



KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW



Live Shows - 3/30

**Neko Case** @ Park West  
**Battles** @ Empty Bottle  
**Soundre Lerche, Willy Mason** @ Double Door  
**Future Rock** @ Abbey Pub  
**Spitalfield, 1997, Alpha Couple** @ Subterranean  
**Emmylou Harris** @ Genesee Theatre  
**Junior Brown** @ FitzGerald's  
**Dallas Cowboy**

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## MISSION OF BURMA

You Either Get It or You Don't

## JANUARY INNERVIEWS

- Andrew Bird
- Catfish Haven
- Emily Haines
- Peter Hook
- Margot & the Nuclear So and So's
- Mission of Burma

story by James H. Ewert Jr

The last time '80s avant-punk heroes Mission of Burma played Chicago, guitarist Roger Miller said he thought he wasn't going to be able to even make it to the stage. Was he too fucked up on drugs and/or in the midst of a backstage groupie orgy? Um...no. The late July weekend was one of the hottest of the summer — and Miller is susceptible to heat stroke.



"I went out onto the stage like 15 minutes before we were on and I started shaking," Miller said while recounting the band's performance at Pitchfork Music Festival this past summer. "My whole body was doing this jittery thing, I could hardly talk. The only thing I could say was that I needed fans." Miller got his fans — three of them — and also had two beers and two bottles of water on stage to get him through the set.

### MILLER'S INNER VIEW

"I would like to think there is a nice line that we have found between art and entertainment. I think that's why our fans, however many there may be, understand that. Other people, they just don't get it at all and it seems like a lot of noise and a bunch of guys jumping around like idiots."

Boston home. "It was just the norm and we kept playing shows. Why we kept playing shows is beyond me."

In 1979, after playing together in The Moving Parts, Miller and bassist Clint Conley recruited drummer Pete Prescott and musical engineer Martin Swope to play in a band called Mission of Burma.

The scene of an aging man with heart problems needing fans, water and beer to carry on is a far cry from the '80s Mission of Burma, which often had the trio playing their furiously loud and spastic music with the careless disregard of unabashed twenty-somethings. "We got used to playing shows where the people didn't fathom a single thing we were doing," Miller said in a phone interview from his

### tomorrow never knows festival previews

Jan 10-12

- Bald Eagle
- Dr. Dog
- Flosstradamus
- The Ponys

Jan 13-14

- Bound Stems
- Dirty on Purpose
- Mucca Pazza
- Paul Green School of Rock

### january previews

Jan 1-6

- The Blacks
- Blood and Time
- Chicago Afrobeat Project
- Sonia and Disappear Fear

Jan 6-13

- Fareed Haque Group
- Honeytribe
- The Make Believe
- Plane

Jan 13-19

- Cairo Gang
- Hackensaw Boys
- Stiletto Attack
- The Waco Brothers

Jan 18-31

- Chris Thile & Edgar Meyer
- Earl Greyhound
- M. Ward
- The Paper Chase

What followed in the years after is a story that will forever hold a place in the annals of rock history. In their short-lived 4-year existence, the band managed to produce only one full-length album, *VS*, and the EP *Signals, Calls and Marches*. Without the Internet or an underground indie music network, the band didn't receive much acclaim. And when Miller developed the rare hearing disorder tinnitus, which causes a constant ringing in the ears, the group disbanded and faded into punk-rock obscurity.

A lot has changed since the days of performing in empty clubs to bartenders — most notably that the band members have families now, all have probably had at least one mid-life crisis, and now the clubs are packed to capacity. "About four months before we folded in '83, we played a show at this club called the Paradise in Boston," Miller said, recalling some of the band's worst horror stories. "So few people showed up that the manager said we will never be allowed to play there again. And of course, in 2002, 20 years later, we sold that club out twice after selling another club out that was twice the size."

The thought of reuniting never crossed any of the band members' minds until Miller got an email asking if they would like to play a show in New York with Yo La Tengo. One thing led to another, and soon enough the band was playing shows again, but this time to much adoring fans — many of whom were not even so much as a thought when Burma began.

"I would like to think there is a nice line that we have found between art and entertainment. I think that's why our fans, however many there may be, understand that," Miller said about the band's music. "Other people, they just don't get it at all and it seems like a lot of noise and a bunch of guys jumping around like idiots."

The band subsequently went on to record *Onoffon*, the follow-up to their only full-length album. And earlier this year, the band released *The Obliteratti*, which Miller credits with much of the band's recent upswing in publicity and radio play. "The surprise has kind of worn off, but it's still extremely gratifying," Miller said about their ironic success in the 21st century. "We played these two shows months after [*The Obliteratti*] was out and people in the audience knew the songs and were singing along to them like inside and out. That was freaky; I was like 'wow, what the fuck is going on here?'"

On the heels of a summer tour and coupled with the release of *Not a Photograph*, a documentary chronicling the band's history and 'inexplicable' reunion tour in 2002, *Mission of Burma* is heading out again to hit four U.S. cities, and Chicago is lucky enough to be the first. "That's how it's always been, even in the first stage of the band, there were people who either got it or didn't get it," Miller said. "There is no 'maybe' with Burma: It's either 'yes' or 'no'."

Mission of Burma :: with Pinebender :: Double Door :: January 12.

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