

# SEATTLEWEEKLY

Heavy Nostalgia: Tad Doyle Crushes Everything in His Past

The new TAD documentary, *Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears*, celebrates the brilliant ugliness created by the band's collision of garage-punk and sludge-metal.

By Michael Alan Goldberg

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"He is the revenge of redneck Americana, howling its distaste at a straight-edged world."

So opined music journalist Everett True, in a 1990 concert review for *Melody Maker*. He was writing about singer-guitarist Tad Doyle and the monstrosly heavy, loud, and lumbering sounds Doyle and the rest of the Seattle quartet that bore his first name were unleashing at the height of the city's grunge era. Anyone who saw TAD's iconic "Wood Goblins" video (which was famously rejected by MTV for being "too ugly") from that same year probably agreed with True, and more than a few took it semi-seriously—there was the menacing Doyle, all 300-plus pounds of him shoved inside flannel and denim, chasing a terrified hiker through the forest with a chain saw and maniacal expression, while his longhaired bandmates licked knife blades, sharpened sticks, and otherwise came off like a horde of backwoods freaks prepared to make all interlopers squeal like pigs, or worse.

The fascinating new TAD documentary, *Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears*, hardly disputes the brilliant ugliness created by the band's collision of garage-punk and sludge-metal—it celebrates it, and cements TAD's legacy as one of Seattle's best and most beloved bands ever, but it also punctures a few myths along the way. In one scene, as he recalls the "Wood Goblins" video shoot, music photographer Charles Peterson—who was there to take some promotional photos for Sub Pop—notes with a grin, "I had to show Tad how to start up the chain saw."

"There was definitely a perception that we were complete badasses and you didn't wanna mess with us," the amiable Doyle chuckles, relaxing in his Seattle home on a recent Friday night. "You know, don't cross 'em, Lord knows what they'll do—they'll pull out a Buck knife and kill ya. But no, we weren't lumberjacks, and no, we weren't truck drivers on crystal meth. We *are* actually college-educated, and although we sung a lot about the underbelly...you know, American depravity and all that stuff, that's just the subject matter we chose to sing about and portray. And then Sub Pop played that up to the nth degree, and it was kinda fun, so we just went with it."

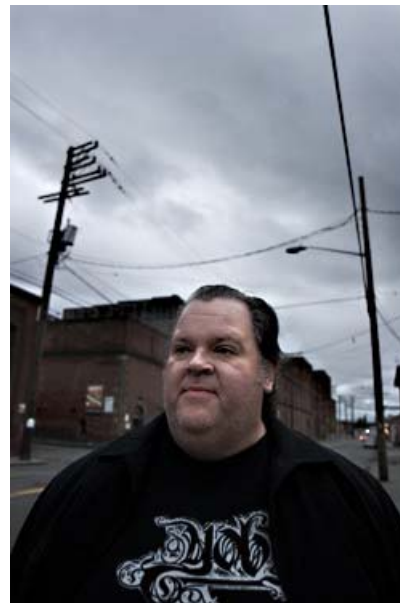
"Tad is by *no* means a savage," laughs Seattle filmmaker and video producer Ryan Short, who crafted the 90-minute documentary with business partner Adam Pease (they co-run King of Hearts Productions). "I think a lot of people have the misconception that they're simple people, you know, and Tad is a very sincere, deep person...a very complex character. I think that really comes across in the film."

**The genesis** of *Busted Circuits* occurred when Doyle—who'd obsessively documented a decade's worth of TAD shows (including a nascent gig at the Central), recording sessions, world tours, and random hijinks with a video camera he'd purchased around the time of the band's 1988 formation (hundreds of hours in total, he estimates)—was put in touch with Short and Pease more than two years ago by a mutual friend who thought the filmmakers could do Doyle's footage justice.

"This box showed up at my door full of VHS tapes, and it took months to go through," Short says. "By the time we got done with that, we felt like we'd lived with them for 10 years. We saw more of them than we were probably supposed to. There's probably some blackmail footage here and there."

