



Music DVD Review: *Not a Photograph* The Mission of Burma Story

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Published December 18, 2006

It's an indisputable fact that few bands were more influential in the evolution of post-punk music than Mission of Burma. They inspired contemporaries like Gang of Four and Sonic Youth, and paved the way for bands to follow, including the Pixies and Nirvana. Not too shabby for a band whose career spanned four years (1979-1983), and whose body of work consisted of a couple of singles, an EP and one album.

That album, *Vs.*, is widely regarded as a seminal work of eighties musicology, and garnered the band national attention among mainstream publications. Things were going swimmingly, and Mission of Burma abruptly called it quits; citing guitarist Roger Miller's worsening tinnitus as the primary reason, the band decided it would be best for all concerned to go their separate ways. One of the hallmarks of the band had been that they were LOUD, and it had taken its toll. Bassist Clint Conley and drummer Peter Prescott could have just hired another guitarist, but they knew the magic wouldn't be there. In 1983, they played their final gig. That kind of solidarity is rare, especially in rock, and it only served to further cement their reputation.

Nothing is forever, though, and 19 years later, after much cajoling from fans and introspection, the band reunited for one last time. *Not a Photograph: The Mission of Burma Story* chronicles how they came to be, with a wink and a nod, and hints as to where they may be heading.

Nobody really knows why the band decided to reunite in 2002, least of all the band members themselves. Maybe it was a collective mid-life crisis. Perhaps they just needed to get out of the house. Or maybe they realized that they had unfinished business. It doesn't really matter. What's important is that they did reunite.

What's even more important is this is not just another tired reunion. The years have been kind to Mission of Burma — their playing is more precise, but the energy is every bit as intense as it ever was, if not more so. It's as though the bandmates looked back on their misspent youth, and said, "Fuck it — nothing's changed. Let's do this thing." Okay, Conley is now working as a news producer and living the suburban life, Miller is half-deaf and has to wear riflerange ear protectors to rock it, and Prescott is running an oh-so-hip record store. None of that's important. They never forgot.

We watch them through tentative rehearsals, through the obligatory press jetties, through the buzz growing around their reunion, and we see them nonplussed about the entire reunion event. This disc takes us through all of that, as the band reworks old tunes half-forgotten, tunes like "Academy Fight Song" and "That's when I Reach For My Revolver." And it all culminates in one brain-rattling performance in New York.

The Mission of Burma story doesn't end there, though. That performance reenergized them as a band, and introduced them to a new generation of fans. Now, as inexplicably as their reunion began, the band is touring and recording again.

Not A Photograph, if nothing else, is a testament to the power of rock. But it goes a step further. It poses a question: Were Mission of Burma too far ahead of their time in the original incarnation?