



## Tad

### Busted Circuits & Ringing Ears [DVD]

(Tad)  
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by Doug Sheppard

In its time, grunge was viewed the revolutionary, galvanizing force that would deliver rock 'n' roll from its over-sanitized '80s hair band/new wave nadir into a utopia of rebellious individualism. It did do that, or at least hair metal was virtually extinct by the time grunge had stormed the gates in 1991-92, but in retrospect, it was more like a quick act of guerilla warfare than an outright revolution.

The success of Nirvana's *Nevermind* album may indeed have been the time punk finally arrived in America; unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that unlike the original wave of '77 punks, there wasn't much to grunge outside of Nirvana. Alice In Chains were just OK, Mudhoney and Pearl Jam were well-meaning but bland, Soundgarden was a grossly overrated '70s derivation, and bands like Candlebox, Hole, and Paw were crap. Once Nirvana was dead, so was grunge, basically.

There were, however, worthwhile grunge bands like L7, the Melvins, the Nymphs, and the subject of this documentary, Tad. Though their albums were all somewhat patchy, Tad always had a few great songs in their arsenal. As they rose from starving Sub Pop indie artists to major label beneficiaries, one couldn't help but think that, given the right circumstances, they could develop into a band every bit as strong as Nirvana.

Sadly, the right circumstances never came. Their "breakthrough" album for Sub Pop, 1991's *8-Way Santa*, was mired in lawsuits—first from the unwitting stoned couple who graced its original cover, then from the makers of worst beverage known to man, who sued and even silenced Tad over a song called "Jack Pepsi" (later retitled "Jack"). Then came their solid major label debut, *Inhaler* (1993), for which Tad were rewarded by being dropped mid-tour in Europe with no explanation. But that wasn't as bad as what happened on 1995's *Infrared Riding Hood*, where Tad were dropped one week after its release. It probably also didn't help that the members of Tad, including a leader known for his girth, weren't exactly matinee idols in the looks department, either.

*Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears* documents all of that, plus the history of the band from its beginnings as Tad Doyle's solo project in 1988 to full-borne quartet within a year. Most of Tad's ex-members are interviewed, with the core of Doyle and Kurt Danielson providing most of the insights, but the DVD also includes interviews with Kim Thayil of Soundgarden, Krist Novoselic and Chad Channing from Nirvana, Mark Arm of Mudhoney, and Sub Pop cofounders Jonathan Poneman and Bruce Pavitt. The result is a well-rounded picture of Tad, from their musical roots (turns out Doyle is classically trained) to their personalities to their road shenanigans.

In some ways, this is the old rock 'n' roll story of promise unfulfilled: Band fails to capitalize on major label money, gets discouraged, and collapses under the weight of depression and drug abuse. But in other ways, it's not. One of the most likable aspects of this documentary—and the members of Tad themselves—is that they've gotten on with their lives. Not a tear is shed in memory of the 1989 European tour with Nirvana, where Tad got most of the ink—yet didn't even come close to the popularity of their tour mates in the long run.

With the filmmakers' amusing censoring of the word "Pepsi" with a mock corporate logo over the lips of interviewees, the "Jack Pepsi" legal struggle—undoubtedly very stressful at the time—is recalled with snickering and sarcasm. There is no finger pointing, no harping on "what could have been" (though one interviewee, Charles Cross, does invoke the phrase), and not even the inevitable self-pity over drug abuse.

Essentially, *Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears* is history without the histrionics. And as commendable as the producers' success getting interviews is, the job they did procuring footage of Tad dating from their days as a tiny club band to major label touring act is nothing short of tremendous. All of which makes this a great documentary.

RATING: 7

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