With only a Panasonic DVX100 camcorder and literally zero budget, Short and Pease spent the following year conducting interviews with the former members of TAD (Doyle, bassist Kurt Danielson, and original drummer Steve Wied and his eventual replacement, Josh Sinder; guitarist Gary Thorstensen declined to be interviewed), plus a litany of Seattle music scene luminaries, including Mudhoney's Mark Arm, Soundgarden's Kim Thayil, Nirvana's Krist Novoselic, producer Jack Endino, Sub Pop co-founders Jonathon Poneman and Bruce Pavitt, and longtime rock writer Charles R. Cross.

The resulting film—which blends stories and testimonials with Doyle's vintage live and behind-the-scenes footage—is absorbing, honest, and highly entertaining. Humor abounds: There's Doyle recounting how his mother was thrilled to see him smiling innocently on one of



Justin Renney

His ears are still ringin'.

## Extra Info

**TAD: Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears** Varsity Theatre, 4329 University Way N.E., 781-5755, [www.landmarktheatres.com](http://www.landmarktheatres.com). 7 p.m. Ticket info TBA. Wed., Feb. 13.

the band's album covers ("Oh, you look so good!"), only to be appalled seconds later when she realized the album was titled *God's Balls* ("Oh Tad, how *could* you?!"). There's a tale of how, during TAD's 1989 co-headlining European tour with Nirvana, Kurt Cobain—fascinated by Doyle's bodily fluids to the point of even writing some songs about them—often delighted in holding a bucket under Doyle's chin while he puked. And there's the amazing footage of Doyle's massive frame precariously perched on the roof of a car that's hurtling through the Alaskan Way Viaduct at 60 miles per hour, as a camera crew captures it all for TAD's "Leafy Incline" video (the footage, as Doyle laments now, was never used out of record company fears of lawsuits from copycat stunts gone awry).

There are plenty of bittersweet moments, too, rendered quite candidly: Wied's less-than-amicable departure; the band's struggle with alcohol and drug abuse; and, of course, the numerous controversies and threatened lawsuits (most notably from Pepsi for unauthorized use of its corporate logo) over band artwork that short-circuited TAD's already dicey commercial aspirations and got them dropped from record labels. And then there's the short but particularly touching scene near the end of the film, when Doyle—who hadn't seen Danielson in nearly a decade (following TAD's late-'90s dissolution, the bassist moved to Paris)—is visited at home by his longtime friend.

"Ryan flew him out unbeknownst to me, and he kept saying, 'I got a surprise for you,' and I was like, 'Dude, I don't like surprises, tell me what it is,' and he said, 'You'll find out, I'll come over....' And that's what was happening, with Kurt. It totally blew my mind."

"That was some of the last footage we shot," notes Short, who says it occurred last summer, when he'd finally managed to scrounge up enough money to fly Danielson to Seattle to get him on camera. "We'd been waiting for that to tie this whole thing together."

Seeing Doyle and Danielson embrace, and then laugh with each other as they sit in chairs in Doyle's living room—and then finding out from Short that Danielson, now an author, has since moved back to Seattle permanently—naturally suggests that there could be one more TAD chapter yet to be written.

"Yeah—that's I guess what we were planning all along, just have that scene and then leave it up to whatever happens after that," says Short. "I just kinda like ambiguous endings like that."

But Doyle's quick to put the kibosh on any of that, even though, he acknowledges, Sub Pop has approached him about a TAD reunion for the label's upcoming 20th anniversary festivities.

"Yeah, they've talked to me about it, but my heart's not in that anymore, and I don't do things just to fake it. I just don't wanna cheat myself or the audience. I bared my soul to it for many years and did the best I could with it, and then I let it go, and now I'm moving on."

**Indeed, Doyle** has a new band—Brothers of the Sonic Cloth, a heavy-rock trio featuring his girlfriend (and punk-rock vet) Peggy Tully on bass and Seattle mainstay Eric Akre on drums—which is slated to play El Corazon next month. But, he says, he's glad for the proper opportunity *Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears* provides him to close the book on TAD for good.

"I wanted a top-shelf product because this is it, this is all I'm doing with the band from here on out. Ryan did a great job, and he was very thorough and made the raw material that I had shine, so I'm really happy with it.

"It's kind of a celebration—we had a hell of a run, you know? We had a lot of really cool and really fuckin' bizarre things happen to us at the same time, *that's* the way I look at it. And bottom line is, we're a one-in-a-bazillion shot. How many bands actually make it that far in the industry, *period*? I'm very proud of what we've done, and I wouldn't have changed a thing."

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