



Not a Photograph

Rating: 8/10

The 2002 reunion of Boston's Mission of Burma could easily be lumped into the slew of post-millennial indie and punk regroupings that have taken place over the past 7 years – The Pixies, Gang of Four, Shellac, Slint, et al. But there's something different going on here. This is a band of once groundbreaking post-punk musicians turned average Joes who, in their own words, are really unsure of why they decided to regroup. It can't be for the money (although they're certainly making some off the band now, it ain't Pixies money). And it definitely doesn't seem to be for the fame (although they seem to be slightly dazed and amazed by the adoration they begin to receive again). And they haven't stopped with just playing live shows – they've also recorded two well-received records over the past 5 years for Matador. This new DVD, named after one of their classic songs and directed by David Kleiler, Jr. and Jeff Iwanicki, chronicles the band's reunion as well as its early years, through extensive interviews with the members and affiliated fans and musicians.

The 19 years leading up to the decision to play together again have seen varying levels of success for Mission of Burma's members. Bass player Clint Conley has found a career as a Boston-area TV producer and self-described "suburban dad," while drummer Peter Prescott is a buyer for a Boston record shop, who admits that he could definitely use the money they might receive from regrouping. Guitar player Roger Miller, whose tinnitus was the main impetus for ending the band at the height of its success, still wears his rifle-range earmuffs when performing live, and Bob Weston (Shellac) has joined in the place of Martin Swope to handle tape loop manipulations. All of them are initially concerned about this reunion, wondering whether those who only know one or two seminal songs will tolerate hearing an hour long set worth of material. But as their sold-out shows seem to indicate, the masses are ready, willing and able.

"How can you not do a lame version of what you did when you were 20 years younger?" wonders Prescott. The key for the band seems to be the ability to sound almost identical to how it did in the early '80s, which the extensive live performance footage on the DVD proves they can do. Interviews included range from Moby, who covered "That's When I Reach for My Revolver," to fans who couldn't get into shows, to Conley's young daughter, who thinks the music sounds kind of "weird." This well-constructed film is both a diary of and a tribute to Mission of Burma, a band that still manages to infuse its presence and music with a punk rock attitude, while all the members have advanced well into middle age. A great moment captured by the cameras comes near the end, as an all-star lineup takes the stage at NYC's Irving Plaza, consisting of members of Versus, Gang of Four, Sonic Youth, and Yo La Tengo, to perform a classic song. MOB is still vibrant, still crucial, and this competent production works both as an intro and a testament to the band's staying power.

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