



## Flipper

### Live - Target Video 1980-1981 [DVD]

US release date: 19 February 2008

by James Greene

There once was a band from Frisco  
Whose jams were much thicker than Crisco  
The audience they fried  
Their lead singer died  
And now they tour with Nirvana's bass player Krist No.

And to think, I gave up my dreams of being a professional limerick writer.

Flipper is a band that most people have completely forgotten about, thanks mostly to that freaky bearded music manipulator, Rick Rubin. The Def American founder bought up all the rights to Flipper's catalog in the '90s, re-releasing a couple of their records before allowing everything to go out of print and refusing the San Fran legends the right to take their murky fish rock elsewhere.

This has kept the band Kurt Cobain openly worshipped (remember that ratty homemade t-shirt he wore all the time?) off shelves and consequently off the radar of young, punk-hungry music fiends across the globe. Shoot, right now you'd have better luck finding a goldurned Fang record at your local music emporium.

Luckily, Rick Rubin's Flipper embargo does not apparently stretch to the DVD format. Thus, we have *Flipper: Live - Target Video 1980-1981*. Finally, the droning, antagonistic, sloppy punk mess the late Will Shatter and his pals—bassist/singer Bruce Loose, guitarist Ted Falconi, and drummer Steve DePace—lives again, complete with moving picture images of the band (in color, even!).

I was immediately struck by what a handsome young man Will Shatter was. You hear the phrase "heroin-addicted punk rock singer" and the brain churns out images of unkempt legends like Darby Crash and G.G. Allin. But Shatter, with his boyish face and well-groomed blond coif, could have easily passed for Van Johnson in his prime. I guess that goes to show you can't judge a guy by his obituary.

I hate to use the term "fever dream" to describe the performances contained on this disc (mainly because I feel those two words are the most overused in dirge punk-related journalism), but that's truly the best way. The frantic, tight camera work on the earliest footage – from a 1980 gig at Berkeley Square – only serves to heighten the general dizziness surrounding Flipper's muddy, mind-numbing sound. A maddeningly long version of "The Wheel" from this set outdoes even the most extended takes of Flipper's most popular drone hit "Sex Bomb" (you *will* believe you are somehow traveling through time as you let the rumbling rhythms of "The Wheel" roll over you – say hi to Ben Franklin for me!).

The 1981 footage, taken from Flipper's opening slot at Throbbing Gristle's final show, is less claustrophobic but equally unnerving. Eerie white light bathes the band as they rock about in front of a giant video screen showing random horrifying images. Sullen looks barely hang on their tired faces. "This is actually a test in future torture," Will Shatter announces before "Nothing".

It's obvious he's including the band in this statement as much as the audience. Flipper was a tad out of their element in cavernous Kezar Stadium that night; all the open air swallowed up their sound. Throbbing Gristle's serious-minded fans watched the punk heroes like some kind of museum exhibit, refusing to give in to their amateur sound and let loose like the booze-swilling fans in the previous segment.

This, in turn, seemed to irritate Will and the boys (Falconi's tensions are released at the end of "Hard Cold Old World" when he completely destroys his guitar). Yes, it seems that old adage is proven beyond a shadow of a doubt here: you can take Flipper out of the club, but you can't take the club out of Flipper.

Take Flipper out of the club and put them in a television studio, though, and they seem to do alright. Rounding out this DVD is a superb 1983 performance of "Sex Bomb" for San Francisco's Channel 25. Sounding thicker, tighter, and more confident than ever before, this segment finds Flipper at the top of their game and is the true highlight of the entire disc.

Technically, this clip is an extra, as it does not fall under the time specified

in the DVD's subtitle (1980-1981). What gives, Target Video? Had you already printed up all the sleeves when you discovered the Channel 25 performance, or did you decide to make the '83 "Sex Bomb" an extra after you realized you didn't really have anything else to offer (aside from some Flipper-praising introduction notes and a brief history of Target itself)? To quote Beck Hansen, that is some straight-up New Jack horse crap.

Forgiveness is divine, though, and I'll give you a little for showering the iPhone era with a nice sprinkling of Flipper. It's a good feeling to know Will, Bruce, Ted, and Steve's memory is no longer relegated to blurry photos of a crappy t-shirt some rock star wore 15 years ago. Here's to the headaches and the riffs that caused them.

RATING: 

— 3 April 2008

[advertising](#) | [about](#) | [contributors](#) | [submissions](#)  
© 1999-2008 PopMatters.com. All rights reserved.  
PopMatters.com™ and PopMatters™ are trademarks of PopMatters Media, Inc. and PopMatters Magazine.