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TAD: Busted Circuits And Ringing Ears DVD Review

Posted by Mitch Michaels on 02.21.2008

The progenitors of grunge, TAD nearly rode the Seattle scene to success - had it not been for Pepsi and crystal meth...

My Story

Sometimes the best music documentaries aren't about the band's that everyone knows, but rather the ones who struggled to make it and perhaps never did. Wilco's excellent [I Am Trying To Break Your Heart](#) comes to mind. It's films like that which really capture the blue collar aspect and the true passion of a band. Because without a passion, what story would there be to tell? "We made a lot of [money](#) and sold a lot of records, then we went on to solo projects". Not exactly a captivating hour and a half in that.

With that said, Seattle's TAD, a band that ran neck and neck with Nirvana to the cusp of stardom, makes for a perfect subject for this movie. Will their story finally put to celluloid bring TAD the acclaim that they deserve?

Their Story

TAD formed around frontman Tad Doyle, a Seattle native who was larger than life in both personality and stature. Doyle, a club veteran and well known face on the burgeoning Seattle scene, put together a well-received single in the late 80's, which became the impetus for him to form TAD with bassist Kurt Danielson. The duo then recruited local drummer Steve Weid and guitarist Gary Thorsensen. They signed to Sub Pop in 1988, just after the label was beginning to break via the success of Mudhoney and Soundgarden.

TAD released their first album, *God's Balls*, in 1989. The album, produced by Jack Endino (who had also worked with Mudhoney and Soundgarden) helped pioneer and popularize the "grunge" sound, which was developing in Seattle at that time. The Steve Albini-produced *Salt Lick* EP followed in 1990, and its single "Wood Goblins", was infamously rejected by MTV. *Salt Lick* led to a European tour with fellow Sub Pop act Nirvana. Nirvana, who were just coming off of their debut *Bleach*, shared headlining duties with TAD for those dates.

TAD released their second LP, *8-Way Santa*, in 1991. Produced by Butch Vig (who also worked on Nirvana's *Nevermind*), *Santa* found TAD exploring a more melodic sound. The album was on the verge of breaking out, when a series of lawsuits sidelined the band. Their biggest single, "Jack Pepsi", drew the ire of the cola company, while a Seattle couple was set to sue Sub Pop for their unlicensed photo appearing on the *Santa* cover.

At this time, TAD (which now featured Josh Sinder on drums) began to explore their options, having generated a healthy buzz with their live shows, albums and image. TAD signed to major label Giant Records, where they released their ultra-heavy third LP, *Inhaler*, in 1993. A tour with Soundgarden followed, but TAD was quickly dropped from Giant and left with no monetary support. No reason was given for their axe from Giant, though blame has been placed on a tour promotion poster that featured then-President Bill Clinton smoking a joint, with the tag line "Inhaler: It's Heavy Shit".

The Giant firing led to tensions within the band, which eventually led to the ousting of guitarist Thorsensen. TAD signed onto EastWest Records, where they recorded 1995's *Infrared Riding Hood* as a three piece. Once again, TAD was dropped from the label shortly after the album's release. Drummer Sinder left in 1996 and was replaced by Mike Mongrain, who gigged with TAD for the next three years. During that period, there was only one release by the band, a single called "Oppenheimer's Pretty Nightmare", which came out on Up Records in 1998. In 1999, TAD called it quits.

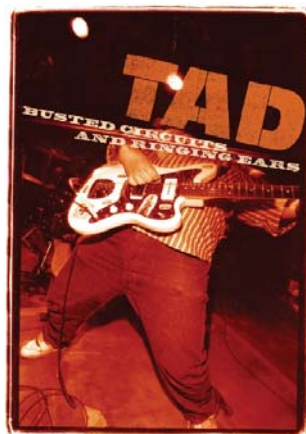
Tad Doyle and Kurt Danielson went on to play with other bands, but none grew the legend of TAD. In 2007, King Of Hearts Productions began work on a TAD documentary, which would feature interview with band members and friends.

The DVD

On February 19, 2008, MVD Visual released [TAD: Busted Circuits & Ringing Eardrums](#) on DVD. The film is in widescreen format and features Dolby Digital sound. The movie is unrated with a runtime of 93 minutes.



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The Credits

Directed by Ryan Short & Adam Pease

Cast:

TAD, with interviews from Krist Novoselic, Chad Channing, Kaim Thayil, Mark Arm, Mark Felchtone and others.

The Feature: 7.0

The press sheet for TAD features a quote from Charles Cross, author of the Kurt Cobain biography "Heavier Than Heaven": "[TAD's is] the story of what could have been as opposed to what was." That's heartbreakingly true, as you can watch TAD's career parallel with Nirvana's, and see the roadblocks that kept TAD from finding similar success. Still, [Busted Circuits And Ringing Ears](#) is also a fascinating look into the Seattle scene. The film chronicles the birthing of grunge and the early days of seminal label Sup Pop through the eyes of one of the area's most promising bands. Never mind that they never "made it". This is the story of a band that took the journey to its bitter end.

The interviews on this DVD are great. Nearly all of TAD's ex-members speak candidly, with the exception of their last drummer Mike Mongrain and founder Gary Thorstensen, who is hinted to have had an acrimonious split with the band fueled by substance abuse. No topic is shielded away from, and you don't get the feeling that TAD or the Sub Pop label execs, band friends, etc, are using the feature to just hype a band that never got their due respect. The film is simply telling the story. Tad Doyle himself is still an engaging personality, and hearing him and Kurt Danielson tell the stories of the band's recording sessions, the "Pepsi" incident, the story of how their video was "too ugly" for MTV, the label axings, terrible touring conditions and copious drug taking is both **entertaining** and very interesting. Interviews with other big Seattle personalities, like members of Nirvana, Mudhoney and Soundgarden, provide a full scope look at the time period.

The movie tells the story of TAD, from their first single, to their Sub Pop years, to their multiple major label firings that led to the band's demise. The reunion between Tad and Kurt at the end is a nice touch, though I could go without the promise of an album of lost TAD music coming out soon. Another slightly annoying aspect of the film is that there just isn't enough archival footage to fill up a 90-minute feature, so you see a lot of images and clips repeated during the telling of the story. Still, the music of TAD is just as heavy as advertised, and the live clips are worth seeing, for sure.

The Extras: 6.5

The only extras on the DVD are a set of TAD music videos, including "Wood Goblins", "Stumblin Man", "Plague Years", "Grease Box" and "Leafy Incline". Most of the footage from these videos is used in the feature, but it's nice to hear the songs without voiceovers interrupting them. These videos definitely capture the spirit of the grunge era, when MTV still played dark and grainy videos over big dance productions.

The 411: [TAD: Busted Circuits & Ringing Ears](#) tells the story of a band that proved to be influential and pioneering without ever reaching a deserved amount of success. The raw stories of life as indie artists, including law suits, label problems and bad tours, are critical to anyone who loves the blue collar side of the music business, while the tales of brotherhood and triumph within TAD are entertaining. The feature also tells the story of the beginning of grunge and Sub Pop Records, which makes this really the story of the Seattle scene itself, as told by the people who were there making it happen. Definitely worth watching, and some great music to go with it.

Final Score: 7.0 [Good] [legend](#)

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