rock and roll suicide sentiment. Instead, Flipper continues to convert, from an enamored Kurt Cobain to scads of emo emulators. **Live TargetVideo077: 1980-81** gives the uninitiated a chance to see the band in the perfect sonic setting - a crappy little club where no one appears to give a sh\*t. How apropos.



### CONTENT

★★★★★

### VIDEO

★★★★★

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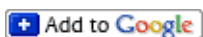
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### The Plot:

Barely a year out from their humble local scene beginnings, Flipper faces an apathetic audience at Berkeley Square in 1980. Consisting of Vietnam vet guitarist Ted Falconi, bass players and vocalists Will Shatter and Bruce Lose, and drummer Steve DePace, the foursome fights through the ennui to deliver a collection of early tracks, including:

"Low Rider"/ "Friends"/ "Brainwash"/ "One by One"/ "Ha, Ha, Ha" /"Oh, Oh, Ay, Oh" /"Love Canal"/ "The Wheel"/ "End the Game"

It's a half hour of murky musical anarchy. Next is a performance from 11 months later. The band is opening for UK noise gurus Throbbing Gristle, and the headliner oriented crowd couldn't be more displeased. Flipper sails through the following songs before retreating to the dressing room:

"Shine"/ "Nothing"/ "Low Rider"/ "One by One"/ "Head Cold Old World"/ "Life"

Six classic tracks dragged out to almost a half hour of horror. Simply astonishing. Finally, a public access television show from Channel 25 in San Francisco features the band running through the seminal cult cramp "Sex Bomb". It becomes the ultimate stomp from Hell.

### The DVD:

For those of us living in the non-punk Neanderthal South during the late '70s/early '80s, news of any breakout band, no matter the region of the world, was cause for an instant trip to the local record shop. So when *Trouser Press* (the DIY Bible of the time) touted a controversial group from San Francisco named Flipper, it was Vinyl Fever or bust. The celebrated single, "Love Canal" backed with the equally unnerving "Ha, Ha, Ha" was our first taste of the sludge core combo. It sounded like the Sex Pistols slowed down to 16 rpms, or perhaps the Clash on Quaaludes. In fact, many people have since argued that Johnny "Rotten" Lydon's follow-up to his "God Save the Queen" leanings, Public Image Ltd. was a direct rip-off of Flipper's funk'd up jive. Yet there was something ethereal and sort of sinister about the band, an 'anything can happen' vibe that seemed to translate easily onto record. Live, however, was another matter all together, and it's something you see quite clearly on this DVD. Flipper were, for want of a better term, amateurish, but in a very good, very brave way. They weren't beyond playing incomplete songs, figuring false starts into the mix, or using a single note as a means of making an entire track. If punk was supposed to be about breaking down barriers and deconstructing the rules of rock, no one battled the musical Man better than this quartet.

The Berkeley show is a perfect example of this ideal. Drummer DePace is ramrod solid. His driving beats make

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up for missing elements among the other band members. Similarly, Falconi's guitar is buried so deep in the mix that you can barely hear its Gang of Four angularity. When he wasn't bashing out the dissonant chords, he was giving the heroin harmonics of Keith Levene a run for their money. For most, the weird combination of Shatter and Lose will either confirm Flipper's forgotten gem status, or indicate the reason why the band barely broached the mainstream conversation. Both guys give goofy a new definition, each one posing like David Lee Roth with spina bifida. Odder still was their out of tune Sid Viciousness when it came to playing the bass. When they try, they sound off kilter. When they don't, the aural aggression literally undermines and then remakes the song. If Flipper were adept at one thing, it was taking a single idea to illogical extremes. "Love Canal" may be an ode to that infamous Niagara Falls, New York neighborhood poisoned by toxic waste, but it's also a decidedly sick shout-out to an equally lethal romance...maybe.

In fact, it's a shame that lyric sheets aren't provided here. One of the best elements of a Flipper tune is its soiled stream of unconsciousness imagery. "Ha, Ha, Ha" may sound like something funny, or even mocking, but it's really a basic bored teen lament (complete with "gushy and wet" sex). Though it's dirge like qualities would defy such an interpretation, "Life" actually celebrates the subject. "Sex Bomb"'s single stanza - "she's a sex bomb, my baby, yeah" is every pop pronouncement filtered down to its lust/longing core, and "Low Rider" is all adolescent angst and wanting to fit in - or die. From the one-off joke of "Brainwash" ("forget it, you wouldn't understand anyway") to the deliberate defiance of "One by One", the words Flipper uses were quite exceptional. It's sometimes too bad that they got lost in a bombast of beer soaked slow burn. At 71 minutes, this DVD barely scratches the surface of the band's continued influence. In today's sonic self-indulgence clime, Flipper's 30 year old cacophony still sounds contemporary. It's proof that among all trends, some things stand out. This California quartet definitely redefined the genre - at least, for a little while.

#### **The Video:**

The main sticking point of this release, at least for most digital denizens, will be the sadly piss poor quality of the visuals. The 1.33:1 DVD image has been cleaned up substantially, but it still looks like a bootleg dupe of someone's copy from 29 years ago. The transfer tries to alter some obvious analog issues, but there's not much that can be done with old magnetic tape and borderline prehistoric technology. TargetVideo077 is not really to blame. Neither is the band. Call it a sure sign of the times, but this picture looks purposefully punked out.

#### **The Audio:**

The sound side of things is much better. As stated before, Falconi's guitar is more or less lost in the overall mire of

the recording. He maybe flailing away like a repossessed Joe Satriani, but we never hear it. Similarly, Shatter and Lose's vocals occasionally disappear. But the Dolby Digital 5.1 track does a terrific job of keeping things from deteriorating into an outright drone. There is nice separation, and some decent immersion. Overall, the aural aspect of this release is the far superior facet.

#### **The Extras:**


Aside from a few text based (and music backed) information screens about Flipper and TargetVideo077, there are no other bonus features on this DVD. While interviews with the remaining members would have been nice, the lack of additional content is understandable. After all, we're lucky just to have these early concert appearances.

#### **Final Thoughts:**

Sometimes, you just had to be there. What seemed revolutionary 30 years ago (Anti-Nowhere League, anyone?) sounds dumb and dated once a significant amount of time - and culture - have passed. Flipper definitely defies such a categorization. Sure, the frat boy antics of the group can seem as fresh as poseur's safety pin pierced cheek, but when it comes to croaking to their own unique musical muse, the guys really gave us something unique. Easily earning a **Recommended** rating (tech issues clearly push the score lower), it's a shame that the Flipper saga ended the clichéd way of other rock and roll stories. Maybe someone will make the necessary documentary on the act. Until then, we can hope TargetVideo077 has more footage in their vaults. Part of Flipper's endearing quality is the wonderful din they managed to make. The more you see of them, the more you understand the attraction.

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